

JOSEPH CONRAD: NARRATIVE METHODS AND THE SEARCH FOR SELF

**SEARCH FOR MEANING THROUGH THE WRITTEN WORD:
A DISCUSSION OF NARRATIVE METHODS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP
TO THE SEARCH FOR SELF IN JOSEPH CONRAD'S *NOSTROMO* AND
*UNDER WESTERN EYES***

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ABSTRACT

The primary focus of this thesis will be a formal analysis of narrative methods in Joseph Conrad's *Nostromo* and *Under Western Eyes*. Conrad develops the search for an understanding of individual character and selfhood through narrative approaches that self-consciously reflect the thematic and moral tensions in the novels. The metaphysics of alienation on the level of fictional characters are echoed by the epistemological and linguistic scepticism of self-subversive narrative frameworks: the reader's "moral universe" and access to reality are implicitly questioned by the problematic tripartite relationship between characters, the storytellers and shifting degrees of authorial omniscience.

My approach to Conrad combines Bakhtinian critical theory with insights from the theories of Jacques Lacan, whose redefinition of the science of psychoanalysis as a linguistics provides a fascinating analytical framework within which to examine tensions between artistic creativity and the subjective search for meaning through communication.

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ABBREVIATIONS

When necessary, references to the texts will be abbreviated as follows:

LJ: *Lord Jim*

NN: *The Nigger of the Narcissus*

PR: *A Personal Record*

UWE: *Under Western Eyes*

Letters: *The Collected letters of Joseph Conrad, Frederick Karl and Lawrence Davies eds.*

CE: *Critical Essays on Joseph Conrad, Ted Billy ed.*

E: *Écrits, Jacques Lacan*

Four : *The four fundamental concepts of Psycho-Analysis, Lacan*

S & L: *Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis, Lacan*

INTRODUCTION

Joseph Conrad's fiction explores the relationship between the self and its environment, between thought and the reality which it shapes: "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*"(NN xlix). Conrad's stated intention as a novelist can be used as a starting point for an interpretation of his texts; it could even be argued as a necessary starting point in a critical environment which must create "objective" parameters amidst a polyphony of subjective voices. But the novelist's stated intention, this seemingly simple assertion of a naturalistic transference from the "written" to the "visual," becomes increasingly problematic in the context of his novels. In effect, the epistemological structure of creative intention is, in a certain sense, crucially at odds with the notion of language as a mimetic representation of the visual real.

Edward Said intriguingly suggests that for Conrad "to have chosen to write... is to have chosen in a particular way neither to say directly nor to mean exactly in the way he had hoped to say or mean"(CE 29). This kind of statement suggests an intriguing dynamic between the author's conscious intentions or conceptual "preconceptions" and the fictional product's "independence" from the latter. Mikhail Bakhtin's writings on

dialogism in the modern novel provide the theoretical basis for Said's focus on the ramifications of the novel's intrinsically polyphonic discourse.¹

Bakhtin's vision of novelistic discourse as an "orchestrated polyphony" of voices provides a useful model for analysis of Conrad's complex narrative methods and their relationship to the search for self: the theory of "dialogic imagination" intrinsically defines the modern novel as a search for truth through a proliferating dialogue among the text's various "subjective" voices. In order to focus the importance of Bakhtin's theories for a study of the search for self in Conrad's novels, it is important to relate the former to the contemporary ramifications of post-Freudian psychoanalytical thinking. When approaching Conrad's work dialogically it seems necessary to place his own dialogue about the self in the context of twentieth-century philosophical theory about the human mind and how it creates, perceives, and responds to external reality. The writings of Jacques Lacan provide an engaging possibility for dialogue with Conrad for the simple reason that the psychoanalyst posits the subject's--and by extension the literary artist's--methodologically necessary limitation to the medium of language as the fundamental reality of the human being's potential for self-discovery. What this fundamentally suggests is that the search for truth is reduced to the medium of language, which in Lacan's view is the intersection of the symbolic, imaginary and real realms. And since the possibility of access to the

real is thus limited to and contained within language itself, Lacan's theories imply that the novelist's fictional medium can be as meaningful and revelatory as any other form of discourse, and is in fact a self-conscious exploration of the evolving relationship between language and truth.

One of Lacan's most basic notions about the individual's self-conception is that the mimetic function of speech is subsumed beneath the more primary role of language as an evocative tool: "Language is never signal, but always dialectical movement" (*S&L* 122). Lacan reminds us that we necessarily remain trapped within Language, that even perception is mediate and is transferred into consciousness through the medium of the word. The mind's conception of reality through the utterance is itself determined by the evolving desire of a subjective individual: "The first object of desire is to be recognized by the other" (*S&L* 31) and "The desire of man is constituted under the sign of mediation" (*S&L* 114).

In his essay on the "mirror stage," Lacan argues that the infant's pre-linguistic "misrecognition" ("méconnaissance" [E 6]) of a static image of itself in a mirror predetermines the fundamentally dialectical and subjectively "creation-oriented" movement of the human individual's self-definition through action and speech. Language becomes the medium--as Lacan says "through the universal" (E 2)--whereby the self strives towards a fictional ideal before the advent of social conditioning, and this has significant

ramifications for interpretation of the writings of an author such as Conrad, who simultaneously recognizes the fictionality of and yet asserts the essential need of static moral and ideological centres for the human mind. The mind's tendency towards inertia, which numerous Conradian critics have discussed by reference to various characters' embodiments of "myth" and cultural conventions (for example, Gould and the myth of "material interests" in *Nostromo*), is in Lacan reduced to the pre-cultural and pre-speech process of a false identification between self and image. Hillis Miller has observed that Conrad "is able to show that society is an arbitrary set of rules and judgments, a house of cards built over an abyss"(6), and by extension, Lacan's theories posit the notion that the communication of imaginary or arbitrary "constructs" in itself is what defines the human being, irrespective of identifiably external cultural influences. And if the critic intends to mediate between the reality of nature and the force of cultural tropes, then he or she needs to take into account the primal dialectic of selfhood and self-projection, which Lacan evocatively describes as "this knot of imaginary servitude that love must always undo again, or sever"(E 7). The study of human intercommunication necessitates an approach which recognizes our universal participation in a basic misconception of modern thinking²: exactitude towards a subjective framework of meaning needs to be distinguished from Truth both within and between individuals, and self-

discovery must be equated with discovery about an Other.

Conrad essentially explores this realization that "the house of cards" is itself a conceptualization and he shows not merely that society is "an arbitrary set of rules", but that what each individual weaves as his or her social fabric in fact creates unique images of the whole (and through active dialectic consequently influences and creates a part of it). Society is itself a dialectic--a locus through which individuals seek to impose a meaningful order over their own conception of the real. In effect, fictions about society, the portrayal of "societies" by Conrad (even when they involve the use of "the largest possible canvas" as the author says of *Nostromo*), are inevitably a study of how the characters' subjective visions of the social world produce reality. Conrad's narrative method and his portrayal of individuals in society explore the dialogic transference inherent in the individual's imaginary or "poetic" self-situating amidst the rational and utilitarian "credos" of communal living. This "metapoetry" of the fictional medium can be described as the artist's effort to break out of the circularity or self-containment within his own lyrical voice, despite the paradoxical realization that the self's creativity and understanding are founded on this sense of a "poetic rationale." Thus for Lacan, any self-labelling or self-identification by individuals in society can only be understood "in reference to the truth of 'I is an other', an observation that is less astonishing to the intuition of the poet

than obvious to the gaze of the psychoanalyst"(E 23).

The two novels I have chosen for this analysis of narrative methods and their relationship to the search for self provide distinct illustrations of Conrad's complex technique. They are specifically relevant to this analysis because both develop a complex dialogue between the search for self and the possibility of an objective portrayal, between the self-revelation of character and the narrative structures' various levels of creative intention: in *Nostromo*, the portrayal of a "large canvas" and the creation of an overarching social vision are consistently challenged by the contrary suggestion that this kind of approach encourages problematic oversimplifications in our response to characters: there is constant tension between the author's metafictional intentions and his narrator's method of organizing the story. Conrad's complex narrative structure in *Under Western Eyes* develops a similar conflict between the first-person narrator's metafictional role as an internal "device"--as a critical interpreter--and his naturalistic role as the creating author.

Even when, as in *Nostromo*, there seems to be a conscious effort to produce visions of the whole through the intentional use of emblematic and even caricaturistic characters, Conrad operates through a method which is true to the real, in the sense that we are necessarily brought into dialogue with the unspoken depth of individual characters. Even when Conrad

seems to be deliberately avoiding in-depth psychological portrayals by abstaining from the use of an interior monologue, his use of naturalism is in constant tension with the overt symbolism of his metafictional techniques and their relationship to central tropes of the texts (such as "the Silver of the Mine"). The portrayal of society and the individuals inhabiting it is simultaneously "external" through the naturalistic visions of often inaccessible and enigmatic characters and "internal" or reflective through the use of narrative techniques that constantly bring into question the possibility of access to the self through the medium of language: characters are thus given an illusory substantiality through the silence of limited omniscience. Our dialogue with this enigmatic self of the "other" is always one which implicates the reader and encourages self-questioning. Paradoxically, the characters are often given depth through a reader's limited access to their thoughts, and also because the narrative framework involves the reader in a self-reflexive dialogue with the metafictional dimensions of the texts; the author consistently challenges our own method of processing what we "see" both within the boundaries of fiction and in our daily existence, and he undermines our confidence in the semantic verbalizations through which we organize our perceptions of others and ourselves to produce an evolving world-view.

In Conrad's texts, we are thus in active dialogue with our own

ideologies and our own method of judging and understanding what we see and hear, and perhaps this explains why thematic studies of Conrad's texts frequently devolve into either paraphrase of the symbolic tropes or analysis of a character's psychology. The reader is engaged in the metafictional dialogue between subjective vision and truth through the texts' self-subversive narrative structures and subtle levels of ironic distance between the author and his methods of presentation--in a sense, we are encouraged to judge and moralize--but simultaneously, our inability to encapsulate or summarize a character through his or her portrayal reminds us of our own participation in a subjective epistemological process: "mankind's conception of itself" (*LJ* 112) and our conception of others is ultimately dependant on our evolving fictions about ourselves. The reader is thus implicated in the actions of all but the most despicable characters; our "socialized" distance is revealed as a fiction, and the authenticity of our own mask is threatened by what remains "Inconceivable" (*LJ* 111) and unspoken in ourselves. Lacan's notion of self-definition by reference to other is important in this context:

...except at a limit that even the greatest geniuses have never been able to approach, man's ego can never be reduced to his experienced identity; and in the depressive disruptions of the experienced reverses of inferiority, it engenders essentially the mortal negations that fix it in its formalism. 'I am nothing of what happens to me. You are nothing of value.' (*E* 20)

Lacan's basic distinction between subjective exactitude and Truth

provides the basic methodological premise of my analysis. The distinction will provide a means to unify a formal study of narrative approaches as a polyphonic system exploring the notion of selfhood with an analysis of the complex relationship among imagination, reality and truth developed in Conrad's fiction. When Lacan states that "the Unconscious is neither being nor non-being, but the unrealized" (*Four* 30) and that "the Unconscious is structured like a Language" (33) he formulates a complex and paradoxical link between discourse and Truth, between the epistemology and the metaphysics of Being. The notion of the Unconscious as the "unrealized" suggests the link between subjective knowing and Truth, which can be described as the constantly evolving relationship of an adherence to a symbolic system (exactitude), one which is being constantly questioned and transformed through dialectic (both within and between individuals):

The Symbolic function presents itself as a double movement within the subject: man makes an object of his action, but only to restore to this action in due time its place as a grounding. In this equivocation, operating at every instant, lies the whole process of a function in which action and knowledge alternate. (*S&L* 48)

This statement suggests the fundamental link between imaginative creativity and the search for Truth in an epistemological theory of subjective knowing: when Lacan responds to Nietzsche by asserting that "God is Unconscious" (*Four* 59) (rather than "dead"), he is arguing that absolute

Truth is unattainable for the human mind because the attainment of valid meaning is contained within a symbolic order which is fundamentally dialectic, which is constantly being questioned and can never be crystallized. The intersection of Lacanian and Bakhtinian thought finds its genesis in this simple notion of the endlessness of "dialogue," which depends on the disruptive difference intrinsic to imagination (often heralded as "madness" within the socially based parameters of a specific symbolic system) to ensure our participation in "an appointment to which we are always called with a real that eludes us" (*Four* 53). Lacan's cryptic suggestion that the real can only be apprehended by being murdered in the "symbol" (*S&L* 83) can be related to his statements about the "neutralization" of information-oriented language within an entire symbolic system, and seems surprisingly close to Bakhtin's vision of the novel as an artistically centred presentation and questioning of existent and crystallized "systems of language": "...interhuman communication is always information on information, put to the test of a community of Language" (*S&L* 123), and yet "what is redundant as far as information is concerned is precisely that which does duty as resonance in the Word" (*S&L* 63). In the latter quotation, Lacan is referring to the hypothetical patient's "monologue" and to how the analyst needs to reveal the rhetorical intentionality of a factual statement in order to discover the more primary discourse of meaning in the spoken words, but this statement can also be

related to Edward Said's aforementioned remark about Conrad's artistic dilemma. Conrad's paradoxical approach in his novels reflects the tension between the need for a monologic centre of reference and the realization--on numerous thematic and methodological levels--that this kind of reductionism survives on the threshold between the madness of delusion and the redemptive power of the self's imaginative reassessment of accepted cultural and metaphysical tropes. (The two novels chosen in this study provide revealing examples of this dilemma.)

Lacan's discussion of the Symbolic and Imaginary orders of mind is an essential component of his theory and will be used as a bridge between clinical psychoanalytical technique and an application of Bakhtinian dialogism to Conrad's work. Lacan's discussion of "madness" provides the clearest illustration of the relationship between the Symbolic and the Imaginary, and also provides a particularly revealing instance of how a "scientific" methodology intrinsically reflects the paradoxical connection between the subjectivity of a label and the socializing or institutionalizing centre which gives it objective validity. I will mention this again later, but it will be helpful to keep in mind Bakhtin's description of novelistic discourse as an artistically conscious "orchestration" of polyphonic voices, where the chaos of individual voices (or "systems of language") is unified by the writer's imaginative purpose: "...inside this area a dialogue is played out between the

author and his characters...that special type of novelistic dialogue that realizes itself within the boundaries of constructions that externally resemble monologues"(320). In Lacan, the definition of madness is fundamentally equivalent to a supra-subjectivity, or in other words, madness entails a subject's inability to differentiate between Language and reality:

In madness, of whatever nature, we must recognize on the one hand the negative liberty of a Word which has given up trying to make itself recognized, or what we call an obstacle to transference, and, on the other hand, we must recognize the singular formation of a delusion which--fabulous, fantastic, or cosmological; interpretive, revindicating, or idealist--objectifies the subject in a Language without dialectic.... The absence of the Word is manifested here by the stereotypes of a discourse in which the subject...is spoken rather than speaking.(S&L 43)

Specifically relevant here is the suggestion that our perception and definition of madness are necessarily determined by our own acceptance of culturally based epistemological and metaphysical parameters. The diagnosis of madness "is obviously the result of the exigency, presupposed by psychoanalysis, that there be a true Word"(S&L 45). What is important here in the context of Bakhtin's thought and its applicability to Conrad's work is the modern novel's explicit methodological destruction or questioning of any "unitary language"(Bakhtin 325) or as Lacan would put it, " a true Word": "The *moi* of modern man...has taken on its form in the dialectical impasse of the *belle âme* who does not recognize his very own *raison d'être* in the disorder that he denounces in the world"(S&L 44). This kind of statement is

consistent with Bakhtin's suggestion that the self-containment inherent in formal stylistic systems of criticism makes them inadequate to address the "heteroglossia" of novelistic discourse, its metafictional core which intrinsically challenges the critic's attempt to extrapolate discourse within a single and epistemologically stable context: "From the point of view of stylistics, the artistic work as a whole--whatever that whole might be--is a self-sufficient and closed authorial monologue, one that presumes only passive listeners beyond its own boundaries"(274). From a Lacanian perspective, Bakhtin's discussion of shortcomings in formal stylistics is similar to the psychoanalyst's "socialized" definition of his patient's delusional entrapment in a subjectively authorized symbolic system or "mythology": this kind of approach seeks to interpret the novelist's intended meaning, to discover the author's "self-substantial fuel" and give it a tangible reality rather than viewing it as an essentially epistemological process, as "a living [*dialectic*] contact with unfinished, still evolving contemporary reality (the openended present)"(Bakhtin 7):

...the transference is not the enactment (*mise en acte*) of the illusion that seems to drive us to this alienating identification that any conformity constitutes, even when it is with an ideal model, of which the analyst, in any case, cannot be the support--the transference is the enactment of the reality of the unconscious.(*Four* 146)

In *Joseph Conrad and the Fictions of Skepticism* Mark Wollaeger

argues that Conrad's authorial perspective in *Nostromo* develops the conflict between the reader's experience of the text as a polyphony of individual voices and the narrator's attempts to inscribe the characters and events within a monologic authorial order:

Under the influence of a particular character's moral perspective, the narrator suddenly tries to impose an order that the complexity of the surrounding narratives refuses to sanction.... the authorial perspective of *Nostromo* internalizes the dialogue of freedom and coercion played out in the narrative...(164)

Lacan's thoughts on the "transference" between analyst and subject are crucial in this context: by complicating and refusing to "sanction" the narrator's monologic assertions, Conrad's approach vis à vis his readers seems to parallel the psychoanalyst's attempt to avoid constraining his patient's verbal journey of self-discovery. The search for self in *Nostromo* is fundamentally based on our creation of subjective meaning in and through our dialogue with the shifting ideological perspectives developed by the narrator's treatment of central issues and characters. The narrator's artificial "coercion" ensures the reader's own self-conscious inscription through analysis of the text. The relativism and inconsistencies which pervade the text's didactic elements encourage readers to scrutinize the contextual nature of their own assertions and moral judgments.

In *Nostromo*, Conrad's narrative methods create an explicit tension

between naturalistic approaches to storytelling--the language of external description and of historical progression-- and the realization that the entire text is the fictional product of the author's isolated consciousness. The third-person narrator embodies this basic conflict by identifying himself as a character within the world of the novel, a character whose omniscient perspective seems to be in a subtle dialogue with the voice of the elusive author. As a device, the voice provides an illusory historical and factual "purpose" for the text--narrating the course of events in Sulaco--which is fundamentally at odds with the symbolic intent inherent in fictional creativity: in other words, while we can ask why the narrator deals with a character in a specific way (for example, one might think the account of Decoud's suicide is oversimplified), the narrator's symbolic or rhetorical purpose remains distinct from the text as a fictional exercise and cannot necessarily be equated with the author's novelistic purpose.

Conrad's own words reveal the naiveté (perhaps engendered by a culturally sustained iconographic conception of the artist) of approaching analysis as a distillation of the author's "authentic" and therefore static self-definition through his work: "When once the truth is grasped that one's own personality is only a ridiculous and aimless masquerade of something hopelessly unknown, the attainment of serenity is not very far off" (*Letters* 1: 267). Conrad seems to be suggesting--with Lacan--that the anxiety fuelling the

search for truth can produce authentic meaning only to the extent that it operates with the recognition that the vision of a cohesive self is in a fundamentally paradoxical dialogue with the chaotic nature of existence. While Lacan argues that "the status of the Unconscious is ethical" (*Four* 33), Conrad's fiction explores the evolving subjectivity of any stable "ethical" framework or authority: "I have come to suspect that the aim of creation cannot be ethical at all" (*PR* 92). This type of statement echoes Nietzsche's vision of a nihilistic universe, and seems to be an underlying theme in much of Conrad's work. But while Conrad's search for meaning is developed through narrative methods which do echo the epistemological uncertainty of the modern world, they simultaneously invite the reader to participate in the quest rather than simply expounding a "moral universe." (The case of Razumov in *Under Western Eyes* may validate a certain moral viewpoint, but considering this as a primary theme in the text can lead to oversimplification.)

In *Joseph Conrad: Narrative Technique and Ideological Commitment*, Jeremy Hawthorn argues that "the variation of Conrad's artistic achievement...is related (but not limited) to strengths and weaknesses in his creative vision at an ideological level" (69). This statement is basically an extension of Hawthorn's basic premise that the novelist's "human and moral commitment" (xiii) is the "whole" towards which the "flexibility" of

various technical perspectives are addressed. But this kind of conception seems highly problematic in the context of both Lacan and Bakhtin's thoughts on the language of "authority" or the "Word of the Fathers". In Lacan, the search for self is undoubtedly undermined when the analyst seeks to resonate his patient's speech within the limited context of the latter's "symbolic authority": "...analysis consists in playing in all the multiple keys of the orchestral score which the Word constitutes in the registers of Language..."(S&L 55) This "orchestral" analogy is repeatedly used by Bakhtin to describe the author's artistic organization of "multi-voicedness" in novelistic discourse, and forms the basis of the theorist's notion that "a literary and language consciousness operating from the heights of its own uncontestably authoritative unitary language fails to take into account the fact of heteroglossia and multi-languagedness"(368). The quotations from Lacan and Bakhtin thus suggest a different criterion than that proposed by Hawthorne for judging either the epistemological or artistic success of discourse (whether spoken or written). This is a basic issue for any dialogic approach to Conrad: Does "creative vision" benefit by the author's use of a preconceived ideological centre? If creative vision and the narrative framework which expresses it reflect the writer's recognition that the self is essentially subjective--a unique masquerade--then the writer would be violating his own premises by applying a preconceived ideological centre.

The finished novel stands in its entirety for the critic, whereas I would argue that Conrad constantly questions the possibility of a cohesive whole and consciously explores this notion by developing self-reflexive dialogues within the fiction.³

From a Bakhtinian perspective, both the writing and the criticism of novelistic discourse are successful to the extent that they refractively expose and thus challenge, rather than proclaim “an absolute bonding of ideological meaning to language”(369) Thus when F.R. Leavis asserts that Conrad does not need to have a “philosophy” in order to be a great novelist, he aligns himself with both Bakhtin and Lacan, in the sense that the former seeks a “disassociation”(369) of novelistic and critical prose from “mythology,” while the latter argues that the analyst’s ability to understand the relationship between language and reality, or between subjective meaning and truth, can only succeed in an environment which precludes the application of a conscious intentionality which would shape the dialectical encounter between “doctor” and “patient”:

...it is in this negativity insofar as it is a pure negativity—that is, detached from any particular motive—that lies the junction between the Symbolic and the Real. This naturally follows from the fact that this nonaction of the analyst is founded on our firm and stated Knowledge of the principle that all that is real is rational...(S&L 74)

Obviously, this is not to imply that Conrad the novelist had no

conscious "motives" when involved in the creative process but rather to suggest that his methods of presenting individual characters and their interrelationships within society infer that the novelist's search for an understanding of the self should reflect an epistemological process of discovery and must recognize that didactic and moral cohesion are precisely the questions to be addressed and explored, rather than a predetermined and secret end which the writer keeps hidden up his sleeve. The imaginative process of creativity is not, in Conrad, intentionally predetermined, but rather a realization--intrinsically reflected in and through his narrative techniques--that the mind forges its images in an ongoing dialectic with chaotic contingencies: " My thought goes wandering through vast spaces filled with shadowy forms. All is yet chaos, but, slowly, the apparitions change into living flesh, the shimmering mists take shape."⁴

For Lacan, the psychoanalytic experience reveals the subject's unique synthesis of the imaginary and symbolic functions as he or she interprets the real: the mind's rationalization of the particular--the mind's concrete world-view-- is determined by the imaginative faculty's "universalization" through the concept and by extension the Word. Imagination's fundamental yearning towards eternal and unchanging truth proceeds through the medium of language and its essentially social or "relativized" meaning. This tension between "communal" (or communicable) truth and the alienation of the

unique subject provides the central locus for dialogue among Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, the search for self in Conrad, and Bakhtin's literary theory as a compendium of critical approaches seeking to reveal the meaning of words by exposing the contextual refractions which vest them with an association with objective truth: on one level, the unique subject's "utterance" is determined by his or her participation in the social mythos, but the search for self is ultimately based on the imaginative faculty's unique transcendence of a culturally authorized language consciousness.

Lacan recognizes the infinitely evolving creation of meaning in the dialectical process, since the language of the self, though ruled by the discourse of desire and shaped by its imaginary conception through the "other," creates uniquely subjective visions of real meaning and truth. The conscious mind forever strives towards the "unrealized" of the unconscious's "linguistic" inclusion of all utterances into an evolving dialectic: "The unconscious is the sum of the effects of speech on a subject, at the level at which the subject constitutes himself out of the effects of the signifier" (*Four* 126). The conscious self could be described as the ephemeral shape-shifter as he or she "murders the symbol," either realizing its death and transcending it or remaining trapped by equating the symbolism of an ideology--which is utterance--with his or her metaphysical conception of the real. The path to self-knowledge is fundamentally metafictional--both within and outside the

text-- for both Lacan and Bakhtin. Church, Science and all dogma, whether collective or "individual", represent the collective languages within which individual utterances forge new ground through their imaginative reassessment of stagnant images of eternal truth:

I identify myself in Language, but only by losing myself in it like an object. What is realized in my history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming.(S&L 63)

The metafictional dialogues in Conrad's novels develop the tension between the language of description (or information), its artistic method of presentation through refractory narrative techniques and its relation to the isolated self's perceptions of and reactions to reality. The author's use of various narrative methods complicates and enriches the imaginative quest for the methodologies and "mythologico-social" dialectics of the self's participation in daily life. In *Nostromo's* shifting points of view and degrees of omniscience, Conrad explores the complexity of communicating a vision of the self in language, one which transcends its symbolic and semantic labels. And while, to agree with F. R. Leavis, we cannot attain the stable "image" (Bakhtin 416) of the author's philosophy, his method encourages our participation in his philosophizing creativity, encourages us to question the metafictional implications of our own conception of the real. A central

thematic point of departure for this analysis of narrative techniques and their relationship to the search for self in Conrad's *Nostromo* and *Under Western Eyes* will be both works' basic concern with the relationship between communication (Lacan's "transference") and the search for self-knowledge. This central notion is creatively and "refractively" explored through the author's various methodological approaches and narrative structures. Conrad's art intriguingly suggests that whereas an individual may be incapable of ascertaining the true meaning or nature of his or her own inner motivations, an outsider might be able to decipher the cause at the root of a certain behaviour. Perhaps the secret to self-knowledge lies in reaching out rather than attempting to grasp from within, since we are constantly misled by the complexities and inconsistencies of our unconscious processes? Perhaps we can hope to gain a better knowledge of ourselves by exploring the dreams and thoughts of others rather than by obsessively questioning our own? The implications of such a theme resound within yet reach beyond the pages of the book, since the underlying reasoning suggests that an understanding of character, attained through the medium of another's words, may subsequently entail a more authentic dedication--or as Lacan would say "good faith"-- to enlighten "all the phantoms"(LJ 111) of our own possession. This study will examine the link between the author's imaginative fictions of the self and its world and their meaning for our own imaginatively driven

conceptions of reality and truth, conceptions shaped and driven by what we see, hear--and read.

NOSTROMO

In his Lacanian reading of *Nostromo*, David Allen Ward suggests that Conrad's characters define themselves by reference to "an imaginary ideal image"(290), one which represents each individual's unique participation in a common delusion: "the form that defines the self always comes from without; it is always something added, something artificial--a rigid 'armour' that one presents to the world"(290). Ward's analysis of key characters (Nostromo, Gould, Monygham and Decoud) is useful, but it is thematic and does not address the problematic mediacy of the narrative framework. In other words, if the search for an "ideal image" represents a universal model for Conrad's understanding of the mind, his own subjective narrator's "account" and ultimately his own creation must be implicated in this framework: our individual searches for the author's intended meaning depend on the extent to which we can establish the narrator's "ideological" perspective on the characters and determine how this relates to the author's thematic intentions.

Conrad develops a tension between the internal and external voices of the narrative through the narrator's subtle alternation between subjective and omniscient access to the characters. The naturalistic portrayal of any

given situation is complicated by the narrator's symbolic intentions. (The use of "foreshadowing" is important in this context.) The dynamic between author and narrator echoes the tension between an individual's "utterance" and the contexts which provide it with shifting degrees of objectivity and meaning. At issue is the artist's need or desire for an aesthetic whole despite modern epistemology's intellectual rejection of a cohesive framework of reference: if "an ideal conception of the self" is indeed a central theme in *Nostromo*, one which we can use as a unifying perspective from which to understand his characters, the self-consciousness which is evident in Conrad's approach consequently suggests his attempt to transcend the limitations he imposes on his fictional products. Conrad's art can be defined as a conscious attempt to escape from the delusion of self-definition. *Nostromo's* complexity stems from the author's decision to use an omniscient voice whose point of view consistently shifts from a selective identification with certain characters (through the use of free indirect discourse and dialogue) to ironic commentary on their actions and beliefs.

Before moving on to an analysis of specific passages, it is useful to compare the author's approach in *Nostromo* with his use of Marlow as a first-person narrator in *Lord Jim*: the later work can be read as a reaction to Marlow's obscurantism, or as an ironic response to the perceived reader's dissatisfaction with an explicitly subjective point of view. Marlow's inability

to encapsulate Jim's enigmatic self has been replaced by a narrative voice which is willing to summarize and even dismiss the inner workings of individual figures in order to get on with the historical portrait of an entire society. This kind of perspective has led various critics--notably F. R. Leavis--to downplay the importance and complexity of the search for self in the novel, to, in effect, participate in the narrative's portrayal of an illusory whole. (It seems revealing that Leavis favours the larger canvas of the later work over the perceived romanticism of the Patusan episode in *Lord Jim*.) The fact that numerous characters can apparently be thematically encapsulated within a repetitive schema encourages the reader to downplay the search for self in the text and consider it as an incidental component within the wider discourse of social realism:

...a negative point had better be made by way of stressing the distinctive nature of the impressiveness of *Nostramo*. The impressiveness is not a matter of any profundity of search into human experience, or any explorative subtlety in the analysis of human behaviour. It is a matter rather of the firm and vivid concreteness with which the representative attitudes and motives are realized, and the rich economy of the pattern that plays them off against one another. (Leavis 224)

It seems revealing that even critics who intentionally refute this position (such as David Allen Ward) often confirm Leavis's perspective by engaging in reductive thematic readings of the explicitly "psychological" concerns of the work. The shift from Marlow's first-person narration echoes

the perceived thematic shift from the "self" to the "whole", from the minutiae of Jim's "exalted egoism"(351) to the imaginative conception of an entire society (a large "canvas" [Guérard 176]). Throughout *Lord Jim*, Marlow functions as a moral and perspectival guide for the reader. Although we can perhaps perceive certain limitations in Marlow's perspective--due to his "paternal"⁵ attachment to the protagonist--his narrative is explicitly addressed to a privileged audience, one whose interest in Jim's predicament depends, like Marlow's, on an ability for self-questioning:

...it seemed to me that the less I understood the more I was bound to him in the name of that doubt which is the inseparable part of our knowledge. I did not know so much more about myself.(206)

Marlow's willingness to question his own implication in Jim's "irremediable step"(68) creates the motivation for his entire account and his attempt to address the "fundamental why"(84) instead of the "superficial how"(84) dealt with in the first four chapters and the official inquiry. The notion of the privileged reader in *Lord Jim* is implicitly connected to an ability for self-questioning or self-doubt in response to Marlow's account. The letter he writes to his chosen listener is certainly not meant for a character such as Chester, who is incapable of appreciating the positive aspect of Jim's sensibility, or even for one such as the French Lieutenant, in whose view there is nothing left to "think about"(152), which implies that, in his rigid

opinion, Jim might as well have followed in Brierly's footsteps. (Ironically, he ultimately does.) The privileged recipient of Marlow's letter (and by extension the reader) is in a certain sense elevated to the intellectual and emotional realm of the romanticism of Stein, whose willingness to concede the pain of personal shortcomings is balanced by his conviction that an "irremediable step" should not entail the desertion of one's dreams. By contrast, Conrad's approach in *Nostromo* consistently subverts our identification with any single character or narrator: each character is emblematically stunted and this encourages an analysis of the novel's artistic conception as the synthesized presentation of a whole society. The dearth of answers and the inability to summarize Jim in the earlier work is inverted in the later novel; it is precisely the narrator's propensity to encapsulate and determine his human subjects which seems problematic.

The reader is caught in a paradox: when analyzing the psychological realism of the characters, one cannot ignore their emblematic function as "instruments" within the author's larger "pattern." (Even Conrad retrospectively referred to *Nostromo* as "nothing"[*Letters* 3: 175].) But by the same token, our implicit acceptance of the characters' individual wholeness is undoubtedly crucial for an understanding of the motives fuelling the third-person narrator's methods of presentation. Josiane Paccaud's observation that "it seems extremely difficult...to disentangle the political from the

psychological”(115) in her Lacanian reading of *Under Western Eyes* can also be used as a starting point for analysis of *Nostromo*, where in fact the subjective fixations of various individuals (such as Pedro Montero, Decoud and Charles Gould) combine to produce the macrocosmic political reality of their society.

Conrad's narrative method in *Nostromo* explicitly engages the problematic interconnections between a “whole” and its individual components. The choice of title itself reveals a basic tension between the notions of narrative as didactic and impressionistic. Thus Nostromo's role in the text can be paradoxically defined as both unique and representative of certain greater “truths” about the human condition. To the extent that we consider him as the representative of the distilled dialectic of “personal prestige” he ceases to be a realistic character and becomes a central symbol of self-definition by reference to “other”; his characterization functions as a locus from which we judge the concept of “prestige” as a crucial component in human thinking and behaviour (both within and outside the text). Conrad's portrayal of Nostromo is thus a useful starting point from which to approach the text as a fictional exploration of the individual's self-definition within a community.

Our access to Nostromo's self is consistently complicated by the self-subversive mediacy of the narrative framework. Our introduction to

Nostromo in the second chapter comes through the medium of Captain Mitchell's reminiscent account of the rescue of Ribiera. Conrad combines the use of omniscient description and commentary, free indirect discourse and dialogue to create a complex vision of the title-figure. Mitchell's role reflects the basic paradox which inevitably develops when one attempts to distinguish between the notions of narrative as descriptive and creative. It is often difficult to differentiate between Mitchell's creation of a legendary figure and the narrator's ironic attitude towards the superintendent's admiration for his prized possession. (It seems quite revealing that Conrad chooses Mitchell's "mispronunciation"[68] as a title for the whole work.) This difficulty may not be apparent on a first reading. Various critics have pointed out that Conrad's impressionistic approach and use of a non-linear time scheme make it impossible to establish the author-narrator's thematic intent. In *Lord Jim*, Marlow's theme is quite clear and explicitly corresponds to the title, while in the later work the inability to identify the narrator forces readers to speculate about the thematic intent which binds the various episodes:

... by not naming the narrator, Conrad makes the reader's relationship with the narrative more immediate than if it were mediated by a full-blown character in the novel... By reducing his own organizational authority, Conrad virtually places the responsibility of narration on the shoulders of his reader. The narrator is virtually replaced by the reader here.(Talib 14)

I. S. Talib's discussion is intriguing because it suggests that Conrad's

technique in *Nostromo* consciously draws a parallel between fictional creativity and memory.⁶ On a first reading, our judgment and understanding of Nostromo and the other characters is explicitly dependant on the narrator's memory of "actual" events. On a second reading and on a more metafictional level, however, we are more directly engaged with our sense of a narrator who tells the story "in the fullness of knowledge" (UWE 183), a narrator whose creative effort is clearly shaped by the coherence of a subjective vision. This creates a problematic relationship between a reader's sense of "immediacy" and the realization that, ultimately, the narrator is a device in Conrad's impressionistic approach, a device whose symbolic organization of the story intent is in a complex dialectic with the author's. Thus while the illusion of immediacy may give the reader a sense of involvement in the "writing" (Guérard 175) of Costaguana's history, this feeling is undermined when we ourselves view the entire text retrospectively as an expression of the narrator's rather than the author's "creative remembering."

Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan's analysis of "mythical" versus "historicist" approaches in *Nostromo* is interesting in the context of impressionist as opposed to symbolic modes in the novel. Erdinast-Vulcan suggests that Conrad's fiction explores the basic rift between "metaphysics" and "ethics" in the modern world, and that narrative methods in *Nostromo* address the problematic notion of a "decentred universe" and the necessity of mythical

tropes as a frame of reference in any epistemology (even one which includes nihilistic tendencies):

...the significance of myth in the novel extends beyond parody or ironic displacement. The mythical mode of discourse...consists of more than epic patterns of plot: it is a distinct frame of reference...which operates in opposition to the voice of modernity.(71)

Erdinast-Vulcan subsequently suggests that Nostromo's captivation by the silver "confirms and reinstates the organic myth which the historicist mode of discourse had attempted to banish into the realm of the 'primitive'. Nostromo's end is, then, a sublime vindication of his life as a mythical hero"(83). This statement seems problematic, since, from another perspective, one could argue that the description of the actual events casts an ironic shadow on the narrator's final vision of Nostromo's "conquests of treasure and love"(566). From the narrator's perspective, the "Azuera myth" could certainly be seen as a symbolic foreshadowing of his own metaphorical vision of Nostromo's enslavement: " And the spirits of good and evil that hover about a forbidden treasure understood well that the silver of San Tomé was provided now with a faithful and lifelong slave"(416). This personification constitutes an explicitly contrived--and highly ironic--attempt to romanticize or "mythologize" the situation. Within the larger context of the mine and its symbolization of an impersonal force for good and evil--it is a haven(336) which can only endure by becoming a "tyrant"(423)--, the

narrator's statement can be simply seen as a moral warning about the dangers of "material interests"(100), expressed in the figurative language of legend. As such, this reinstatement of "myth" is in a complex relationship with Nostromo's own use of the myth which occurs prior to his decision to remain silent and "grow rich very slowly"(417). In a sense, the narrator's statement is a highly questionable conclusion or thematic recentring of the ambiguous glimpses we are given of Nostromo's thought-process in the crucial episodes with Dr. Monygham and on the Great Isabel. Erdinast-Vulcan's distinction between mythical and historicist "voices" in the text needs to be taken further in order to include the more fundamental dialogue between Nostromo's uncertainty and the ambiguous glimpses given of his complex self-definition through verbal interaction and internal reflection. In other words, even the distinction between historicist and mythical voices ultimately suggests that the tension resides between our conception of Nostromo as "a common thief"--as a greedy Sotillo--and the narrator's final vision of him as "genius" and "conqueror." Both modes represent an "intellectual" and Decoudian means of understanding and of oversimplifying the dialogue between the language of desire and the external community: the search for self is subsumed beneath competing rationalizations and "labels" in this perspective.

The crucial meeting between Nostromo and Monygham is a brilliant

illustration of the complex interaction between one's unspoken or "unrealized" inner self and external communication between individuals. Even if Nostromo defines himself by reference to a "static ideal," we are told that his "personality" is hinged on his encounter with Gould's apparent emissary, Dr. Monygham:

He was mollified by what seemed a sign of some faint interest in such things as had befallen him, and dropped a few phrases with an affected and curt nonchalance. At that moment he felt communicative. He expected the continuance of that interest which, whether accepted or rejected, would have restored to him his personality--the only thing lost in that desperate affair.(364)

Monygham's "unexpected utterance"(364), his stated wish that the Capataz had "shouted and shown a light"(364) confirms Nostromo's sense of betrayal(355) and his alienation from the Europeans, his distress at being "Nothing to anyone"(380). The rumours of the doctor's "malevolent disposition"(380) (confirmed for the sailor by Hirsch's "sacrifice") make him feel like a mere instrument or tool when the doctor subsequently attempts to console him by telling him that he is "everything" because he is "needed"(380). When Nostromo mentions the Azuera myth for the second time--in reference to Sotillo--he provides a retrospectively naturalistic justification for the narrator's use of the myth as an ominous opening for the entire account, as a foreshadowing of Nostromo's own ultimate "enslavement." It seems that cause and effect have been reversed by the

narrator and this ties in with his anachronic interjection of Mitchell's account, which leaps ahead of Nostromo's actual decision to steal the silver and is an inaccurate perspective: " At once I could see he was another man...The loss of the silver preyed on his mind"(405). At this point in the narrative, the reader has been informed that the silver has been hidden with Decoud, that Nostromo mistrusts the Europeans he has met (Monygham and Mitchell) and has not been able to see his employer, Don Carlos. But Mitchell's account is crucial because, on a thematic level, it suggests that Nostromo's obsession precedes his return to the island and the reader is informed of Decoud's death through the convoluted medium of Nostromo's unwillingness to "betray" the treasure and his sense of betrayal by the Blancos, of being their dog. Indeed, at this point in the narrative, a reader is driven to speculate about Decoud, to wonder whether Nostromo has abandoned him or even killed him and made up the story about finding the lighter's boat. This kind of uncertainty is encouraged by Nostromo's previous statement that he cannot do the "impossible"(380) and find the silver for Sotillo. But it is primarily and significantly the result of the narrator's "retrospective" vision--his knowledge of the outcome.

It seems significant that the only character-based or dialogic mention of the Azuera myth comes from Nostromo and that this is then retrospectively chosen by the narrator as a vision of the "people's" attitude:

"The poor, associating by an obscure instinct of consolation the ideas of evil and wealth, will tell you that it is deadly because of its forbidden treasures"(39). The use of free indirect discourse in the narrator's account results in a subtle blending of sceptical detachment from the legend with a religious and moral perspective: the "gringos" are labelled as "impious adventurers"(40), as outsiders guilty of heresy. In effect, this is the language of Teresa when she accuses Nostromo of abandoning her for his mission, of going as the "Blanco"'s foolish "mozo"(40) and participating in the sacrilegious adventure. If we then view Nostromo's theft as an act of rebellion against the rich "caballeros," the image of the sailor "chained" to the San Tomé silver becomes in effect a parody of Charles Gould's enslavement to the machine of "material interests": both men can be seen through their self-conceptions as protectors in the face of betrayal and corruption, through the redemptive properties of material wealth. (Nostromo, as one of the "caballeros amongst the common people"[258], is the successful protector of the Viola family, while Gould becomes the successful "Rey de Sulaco"[274].)

The myth of Azuera thus becomes a metaphorical framework which refracts the dialogue between spirituality and "material interests," one which involves every single character associated with the San Tomé mine (from Holroyd--an actual "Americano"--on down). This is certainly the "rich economy of the pattern" mentioned by F. R. Leavis, one which can be applied

to characters as disparate as Nostromo and Emilia Gould, in whom "the most legitimate touch of materialism was wanting"(93) despite the fact that she recognizes that the "immaterial" and "real"(93) side of their prosperity depends on material success. It seems problematic that a myth which functions as an interesting but somewhat reductionist perspective from which to unify disparate selves is the product of actual spoken "utterances" by the title-figure: an analysis of Nostromo's two uses of the legend is crucial in order to differentiate between the character's and narrator's uses of this central trope. Nostromo first mentions the myth to Teresa, and the episode draws explicit parallels among wealth, impiety and the voice of Reason: Nostromo dismisses the "impiety"(226) of his actions (his refusal to get a priest) because of his own skepticism, because he convinces himself that Teresa's belief is subjective, while the "value" of the silver is undisputed. Apparently, he allows the voice of reason--of materialism--to conquer and subvert an appeal on spiritual grounds. Nostromo then mentions the myth for the second time during his crucial encounter with Monygham, one where his "personality" is in the balance, one where his feelings of anger turn him into a "spokesperson" for the people and can be directly attributed to his feeling of alienation, his sense that nobody cares about him: the language of social exploitation is inextricably connected to Nostromo's need for self-definition through the empathy of another person. From a Lacanian point of

view, one could say that the character's dialectic of exploitation--his "social" discourse--is a direct outcome of his "aphanisis" (disappearance).⁷ From this perspective, one could argue that Nostromo's decision to steal the silver is based on his relationship to his step-parents. The "revenge" motif could be seen as an ironic version of Viola's "fiercest fighting"(58) in opposition to the hierarchical exploitation of the Northern kings, while the theft itself constitutes a vindication of Teresa's choice of him as a family protector. While the text does not allow us to infer that the actual decision to steal has been taken during the encounter with Monygham, the narrator's perspective implies that the decision-making process is already underway: we are told that Nostromo quotes the legend "in a changed tone," that he is "speaking to himself"(384). The notion that the sailor includes himself in the myth is also encouraged when he refers to the "gringos" as "sailors like myself"(385). The vision of Nostromo chained to the silver of the mine could be seen as the physical expression of his continued bondage to and participation in a family secret: ironically, by ultimately fulfilling the role of protector chosen for him by Teresa (the only positive outcome of his betrayal) Nostromo embodies his stepfather's worst nightmare and violates the latter's "austere contempt for all personal advantage"(60). What is important here is that this kind of interpretation is fundamentally based on the reader's subjective rationalizations of Nostromo's evolving process of self-definition: we seek to

explain Nostromo's actions and behaviour by speculating about his emotional identification with or revulsion from the dialectics of various characters. The search for self in *Nostromo*, specifically in reference to the myth of Azuera, is based on our ability to distinguish between the narrator's inclusion of him within the myth and his own self-definition by reference to it: this tension represents the core of the dialogic between subjective assertion and the reader's participation in a "communal" meaning.

Thus when Nostromo does finally decide to "get rich very slowly" one tends to downplay the significance of the "four ingots missing" and interpret the decision to steal as the ultimate result of his captivation by the myth of the silver. The question remains whether the myth of Azuera is a figuratively expressed result of Nostromo's enslavement to the silver, to a symbol of material interests (and exploitation) in the text, or whether the sailor's superstitious mindset encourages his use of a myth to define and rationalize his need to keep the secret: from this perspective, the Azuera legend is nothing more than a group of words which provide Nostromo--and by extension the reader-- with a means to understand his emotional predicament from an "intellectual" angle.⁸ The empirical fact that the silver is ultimately stolen--an outcome which has been subtly foreshadowed by Conrad's use of narrative interjections (by both characters and the "omniscient" voice)--encourages Erdinast-Vulcan's perceived

"reinstatement" of the myth of material interests. However, this kind of perspective also encourages a definite oversimplification of Conrad's psychological portrayal. Paradoxically, we are encouraged to view Nostromo's decision sceptically, as an angry reaction to his sense of exploitation, as his own "self-containment" within the dialectic of material interests, as a validation of Monygham's sardonic statement that "nothing but the whole treasure would do"(229). The importance of the secret, kept because of Nostromo's perceived potential for misunderstanding and life-long shame, is subsumed beneath the narrator's insistence on the universal power of material interests, a myth which effectively downplays the uniquely evolving dialectic of each individual, and which encourages a reader to draw reductive parallels between the most complex and the most stereotypical characters (such as Sotillo--the quintessential representative of "childish"[287] greed).

In his discussion of *Nostromo*, Royal Roussel argues that "the narrator's reserve seems the result less of an intrinsic impersonality than of a studied restraint, less of the absence of emotion than the deliberate negation of it"(112). This is an intriguing statement, which can be directly compared to Lacan's previously mentioned need for the analyst's "detachment of motive" during the transference with the patient. Conrad's narrator is in a sense in a direct conflict with the author's imaginative creativity and functions as an artificially detached subverter of imaginative identification with the

characters. But this self-reflexive paradox ultimately reveals that the author is consciously creating dialogue and complexity between a detached and analytical versus an impressionistic and involved (self-searching)) attitude towards another human being. In a sense, the voice of the narrator functions as the detached analyst, as a device to explore different rationalizations of the author's fictional creations. The dialogic novel is taken one step further when Conrad seems to include a Bakhtinian critic in his cast of characters, one whose portrayals of the characters expose and undermine various versions of "bonding of ideological meaning to language"(Bakhtin 369). From a Bakhtinian perspective, this could be seen as a polyphonic orchestration which includes its own critical discourse within the overall structure and which thus strives towards self-containment in and through its method. However, Conrad goes even further by refusing to allow the voice to encapsulate the individual complexity of characters. Thus Bruce Johnson's insightful psychological analysis of characters in *Nostromo* seems to oversimplify the process of Nostromo's transformation by enclosing him within one of the narrator's most general and problematic generalizations:

His mind--'the popular mind is incapable of skepticism'--must believe in something; and, after all, he is surrounded with the insistent argument that the universe is run according to "power, punishment, pardon"..... Thus the silver which had clouded and finally obliterated a true moral sense in Charles Gould has ironically developed one in Nostromo.(115)

We are once again encouraged to consider the character's thought-process through the lens of social exploitation and revenge. Johnson sees the theft as Nostromo's search for "compensation for the betrayal" and for a "rudimentary sense of recompense"(115). Nostromo asserts himself as "his own man" through the silver but subsequently and ironically becomes enslaved to this inanimate "master." We are once again brought back to the myth of Azuera in this reading and encouraged to agree with the narrator's vision of a man vesting an inanimate object with a higher, redemptive meaning. The theft of the silver is seen as a misdirected quest and this subsumes the problematic fact that this interpretation is merely an echo of Nostromo's own self-portrayals through the eyes of others. In Johnson's reading, Nostromo's decisions to remain silent are inaccurately connected to a simple motivation, and this allows the critic to rationalize Nostromo's decision to remain secret as a consistently followed means to an end. What is crucial here is that this approach fails to do justice to Conrad's episodic complexity, to the intentional secrecy which the author sustains in our access to Nostromo's conscious and unconscious thought-processes when he decides to keep his information secret: in fact, Nostromo's secrecy before the decision to "get rich" must be sharply distinguished from his outlook following his discovery of Decoud's actual rather than fabricated "disappearance". The "uncertainty of motive" which Nostromo perceives in Decoud's suicide is an

important factor, which encourages him to remain silent and allow the assumed explanation to stand:

He could not know. Nobody was to know. As might have been supposed, the end of Don Martin Decoud never became a subject of speculation for anyone except Nostromo. Had the truth of the facts been known, there would always have remained the question, Why? Whereas the version of his death at the sinking of the lighter had no uncertainty of motive.(412)

Intriguingly, this excerpt expresses the dialogic tension Conrad develops between free indirect discourse and interpretive interference: while Nostromo's own thoughts seem to be straightforwardly narrated—he wants to avoid being questioned--the assertion “As might have been supposed” implies a preexistent pattern of reflection, as though the episode merely confirms and reechoes the previous decision to remain silent. This is clearly speculative and highly problematic, because it conflates the revenge motif and the perceived desire for remuneration with Nostromo's sense of mistrust towards the Blancos. Ingeniously, we are led to speculate retrospectively about Nostromo's potentially “selfish” motives by being told that he decides to follow the “version” of a story which has no such “uncertainty.” It seems important to recognize that the false version of Decoud's death is not in fact Nostromo's own, and that our understanding of Nostromo's actions necessarily depends on our perception of his “ulterior” motives, on why he remains silent. Seeing the silver merely as a symbol of remuneration and of

self-definition by reference to a “substitute” is an oversimplification because it encapsulates the subject in a static symbolic order--from a Lacanian perspective, this seeks to define the subject within the confines of a closed or “mad” dialectic. The point is, our perception of the character’s “exactitude” or adherence to a determined pattern is in a constantly evolving tension with the actual “enactment” of the subject’s enigmatic thinking-process and actions. The vision of Nostromo “silent and staring for hours” is in a sense an empty “receptacle” challenging the reader for a justifiable “version” of Nostromo’s decision-making process. And if one interprets all of the sailor’s outward behaviour by reference to his “uttered” and the narrator’s symbolic use of the Azuera legend, one is in a sense judging the character within one of his own self-conceptions by reference to other. We see him through his stepfather’s eyes and convict him from a political perspective, as a false demagogue whose “inflamed”(58) proclamations are a thin veil concealing personal greed: ““You fine people are all alike. All dangerous. All betrayers of the poor who are your dogs””(380). This angry statement might then inform our thematic interpretation of the following observation: “He had made up his mind that nothing should be allowed now to rob him of his bargain”(416).

Suresh Raval’s discussion of *Nostromo* provides a revealing instance of how the critic’s interpretation seems in effect to parallel the narrator’s retrospective inscription of Nostromo’s “transformation” within

an artificially linear pattern which culminates with the theft. In effect, one can argue that the narrator's and the critic's "memories" of the final outcome (the theft) threaten to subvert both the former's portrayal and the latter's analysis of Nostromo's thought-process in between his return to Sulaco and his discovery of Decoud's disappearance. Thus the narrator's "As might have been supposed..." is a statement which simultaneously refers to the "present" moment on the Great Isabel, the moment which is immediately following Nostromo's discovery of Decoud's death, with a pattern of judgmental reflection moving backwards in time: we might well "have supposed"--as Suresh Raval's analysis implies--that Nostromo would ultimately decide to make Hirsch's false story stand for the truth. In this reading, one must implicitly assume that Nostromo's decision to steal precedes the actual revelation of Decoud's death simply because the former lies to Monygham, Mitchell and Barrios: "When Nostromo returns with Barrio's army, he jumps into the dinghy because he wants to find out if he is the sole possessor of the treasure, not because he is remorseful for deserting Decoud"(Raval 86). This statement is highly speculative and problematic given the numerous illustrations that Nostromo remains silent because of his understandable "mistrust" and fear towards individuals in a volatile and clearly lethal situation:

He remained before [the door], irresolute, like a fugitive, like a

man betrayed. Poverty, misery, starvation!... The anger of a dying woman had prophesied that fate for his folly... And the *leperos* would laugh--she had said. Yes, they would laugh if they knew that the Capataz de Cargadores was at the mercy of the mad doctor... At that moment the notion of seeking Captain Mitchell crossed his mind...And what could he be told? That doctor would worm it out of him as if he were a child.(389)

...Barrios, talking with Nostromo, assumed that both Don Martin Decoud and the ingots of San Tomé were lost together, and Nostromo, not questioned directly, had kept silent, under the influence of some indefinable form of resentment and distrust. Let Don Martin speak of everything from his own lips--was what he told himself mentally"(410).

At this point in the narrative, the notion of "remorse" for "deserting Decoud" is not even an issue: Nostromo has simply not been able to return as soon as he had planned because of significant contingencies, such as his essential role in saving "the lives and futures of a whole town"(407). What seems revealing about Raval's opinion in this context is the fact that the critic seems to judge Nostromo in the same way that the latter judges himself. In effect, Nostromo himself envisions his "crime" against Decoud as an extension of his earlier abandonment of Teresa(416), and this becomes his own romanticized guilt-complex, his own subjective way of defining the perceived tragedy as a further proof of his heroism: "The blank stillness of awe was succeeded by a gust of immense pride. There was no one in the world but Gian' Battista Fidanza, Capataz de Cargadores, the incorruptible and faithful Nostromo, to pay such a price"(416). What Nostromo sees as the

quintessential proof of his “incorruptible” and selfless devotion becomes a positive proof of his complete egoism and obsession with “prestige” from a judgmental outsider’s perspective.⁹ The tension between Conrad’s intention and the narrative framework is crucial here: if we think that Nostromo’s abandonment of Decoud is intentional, his unwillingness to “fetch a priest” for Teresa can be seen as the self-serving defiance of an ethical code rather than as his unwillingness to participate in a subjective desire at the height of a dangerous emergency. Paradoxically, Nostromo’s romanticized self-accusation-- an episode which transforms his agony into “pride”--provides the only concrete textual basis for Raval’s vision of a clearly criminal transgression:

This heroic and public act [the mission for Barrios] will be taken in complete disregard for the safety of Decoud, *whose meagre supply of food will not save him, for more than a few days, from starvation.* His heroism thus becomes tainted with the egotism denounced by Teresa Viola.(86--my italics)

The italicized section of the above excerpt is a good illustration of an interpretive accusation based purely on Nostromo’s own sense that he has abandoned “a woman, then a man...in their last extremity”(416).¹⁰ It seems revealing that Raval sees the proud Capataz as an anti-hero while Monygham, who has “an ideal conception of his disgrace”(319) and believes in his own “human littleness”(363) is seen as “the true moral hero”(Raval 90) of the novel. Essentially, this reading constitutes an interpretation of

Conrad's moral framework for the novel and for our judgment of his characters which is quite simply based on the abstract notions of "pride" versus "humility": Nostromo is dismissed as a "hollow" individual because all of his actions--even generous ones--are based on his desire for personal prestige. Monygham is seen as Conrad's chosen hero because all of his actions--even "dangerous," "selfish" and "cruel" ones--are based on his "worship" of another human being.

Nostromo's belief in the value of duty and heroism is confounded and destroyed by the voice of skepticism. The doctor's words confirm the pragmatic social language of supply and demand, confirm Nostromo's sense that he is being treated as an object in the dialectic of pure reason: "You are safe because you are needed. I would not give you away for any conceivable reason, because I want you"(380). During his encounter with the sailor, Monygham paints the world in the depersonalized shades of materialism and expresses a sceptical disbelief towards an ideal of unswerving devotion and duty: "'If that's all he's sure of [himself], then he is sure of nothing'"(269). While this latter statement refers to Charles Gould and is not actually uttered in Nostromo's presence, it basically expresses the "skepticism of the Blancos" which Nostromo fears to face. This statement also constitutes the attitudinal credo through which Raval convicts Nostromo because of pride and through which he subsequently extols Monygham's "self-deprecating" heroism.

Nostromo is a "Jim" who would never abandon his sinking vessel, but the value of Jim's dream has been undermined by the sceptical tendencies in the narrative which destroy the moral value of an abstract dedication to duty by exposing it as an iconoclastic cult of self-image. Monygham's idealization of Emilia Gould might seem to have more moral sanction in a subjective reader's judgment because it reveals a movement outside the "self." However, Conrad's subtle approach reminds his reader that, ultimately, our understanding of another's self depends on our ability to transcend the petty subjectivity of our own moral framework: we lose sight of Nostromo's self when we judge him by reference to another voice's personal delusion.

The atrocity of Nostromo's transformation reaches its highest pitch when we see that it is a product of his self-inscription through Monygham's perspective: the doctor does not provide the necessary cathartic experience because he is driven by the demands of his own infatuation with Emilia Gould. Nostromo's perception of Monygham's "cruelty"--which is in effect a mistaken analysis--allows him to see himself as a mere tool, to identify himself as a Hirsch, as a potential sacrifice offered to "gain a day"(379). Monygham takes the emotional core of his life and utters it in a way which renders his discourse intolerably "impersonal" for Nostromo: "'There are innocent people in danger whose little finger is worth more than you or I and all the Ribierists put together'"(381). It seems significant that the doctor does

not even speak Emilia's name during this interchange, while the reader is clearly aware that when Monygham refers to the "people" and proclaims himself as a "devoted Ribierist"(382), he is in fact referring exclusively to the object of his love: thus while Raval's statement that Nostromo "tells lies"(86) to Monygham is true, Monygham is himself "lying" to Nostromo by sublimating his purely personal motivation into political language. Nostromo's disillusionment results directly from Monygham's inability to share his own secret meaning in life. By not verbalizing or admitting the limitations of his own skepticism, Monygham cannot provide relief to Nostromo. Ironically, by sublimating the language of love into the language of social values, Monygham's essentially "tender" motivations are transmuted into cruel words. But while it seems valid to suggest that the encounter with Monygham alienates Nostromo from the Blancos by making him feel like an "object," it seems even more important to recognize that the conscious decision to steal is made after Nostromo discovers Decoud's disappearance.

Fundamentally, the text suggests that Nostromo is himself unaware of his deeper motivations. One could argue that when Nostromo creates his "admirable idea"(384) to fool Sotillo, he is in a sense sublimating his own situation through emotional identification with Sotillo's futile scrambling after a "fixed idea". Sotillo's haunting can be seen as a metaphorical

reenactment of Nostromo's own situation and agony, his own sense of being given a false trail and of being fooled. Whether or not Nostromo is consciously drawing the parallel, it seems important to see that the creation of an "admirable idea" can be described as an imaginative "reenactment" of a personal trauma. Since he thinks that the Blancos see him as a "dog" (and is encouraged to do so by Monygham), Nostromo cannot take the risk of telling them the truth-- a truth which makes him a hero in his own eyes but which he assumes will not be believed by people who do not believe in an ideal of duty.

Bruce Johnson suggests that we "take Dr. Monygham as in significant part the voice of Conrad"(116). Perhaps it would be more accurate to describe him as an individual expression of contrary tendencies in the narrative voice. Through Monygham, the interaction between the subjective creation of imaginative meaning and the narrative framework's sceptical subversion of meaning is embodied on the level of an individual's psychology:

There is always something childish in the rapacity of the passionate, clear-minded, Southern races, wanting in the misty idealism of the Northerners, who at the smallest encouragement dream of nothing less than the conquest of the earth.(287)

A reader might interpret this statement by the narrator as Monygham's perspective, since, in effect, he inscribes himself as Emilia's

defender in response to the above statement; he is able to escape from his skepticism, from his "immense mistrust of mankind"(69), because the object of his love is worthy of protection from both her husband's "misty idealism" and from the popular rapacity aimed at her social position. Monygham defines himself as a "social" tool in the name of his love, an escape from skepticism which then affects his discourse with Nostromo and allows him to contradict one of his own rational credos: "...it is most unreasonable to demand that a man should think of other people so much better than he is able to think of himself"(69).

Monygham's "ideal conception of his disgrace" can be seen as a microcosmic metaphor for the author's perception of his own "littleness," of his own single voice whose written utterance seeks to create meaning through visions of the whole (of the "large canvas"). Monygham's "cruel" words are an illustration that he judges the "value" of other people by reference to his own subjective hierarchy of meaning, one which is fundamentally ideological and which literally constitutes a lie against his own reasoning. Thus Monygham's sceptical voice is false to its own "magic," just as the narrator's use of the Azuera myth suggests a sceptically limited and incomplete basis from which to define and dismiss Nostromo's theft of the silver as an analogical parallel to the political image of a false demagogue.

As an individual character, Monygham thus embodies the

fundamental tension between the creative author and his search for self through the narrative framework (which is itself a specific "version" of the story). The sceptical voice of the narrative--the metafictional voice which reveals the subjectivity of different characters' world-views--must preserve an "ideal conception" of its own cohesiveness in order to portray an entire "canvas." The text's own "cruelty" towards its "objects" can be seen as a means to an end, one which is simultaneously "tender" and "selfish." Monygham is himself motivated by a selfish pride in the moral subjectivity of his devotion to Emilia: perhaps we can excuse his "pride" because it is based on love for another unlike Nostromo's narcissism. However, from an objective point of view, this love provides him with his own self-serving and subjective means of validating a cruel ideology: from this perspective, his willingness to die for a cause need not necessarily be judged as more "admirable" than Nostromo's willingness to sink with the treasure. Monygham's obsession makes him "utterly indifferent to Decoud's fate"(362), and the destructive side of his devotion suggests that his insights must be viewed in the light of his adoration:

This claim...made Dr. Monygham's thinking, acting, individuality, extremely dangerous to himself and to others, all his scruples vanishing in the proud feeling that his devotion was the only thing that stood between an admirable woman and a frightful disaster.(362)

While we might think that Monygham's prediction about the mine's

"tyranny" is an insightful and cyclic vision of Costaguana history and politics (when we attempt to draw parallels between the author and his characters' voices), we can also see this statement as a disguised attack on Gould's perceived "tyranny" over his wife.

The narrator's--and by extension the reader's--interpretations of the events are in a problematic interaction with the author's creation of a specific plot and episodes. Monygham is the one surviving "individual" who actually hears Nostromo's mention of the Azuera myth, which is then given ominous symbolic significance by the narrator's use of it at the beginning of the tale. Through the lens of the myth, Nostromo becomes reducible to a list of social labels (such as "our man", the equivalent of the gambling "mozo") and psychological rationalizations; he becomes an idea and an object of scrutiny within the larger concern with "social realism" developed in the novel. He ceases to be a "real" human being and becomes the label of the text, of the "larger canvas." The account of Nostromo's death is interesting in this context. He is killed just after he reveals his secret to Giselle and becomes a "lover," simply because Giorgio Viola mistakes him for an aspiring son-in-law (Ramirez), and sees him as an unwanted human being who does not fit into his world-view. Thus the instrument of Nostromo's death remains completely oblivious to the poetic justice which a reader might interpret as the author's purpose through the use of this "plot move": Nostromo is

killed in the act of theft, in the act of transgressing his father's "religion" and "austere contempt for all personal advantage"(60). To take this even further, Nostromo is using the symbolic defender of democracy as the defender of his ignominious pilfering. But we miss the ultimate irony of the situation when we forget that Nostromo's agony at being misunderstood (because of the uncertainty of motivation in Decoud's suicide) and our reaction to him as a "real" individual are completely undermined when we consider him as an object in the author's plan of poetic irony and retribution. On the one hand, the text encourages us to appreciate the fact that Giorgio has unwittingly "defended his honour" and his worship for Garibaldi's principles. Furthermore, we can see Nostromo's end as a confirmation of the author's skepticism and unwillingness to participate in Nostromo's "popular naiveté," since the latter is destroyed at the very moment when he anticipates "release" from his enslavement. While this may in fact be a valid interpretation, one must not forget that Nostromo's fate can also be seen as the result of his own skepticism: the absence of an Emilia Gould and her "art of human intercourse"(70) to make him feel understood seems to be the primary cause of his decision to steal. Nostromo tells Emilia that he stole the silver and committed the crime in order to prevent the external world from speculating about Decoud's death and the disappearance of the four ingots. Ironically, the larger crime is committed in order to prevent accusations

about a lesser one:

'And Decoud took four. Four ingots. Why? Picardia! To betray me? How could I give up the treasure with four ingots missing? They would have said I had purloined them. *The doctor would have said that.*'(460--my emphasis)

Monygham's destruction of the ideological bond between Nostromo and his employers can thus be seen as a crucial cause in the sailor's inability to continue defining himself by reference to the "Blanco" community. To say that "the popular mind is incapable of skepticism" seems utterly misleading in this context and consequently in our overall understanding of Nostromo's evolving thought-process. It also seems prejudicial to argue--as Raval does--that the above confession is simply Nostromo's final attempt to "rationalize" the theft and preserve his public image. In this context, it seems interesting that the narrator's textual statement on the Great Isabel ultimately becomes a false prophecy of the actual events: "the end of Don Martin Decoud" does become "a subject of speculation"(412) for another character in the novel (Emilia Gould). The search for Nostromo's self is thus founded in the complex relationship between the characters' subjective perceptions of a "future anterior" and the narrator's and reader's consistently subverted attempts to understand unique emotional predicaments from the heights of an assumed intellectual superiority.

While one cannot point to any single protagonist in the narrative,

Nostromo and Charles Gould seem to be figures whose “silence” and central engagement in the action set them apart for the narrator and indeed for Conrad. They become central objects of scrutiny for both the narrator and reader, and most importantly for the characters themselves. Both men remain somewhat enigmatic precisely because their roles as “silent” leaders encourage incomplete stereotypical perspectives and judgments, perspectives which often seem to be conflation between the narrator’s and characters’ thinking. Thus the narrator’s portrayal of Charles Gould in Part One foreshadows and echoes Decoud’s later analysis: “Mines had acquired for him a dramatic interest. He studied their peculiarities from a personal point of view, too, as one would study the varied characters of men”(81). The narrator portrays Charles Gould by reference to a specific pattern, one which Decoud subsequently confirms and restates as a fulfilled prophecy. The following excerpt is, in effect, one of the concluding visions we are given of Gould, one which ultimately seems to remain unchallenged:

Don Carlos’s mission is to preserve unstained the fair name of his mine; Mrs. Gould’s mission is to save him from the effects of that cold and overmastering passion, which she dreads more than if it were an infatuation for another woman.(219)

The narrator’s earlier (quasi-prophetic) analysis is thus echoed and confirmed by the outlook of a sceptic, one whose pragmatic nonchalance is described as “a mere barren indifferentism posing as intellectual

superiority”(152). In effect, Decoud’s apparently insightful and imaginative view of Emilia’s fear is clearly an assertion of his own sense of “intellectual superiority” over another figure. We are encouraged to see Charles Gould as an illustration of what Decoud is not and can “see through”: “I cannot endow my personal desires with a shining robe of silk and jewels”(202). This statement is yet another illustration of Conrad’s subtle treatment of dialogic interpretations and their relationship to the search for self: Decoud’s statement functions as an ironic commentary on Gould’s “idealism” and on his obsession with the mine, and seems to point to a weakness in his character, to a delusional means of self-definition. This perspective is strengthened by the narrator’s portrayals of Emilia’s loneliness and of Gould’s participation in the corrupt political process. On the other hand, Decoud’s entire perspective is clearly undermined by his suicide, by his inability to maintain hope for a better future. It seems essential to recognize the distinctions Conrad seems to be drawing between scepticism as a mode of interpretation and scepticism as a mode of being.

Thus we can see Gould’s “ray of hope” and “hope for a better justice”(100) as delusional or as necessary--perhaps as a necessary delusion given Decoud’s end? Decoud sees people and sees himself as isolated within a dialectic of personal folly. In his bitter view of an essentially selfish humanity, any ideal and any sincerity seem to be tainted by the megalomania

of the individual's personal greed: the entire nation must separate in order to satisfy Decoud's love for Antonia. From this point of view, Charles's willingness to blow up the mine can also be dismissed as a childish obsession, as a "fetish" which has captivated the "poor boy"(431) as Emilia calls him. As readers, we might agree with the text's portrayal of a man as "insane" because he is "haunted by a fixed idea"(328). However, we can only do this if we view the character from a sceptical outlook to which "the narrowness of every belief is odious"(177), from an outlook which ultimately sees the universe "as a succession of incomprehensible images"(414). In Decoud's universe, we are encouraged to equate the human being with the impersonality of the "machine" he creates and strives to sustain. Lacan's notion of the transference is useful here because he suggests that the interpreter is forced to "murder" the subject by placing him within his own symbolic system. Thus the perceived insanity of the subject is in fact created by the analyst's critical portrait or summary. But this is a portrait which can only provide a distorted verbalized understanding of what remains "unrealized" or dialogic in the subject's unconscious. Conrad's approach in *Nostromo* provides a fascinating exploration of this tension between communication and fiction. Ingeniously, whenever we are made to identify with the emotional predicament of an individual character, we participate in their subjective and imaginative view of other characters and the whole: our own "provisional"

empathy tricks us into accepting their incomplete rationalizations about other characters.

It seems problematic to assert, as does Bruce Johnson, that Conrad in fact "favours" Moneyham and Emilia over the other characters, since it seems evident that favouring any one perspective is the precise cause of inaccurate interpretations. (This also seems true of Raval's choice of Moneyham as the hero.) When we pity Emilia's solitude, this automatically encourages a negative interpretation of Charles's relationship to the mine and suggests an ironic perspective from which to judge his compromises with corruption: we tend to downplay the fact that the mine is an effective haven for many people, and that Emilia's own philanthropic activities depend on Charles's continued success. If we agree with her opinion, then we begin to see Charles's public success as a personal failure: "...there is something inherent in the necessities of successful action which carried with it the moral degradation of the idea"(431). Even if this statement seems valid, it seems naive to consider the moral corruption of the "idea" as a sign of moral corruption in the individual who actively pursues it: should the difficulty inherent in practical implementation undermine the moral value of pursuing the idea despite the obstacles?

Emilia's decision to remain silent following her interview with Nostromo embodies the fundamental tension between an individual's

ideology and the practical world of things. One could argue that Emilia's vision of her society thus makes her think of the consequences of Nostromo's revelations from an emotional and ideological rather than from a practical point of view. It seems better to maintain both Decoud and Nostromo on their heroic pinnacles and hide the ugly truth from the fledgling nation. It seems better to maintain a universally accepted story. However, even the validity of this decision depends directly on its immediate context: her refusal to satisfy Monygham's eager curiosity seems reasonable, since he is certain of conveying the most unfavourable verdict on this illustration of "human littleness."¹¹ She is also protecting Antonia's feelings. On the other hand, perhaps Linda--whose desperate cry echoes on the concluding page--could have been helped by the revelation, by making her realize that her own moral "austerity" would make Nostromo fearful of her judgment. In a sense, Emilia is undoubtedly guilty of betraying her own humanitarian goals when she rejects the silver for the sake of maintaining a universal delusion and because she too has "hated the idea of the silver"(460). Her personal aversion results in the waste of a valuable resource, one which has been produced by the hard toil of workers, one which could have been used practically, to provide food for the hungry, medicine for the sick and shelter for the refugees of Sta Marta. Thus while we can identify with Emilia's emotional predicament, the text of *Nostromo* continually reminds us that our objective

judgments of individual characters and ideological perspectives (even the narrator's) depend on our shifting identification with the emotional predicaments of the various selves which make up the whole.

UNDER WESTERN EYES

In *Under Western Eyes*, Conrad's use of a retrospective first-person point of view and the narrator's added involvement as a character make the later work structurally similar to Marlow's narration in *Lord Jim*. However, the author's use of self-subversive strategies within the narrative framework seem to readdress the epistemological dialogue between language and the subjective creation of meaning found in *Nostramo*. In *Lord Jim*, Marlow explicitly relates his own subjective vision of the events. In *Under Western Eyes*, the narrator explicitly intends the story to "tell itself" through the "documentary evidence"(3), but this statement contends with concrete proof that the "biographer" must necessarily fictionalize, that the interpreter's "myopic" view of the facts must be fleshed out by his own imaginative input. The narrative structure is undoubtedly more complex in *Under Western Eyes* than in *Lord Jim*, in the sense that the teacher uses artificial methods to provide the reader with a sense of privileged access which is denied all of the other characters in the account, including himself. Razumov's final confession is shocking to everyone but the reader, who alone witnesses the build-up which ultimately concludes with the truth "struggling on his lips"(354) and the "denunciatory finger"(354). The narrator's unqualified

omniscience acts as an insuperable barrier between his dual roles as both character and author, and this division adds to the fictional illusion which bestows on the reader an exclusive access into Razumov's mental state. As in *Nostromo*, there seems to be an implicit challenge to the Bakhtinian notion of "disassociation" through the use of a narrative framework that creates a forum for metafictional dialogue between subjective creativity and objective meaning. The search for self in *Under Western Eyes* is developed through Conrad's subtle treatment of the relationship between subjective words and external reality: the notion of texts as retrospectively factual accounts is clearly complicated by the psychological definition of texts as imaginative creations of subjective meaning. (The latter notion would perhaps be described as a "magical" one by Bakhtin, but accepted as meaningfully "rational" by Lacan for the purposes of fruitful discussion and transference.)

The teacher of languages' role as first-person narrator is consistently undermined both in terms of his own stated methods and intentions as well as in terms of his relationship with Razumov. The teacher claims that his imagination plays no part in his interpretation of the diary or the comments of the various characters, but the reader witnesses considerable analysis and personal input from the self-proclaimed outside observer. Furthermore, the narrator frequently oversteps the boundaries of his limited authority, such as

when the solitary Razumov stopped writing and "flung the pen away from him into a distant corner"(362). However, such unqualified omniscience is an integral and self-evident aspect of the novel's narrative method, and serves to remind us that the narrator is himself an authorial device with specific and deliberate functions in the text. The reader is thus encouraged to reflect upon the author's deliberate choice of a storyteller whose incomplete grasp is artificially supplemented rather than replaced by direct third-person narration. Perhaps the teacher's unfounded and illusory independence as the "author" of the account parallels Razumov's doomed attempt to maintain an independence which is paradoxically motivated by the spectre of authority?

The account of the Russian student's personal diary constitutes the only direct source that we have of his thoughts, and the motivations behind his decision to write remain obscure. He is prompted to action by the sudden threat which Haldin represents for his "silver medal"(11) hopes and solitary existence: " Razumov, of course, felt the safety of his lonely existence to be permanently endangered. This evening's doings could turn up against him at any time, as long as this man lived and the present institutions endured"(21). It is difficult to decide whether Razumov's sense of the "institution"'s rational and harmonious validity stems from his true opinion or from his fear of an insuperable master (the Russian Government). There is no doubt that his imagination paints a dismal portrait of his future

prospects following complicity with a revolutionary:

He saw himself deported by an administrative order, his life broken, ruined, and robbed of all hope... He saw his youth pass away from him in misery and half-starvation--his strength give way, his mind become an abject thing. He saw himself creeping, broken down and shabby, about the streets--dying unattended in some filthy hole of a room, or on the sordid bed of a Government hospital.(21)

It seems evident that such vivid illusions of horror are the direct cause of Razumov's decision to betray Haldin. Since it is irrefutable that the present institutions will endure despite Haldin, the only solution to Razumov's dilemma is the destruction of Haldin. Razumov's alternatives are established before he has failed in his attempt to wake Ziemianitch or decided to betray the revolutionary's trust. The interesting aspect of Razumov's account lies in its division between his initial imaginative and emotional reaction (his automatic hate for Haldin) and the subsequent rationalizations by which he masks the true nature of his cowardly submission to the yoke of autocracy. The cynical yet seemingly honest terror is transformed into an affected and arrogant sense of superiority and independence of mind:

'No! If I must suffer let me at least suffer for my convictions, not for a crime my reason--my cool superior reason--rejects'... He was persuaded that he was sacrificing his personal longings of liberalism--rejecting the attractive error for the stern Russian truth.(35-36)

Razumov's betrayal and subsequent justifications of his action denote his confusion or uncertainty about his own inner self. There is a basic paradox inherent in the structure of the novel and its setting in the shadow of a repressive régime. Razumov is clearly torn between the two conflicting sides and yet his decision seems initially disconnected from any struggle between divided loyalties. Razumov betrays another man's life for the simple sake of self-preservation. His subsequent rationalizations and transformation into a Government spy seem motivated both by his need for safety (in answer to Mikulin's question "'Where to'"[99]), and by his desire to justify his treachery by taking a definite side. His bitterness towards the revolutionary movement as a whole seems catalyzed by Haldin's unexpected visit and the fears which it arouses. His past apathy towards political issues has been shattered by external circumstances, and he is irretrievably drawn into the tangled web of repression and dissent. The record of his painful mental turmoil and ultimate confession is entrusted to the western eyes of the narrator, who warns us explicitly about the danger of words and their acceptance as truth.

There are many levels on which one should consider the implications of the teacher's statement that "Words...are the great foes of reality"(3). After all, is he not explicitly undermining the validity of his own account, since Razumov's thoughts to him and his synthesizing of the diary

and his own experiences for the reader are exclusively limited to the medium of writing? Ironically, the narrator's statement seems to implicate the author of the work: Conrad's use of such an affirmation within the pages of a narrative which explores the innermost thoughts of a tormented man implies the denial of words as a means to express one's own thoughts in a real situation, beyond the fantasy of fiction. The difficulties of understanding Razumov's inner thoughts from the perspective of his diary are equivalent to the difficulties encountered in attempting to elucidate the complexity of the inner self in general. Could we ourselves succeed in unravelling the complexities of our own thoughts by transcribing words in a diary? Fundamentally, the narrator's statement is a device which urges the reader to consider the thematic implications of this "foe" within the narrative's internal structure. Rather than question the validity of the teacher's authority (since even our own has been subtly questioned), we are encouraged to consider the complexities of words as a means of self-expression and self delusion for the author of the diary.

It is undeniably true that on a basic level, Razumov's words and the verbalized course of his thoughts are "foes" in his unwitting journey to self discovery. As Daniel Schwarz argues: "Razumov believes in the ability of language to create reality... He relies on language to create the necessary revolutionary self with which he can perform his mission as a spy"(202).

Indeed, Razumov's rationalizations and misguided sense of intellectual superiority are ultimately stripped away by Natalia's "trustful eyes"(358) rather than through any process of rational reasoning or logical deduction. His ponderings illustrate the irony of his betrayal, whereby he convinces himself of his right of independence and subsequently abandons all freedom for the sake of an abstraction. Razumov's justification of Russian authoritarianism seems to be a façade which fools him into thinking that his decision is an expression of his freedom. The question of Razumov's freedom is raised before the arrival of Haldin, when we are told that "there was nothing secret or reserved in his life"(7), which implies an assertion of compliance with societal convention. The ties which bind Razumov to the establishment may be deeper than he is consciously willing to admit, and perhaps his desire for his aristocratic father's approbation also strengthens his motivation to betray the revolutionary. The contradiction inherent in Razumov's account of his thoughts and feelings becomes evident from these adamant declarations of independent or detached thinking. While it is true that Razumov succeeds in "detaching"(98) himself from his compassion, it also seems undeniable that his "patriotic instincts"(98) stem from the necessity caused by his fear of the established institution rather than from "an act of conscience"(38). The narrator's warning about words seems applicable to Razumov's written account, since the diary provides him with a medium

to develop arguments which can justify his betrayal and conceal the true reason for his decision from his reasoning consciousness:

For a train of thought is never false. The falsehood lies deep in the necessities of existence, in secret fears and half-formed ambitions, in the secret confidence combined with a secret mistrust of ourselves in the love of hope and the dread of uncertain days.(33-34)

Conrad's specific method of narration in *Under Western Eyes* creates a dynamic between his chosen narrator's roles as both passive and distant witness and as active agent in the creation of the work as a whole. As a device with limited knowledge which assumes an omniscience in the relating of Razumov's actions and thoughts, the narrative voice is subtly interwoven with the protagonist's thoughts and the order in which the events surrounding Razumov's story are presented. On the surface, the teacher of languages' self-proclaimed dependence on the diary creates a distance between his structural supremacy in the framework of the narrative as a whole and the reader's supposedly direct access to Razumov's written words. In a certain sense, the narrator is in conflict with the role assigned to him by the author.

By his own account, the narrator is a mere transcriber of Razumov's self-developed narrative, yet from the perspective of the author, his position as a character within the novel epitomizes the dichotomized dynamic between Razumov's self-portrait and the novelistic role which the narrator

denies but which he undeniably embodies on a certain level. The teacher of languages is both a distanced and judgmentally neutral vehicle whose words "are written where their sincerity cannot be questioned"(214)--since they are excerpts of Razumov's self-analysis--but he also assumes the contradictory role of a narrator who is presenting the framework of Razumov's moral universe:

The task is not in truth the writing in the narrative form a *précisé* of a strange human document, but the rendering--I perceive it now clearly--of the moral conditions ruling over a large portion of this earth's surface...(67)

The author's use of this dualistic dynamic between the narrator's access to the character and his retrospective creation of Razumov's story for the reader, combined with the reader's knowledge of his unqualified authority as a narrative device within the internal structure of the work, sets up alternative standpoints for a reader's point of entry into the novel. Within the narrative structure, the teacher of languages is the totality of the medium, since he sets the stage and pens the narrative framework as a whole, and furthermore embodies the persona whose "western" perspective gives Conrad's work its chosen title. When we consider the teacher as the sole explicit authority in the account of Razumov, the rendering of the intricately detailed diary and the surrounding "moral conditions" becomes a novelistically and imaginatively synthesized biography of the Russian

student's story, with the biographer filling in missing links in the chain of events, while choosing to omit others (such as certain portions of the student's interview with Councillor Mikulin): "...the narrator...imagines and silently fills in what took place in between the textual fragments available to him. In spite of his claims to the contrary, his activity often approaches that of a writer of fiction..."(Lothe 288) On the other hand, the teacher's role as Conrad's device in the development of Razumov's thoughts and actions reveals the implicit absurdity of interpreting such unqualified omniscience as being the narrator's own creative embellishments. The author has thus created a medium which brings itself into question on various levels of a reader's subjective interpretations.

The framework of the narrative as a whole seems to imply the fictitious dimension of any written account, and in this sense places the author's imaginative search for truth and meaning on the same level as a person's quest for self knowledge. Both of these mental processes embody a creative dimension which seeks justification in a logically causal chain of events and consequences. Conrad creates an intricate relationship between himself, the narrator and the protagonist, the three writers whose words are paradoxically independent and self sufficient from the narrative's internal standpoint, but who simultaneously are inextricably intertwined from the perspective of the novel as a fictional creation. The author gives the teacher

of languages full control of the narrative development, while simultaneously making it clear that the narrator's authority does not justify the intricacy of the account. Similarly, the narrator has also asserted that his is a faithful and unembellished rendering of the words in Razumov's diary, and yet it is quite evident that the narrator's chronicle oversteps the bounds of "documentary evidence"(3): " In discussion he was easily swayed by argument and authority. With his younger compatriots he took the attitude of an inscrutable listener..."(5). The information given in this excerpt, while certainly significant in terms of our understanding of Razumov's character, is clearly not an instance of the student's self-analysis. It seems much more likely that this introductory statement about the protagonist finds its basis in the narrator's need to organize his account by making a statement which he feels is justifiable and therefore valid. Even if Razumov may never have actually described himself in that way, the narrator's characterization is thematically supported by Haldin's praise of his fellow student (when he calls Razumov "a man of few words"[15]). The assertion that the young man is "easily swayed by authority" also seems true to the extent that his own introspection leads him to Prince K with his betrayal and his encounter with Councillor Mikulin induces him into official servitude.¹² Although the reader may not initially question such seemingly trivial and often justifiable narratorial intrusions, it seems quite significant that they occur immediately following

the teacher's claim of "documentary evidence"(3) and his limiting himself to offering a translation of the Russian language. From the reader's perspective, the implications of the narrator's self-contradictory methods are undoubtedly emphasized in the sense that his broad and unqualified statements originate from his perusal of the diary, which explores Razumov's mental turmoil and uncertainty in connection with the Haldin affair. It seems quite rash to make general claims about Razumov's character, claims which apply to a time before commencement of the diary, since, to a great extent, it seems more likely that Razumov's psychology is in many ways the product rather than the cause of the circumstances surrounding his compulsion to write.

One cannot assume that such juxtaposed instances of narrative inconsistency are simply cases of the author's ambivalence towards the structure which he has created, since it is the narrator's text itself which repeatedly reiterates its faithfulness to the student's own words at the expense of imaginative creativity(1). Razumov's irritable outburst is a subtle reminder of the teacher's disavowed penchant for fictionalizing his character (ironically prior to his wielding the biographical pen): "' I am not a young man in a novel'"(185). Thus Razumov's own words, which on one level represent the most distant or independent sections within the teacher's narrative structure (since these words are spoken chronologically prior to reflective organization made "in the fullness of knowledge"[183]), simultaneously bring the present

medium which presents them into question (albeit unwittingly). Conrad makes his protagonist reach past the transcriber by proclaiming a reality which is independent of the narrative structure that presents it. No matter how deeply we feel that we understand Razumov, his own words remind us that such understanding occurs within the limits of the teacher's--and ultimately the author's--narrative. His statement above thus reemphasizes the inherent tension of the tripartite relationship within the structure of the novel as a whole, and suggests the complex interplay between reality and fiction, communication and subjective interpretation. Razumov adamantly denies being what he actually is; the novelist's creation:

...the reminder of a narrative presence behind that of the ostensible narrator...makes the reader aware of the novel as a novel. In this of all Conrad's novels we are encouraged to detach ourselves from the reading process, to 'separate ourselves from our reading activity.(Lothe 288)¹³

Lothe's statement reminds us of Razumov's own claim of "detached thinking"(98), a detachment which is destructive since it depends on a verbal independence which erects barriers within a single psyche. Once again there is a suggestion here that interpretation through the "word"--and by extension one's self-understanding through language--creates rational meaning in and through emotional alienation from the self.

The teacher of languages' roles of both uninformed character and retrospective chronicler (with an inordinate and often unsubstantiated

knowledge of the facts) combine to emphasize the novel's basic theme of the self's inscrutability. The narrator often illustrates the enigmatic nature of Razumov's mental state by comparing the student's own written records about his thoughts and feelings with his own uninformed opinions at the time of Razumov's behaviour:

I could almost feel on me the weight of his unrefreshed, motionless stare, the stare of a man who lies unwinking in the dark, angrily passive in the toils of disastrous thoughts. Now, when I know how true it was, I can honestly affirm that this *was* the effect produced on me. It was painful in a curiously indefinite way--for, of course, the definition comes to me now while I sit writing in the fullness of my knowledge. But this is what the effect was at that time of absolute ignorance.(183)

A person's inability to understand another's inner workings by the use of preestablished principles or unqualified generalizations deduced from external behaviour is made undeniably clear by the misinterpretations of both the narrator and other characters in the narrative. The distortions of uninformed analysis are epitomized in such instances as the narrator's assertion that Razumov's "few words"(173) reveal his sincerity, or Natalia's misguided belief in Victor and Razumov's "brotherhood of souls"(172), which she assumes because of the evident turmoil which her brother's name evokes in the young man's troubled consciousness. This propensity to misinterpret the facts is further illustrated in Razumov's encounters with the revolutionaries. Ivanovitch's confident assertion that he "cannot be

deceived"(130) exposes the naivete of basing one's judgment of character on the seemingly "patient"(130) mask which conceals a tempestuous anxiety and uncertainty. Sophia Antonovna's opinion of the Ziemianitch episode exemplifies the ironic relationship between an undoubtedly true theory and its misapplication in reality:

Such were the last words of the woman revolutionist in this conversation, keeping so close to the truth, departing from it so far in the verisimilitude of thoughts and conclusions as to give one the notion of the invincible nature of human error, a glimpse into the utmost depths of self-deception.(282)

Razumov's encounters with the various characters are plagued by the precarious relationship between the two divided aspects of his inner self. He is incapable of fully assuming a definite role, and his actions and abrupt reactions suggest that he is trapped and unable to separate his rationalizations (or self justifications) from the effects of his repressed guilt. All of his conversations are invaded by Haldin's spectre and even the most innocent inquiries and comments are transformed into accusations or prying which cause him to respond through the hazy medium which connects the divided aspects of his personality. It is difficult to ascertain the specific reasons why he so frequently comes close to betraying himself to such people as Ivanovitch and Antonovna, even though he consciously strives to create a favourable impression. The constant fear of self-betrayal inspires an anxiety which ironically pervades every attempt to allay suspicion. However, this

interpretation of his actions seems superficial and is perhaps encouraged by the narrator's portrayal of his subject, in that the teacher of languages claims that Razumov's reaction to the mentioning of Haldin's name has been calmed by his "new beliefs" and "the murky medium of sardonic reverie"(246), and such an analysis seems instrumental in insinuating that Razumov's primary preoccupation is with the necessity of concealment, rather than with the horrors which make such concealment necessary. It is left up to the reader to unravel the contradictory motivations which prompt the peculiar nature of Razumov's behaviour. Scrutiny of the final confession will show that the desire to be "washed clean"(357) originates from a need to admit the horror of his deed, and the need to escape from "the choking fumes of falsehood"(267) is inspired by the painful darkness which separates inner selves, a separation more profound and far more destructive than an inability to share the truth with the outside world:

Razumov felt a chill run down his spine. It was not fear. He was certain that it was not fear--not fear for himself--but it was, all the same, a sort of apprehension as if for another, for someone he knew without being able to put a name to the personality.(199)

The narrative structure of the fourth and final part of *Under Western Eyes* combines a development of the missing link between Mikulin's "Where to?" and Razumov's arrival in Geneva with the young man's ultimate confession to Natalia and the revolutionaries. It seems

evident that the narrative's return to Russia is more than a simple device to delay the reader's knowledge of Razumov's governmental mission, since the narrator states that "the naked truth"(293) is a fact which "every reader has most likely discovered himself"(293). Indeed, it would be naive to consider Razumov's arrival in Geneva as an escape from servitude since the authorities' knowledge of his betrayal would undermine the possibility of honest complicity with the revolutionaries. The narrator's decision to place the Mikulin episode immediately prior to Razumov's confession seems to reflect and reinforce the sense of Razumov's mental isolation, an isolation which alienates him not only from other human beings but also from himself. In other words, Razumov's aforementioned "murky medium of sardonic reverie" and his depiction as a "somnambulist"(317) lost in a nightmare find their genesis in his previously unanswered reply to Councillor Mikulin's question. Our insight into Razumov's turbulent state of mind is further complicated by the knowledge that the loss of his precious independence is self-motivated, rather than compelled by the autocracy: "'You are a young man of great independence. Yes. You are going away free as air, but you shall end by coming back to us'"(295). Thus Razumov's loss of independence derives paradoxically from his own independent decision making process, and Mikulin's expertise at manipulation serves merely to exacerbate an uncertainty which clouds the student's ability to determine the

true nature of his own beliefs:

...everything abandoned him--hope, courage, belief in himself, trust in men. His heart had, as it were, suddenly emptied itself. It was no use struggling on. Rest, work, solitude, and the frankness of intercourse with his kind were alike forbidden to him. Everything was gone.(303)

The narrator's decision to place this episode in the final part of his account indicates his desire to qualify the peculiar loss of self which plagues his protagonist, and the narrative's artificial structure serves to strengthen the notion that Razumov's confession marks the destruction of the psychological barrier which is the cause of his ambivalent behaviour. Razumov's altered perception and subsequent mission as a government spy are directly connected to his "low fever"(298) following his initial interview with Mikulin. His behaviour between this illness and his final release through confessing his betrayal is thus elucidated in terms of an unfitness or a confusion which prevents communication between inner selves. The sense of a dichotomized personality parallels the notion of Razumov's illusory independence, one which only exists by his denial of his true feelings.

The quasi-physical description of Razumov's altered state of mind as a "low fever" seems to suggest a subtle change of perspective in the narrator's portrayal of his subject, a shift which can be considered as a movement towards a heightened convergence between narratorial and authorial

viewpoints. Up until the final pages of Part Three, one could argue that the teacher of languages' approach to Razumov's psychology is mostly concerned with the actual mechanics and consequences of his unstable predicament, namely his inability to communicate freely with the external world. The narrator's decision to delay his account of the Mikulin episode seems consistent with his frequent warnings about the myopic limitations of his (and indeed the reader's) "western eyes", since they tend to develop an opinion which focuses on the externals of Razumov's actions.¹⁴ His betrayal of others is the primary forum through which he is presented for judgment, and we are given a detailed account of Razumov's self-concealment from others without sufficient emphasis on the fact that such falsity is the direct result of his own self-betrayal. Rather than judging Razumov as a whole, we judge him within the limited perspective of what he has become: we see the reprehensible traitor without being able to fathom the hidden self which yearns for truth. One could argue that the delayed information that Razumov is not directly compelled to undertake his role as a spy functions as an additional condemnation of his moral values, in that it is an obsessive need for self justification rather than an understandable fear of autocratic repercussions which goads him to accept his mission. However, the fact that he is not bullied to act in negation of humanitarian principles, but rather finds himself in a medium wherein he has lost sight of such principles,

reflects the portrait of a drowning man striking out blindly and pathetically rather than that of an arrogant man needing validation of his past actions.

Razumov's need to confess stems from his inability to survive the assault of Natalia's trust. Ironically, that which previously motivated him to betray Victor ultimately serves as a catalyst to make him betray the hidden truth which torments his own inner self:

You were appointed to undo the evil by making me betray myself back into truth and peace. You! And you have done it in the same way, too, in which he ruined me: by forcing upon me your confidence.(358)

The narratorial juxtaposition of Razumov's "illness"(298) and his need to escape from falsehood by being "washed clean" implies the teacher's sense that Razumov's struggle can only be understood from an internal perspective, in that the divided aspects of his consciousness cannot be adequately reconciled within a single entity. The final confession thus reveals the true nature of Razumov's character to himself, since it is a confession which destroys an internal blindfold, rather than an action which is purely prompted by a need to confide in others, by a need to rationalize oneself for another. The fact that Razumov reveals his secret immediately following the certainty of his physical safety suggests that our judgment of his baseness and cowardice should be tempered by the knowledge that his need for honesty originates from internal rather than external compulsions:

There are evil moments in every life. A false suggestion enters one's brain, and then fear is born--fear of oneself, fear for oneself. Or else a false courage--who knows? Well, call it what you like; but tell me, how many of them would deliver themselves up deliberately to perdition...rather than go on living, secretly debased in their own eyes? How many? . . . And please mark this--he was safe when he did it.(380)

CONCLUSION

In both of the texts addressed in this analysis, Conrad explicitly explores the mediate nature of discourse: the factual and "linear" revelation of events is in constant tension with the rhetorical and symbolic purpose of a subjective point of view. In both *Nostromo* and *Under Western Eyes*, Conrad reveals that the search for self embodies the fundamental paradox between subjective isolation and the creation of communal meaning through language. In both works, the omniscient perspective is subverted on a metafictional level, through the author's development of a double movement in the narrative structure. The first movement equates the narrators' texts with the author's, while the second clearly suggests a distance between the creator and his fictional devices. It is this gap between the narrating and the creative agents which ensures that the reader's self-conception is inscribed in any critical response to the texts and their characters. The two narrators are presented as the literal "creators" of the words on the page (they "pen" the totality of the medium on an internal level) and thus the gap between internal and external levels of narration remains essentially undefined, implicit and "unspoken" until a reader attempts to "verbalize" it through his or her own subjective interpretation.

Fundamentally, the complexity of Conrad's narrative frameworks seems to parallel Lacan's notion of the "transference" between the subject and his analyst: Conrad's narrators are personas who both are and are not the creators of the words on the page, in the same way that the patient creates a self-portrait for the analyst, creates an imaginative vision which is determined by the dialogic nature of the interview, which anticipates an objective response from a perceived source of authority-- an authority which is itself subjective. In Conrad, the reader thus becomes an analyst whose subjective world-view defines the gap between the author's ideology and his narrators' symbolic organization of the "facts."

Lacan's notion of self-definition by reference to "other" seems crucial for our understanding and judgment of Conrad's narrators and characters; indeed, this notion represents the central dialogue which informs the complexity of the whole. When Lacan states that "the status of the unconscious is ethical" (*Four* 33), he means that the enactment of our thoughts is founded on a "moral framework" which is shaped by our self-conception through another's eyes. Pure egoism itself must be seen as "mediate" in this perspective, since it is shaped by an inter-subjective process within the self. In Conrad's fiction, the narrators' and by extension our own judgments of characters will depend on the language of our own self-definition by reference to other--our own identification with or revulsion

from subjective creations of meaning determines our critical response to the portrayals of various characters. The extent of our identification is essentially determined by our relationship to the author's structural devices, by our response to the way we define the narrators' rhetorical and moral intentions.

Conrad constantly draws attention to his own role by making his reader question why he makes his "devices" portray the material in a certain way. From this perspective, it is not Conrad who chooses to open the text of *Nostromo* with the legend of Azuera; it is his narrator who chooses to do so, and we have seen how this kind of symbolic foreshadowing can complicate our vision of a central character. In a sense, the use of foreshadowing gives us a "myopic" overview similar to the teacher of languages's "western eyes" and his use of the key word "cynicism" to provide a comprehensive definition of the Russian "spirit." Conrad himself asserts that "silver is the central pivot" in the text of *Nostromo*. Indeed, the "silver of the mine" becomes the locus within which the complexity of psychological portrayals becomes simplistically unified within the overarching dialectic of "material interests." (Even Monygham refers to himself as "loyal to the mine"[362].) The description of impersonal social forces constantly threatens to subvert the unique complexity of the various characters. A good illustration of this can be seen in the narrator's description of how the "world-views" of two individuals combine to create a common locus of meaning for an entire

group. His words address the notion of “personalities” as a chemical union which can produce meaning for others rather than actually developing a revealing portrait of the individuals themselves: “ From the contact of these two personalities, who had not the same vision of the world, there was generated a power for the world’s service--a subtle force that could set in motion mighty machines, men’s muscles, and awaken also in human breasts an unbounded devotion to the task”(67). When one participates in this general portrayal of a “larger canvas,” characters do tend to “dissolve before our eyes”(Wollaeger 123). In Lacanian terms, we become engaged with the reductive conception of a subjective transference, one which has a tendency to “depersonalize” its subjects by inscribing them within a social discourse that revolves around an inanimate “pivot.”

Albert Guérard’s reading downplays the psychological and thematic importance of communication between and within individual characters in *Nostramo*: “The novel’s mysteries are rarely those of communication between two men, or of one man’s communication with himself”(177). Guérard then goes on to argue that the text “makes nothing like *Lord Jim*’s effort to induce in the reader sharp conflicts of sympathy and judgment”(178). This latter statement seems quite problematic given this study’s disagreement with Raval’s judgmental interpretations. It seems quite obvious that there certainly is room for such conflicts in our response to various characters.

Guérard's opinion seems the result of his tendency to equate what he calls "the reader's discovery of Costaguana" with what should in fact be recognized as the narrator's retrospective and personal vision of the whole. And this necessarily makes the "thematic" role of the narrator basically similar to Marlow's personal reminiscences in *Lord Jim*. The critic must recognize the possibility that it is the narrator--rather than the author--who intends a "lack of conflicts" and thus organizes his story around the social dialectic of "material interests": Marlow's emotional involvement with his protagonist and the "Sulacan traveller's" detachment are two sides of the same coin, and the reader must decide which of these two attitudinal perspectives provides a greater objectivity. Paradoxically, the reader must attempt to distance himself or herself from the narrators' "ulterior" motives. Our emotional identification with Jim or with Razumov should not be any deeper than with the characters in *Nostromo* simply because the first-person narrators implicate themselves in their protagonists' dilemmas. Thus while Jim's abandonment of Jewel seems, if anything, more "cruel" than *Nostromo's* two "desertions," the former narrative undoubtedly encourages us to infuse our judgment with Marlow's sense of Jim's redemptive qualities, while the latter perhaps encourages a reader to feel secure in his or her sense of moral and intellectual superiority over the vain Capataz. To the extent that we agree with Marlow's ambiguous vision, we can never "see him [Jim]

distinctly”(206). By the same token, to the extent that we do identify with a certain character’s (including the narrator’s) explanation or interpretation of another individual’s actions in *Nostromo*, we tend to echo the oversimplification in our own interpretation: if we agree--problematically--with Mitchell that “the loss of the silver preyed on his [Nostromo’s] mind”(405), it becomes easy to condemn Nostromo for his desertion of Decoud. (This is precisely what Raval seems to do.)

The tenuous relationships between an individual character’s utterances and the reader’s subjective interpretations are thus subverted by a narrative framework that imposes its own artistic and lyrical purpose: the search for self in the text is based on the reader’s dialogues with the “rhetorics” of individual characters and how these primary dialogues interact with contrary tendencies in the narrative framework. Thus, a general statement like “it is difficult to resent...the physical or mental anguish of another organism”(80) needs to be considered on various levels. It can initially be seen as the narrator’s generalization based on his vision of an individual character, but it can also be read as a more general statement on the human condition by Conrad, even as a subtle warning about the potential “cruelty” or “distance” which his text seems to maintain towards certain characters. Paradoxically, the narrator uses this statement to deplore a human limitation with the intimation that he or she has reflected on this

problem and intends to transcend it. (After all, the narrator is in many ways engaged with his "anguished" characters.) From another perspective, the reader is perhaps also intended to judge the entire text in the context of this statement--when the statement is seen as Conrad's own. We must pay careful attention to the narrator's own tendency to be cruel towards his subjects in his pursuit of a cohesive vision of an entire society.

Our own vision of the "whole" thus depends on our shifting identification with various viewpoints: ultimately, Conrad's texts explore the possibility of communal meaning by revealing the partial validity of various contradictory perspectives. The angle of our sympathetic engagement and our dialogue with the narrator's symbolic approach determine the way in which we furnish the missing links in the portrait of each character. Conrad constantly develops the tension between the "self-revelation" of characters through their actions and utterances and the mediate portrayal of an interpreting voice. In *Nostromo*, each character is a hero unto himself: even Decoud seems to perform a subjectively valid act, one which can be rationalized by his imaginative vision of the universe as a "succession of incomprehensible images"(414). We are told the story of Decoud's end and must recognize our own need for a subjective "ideological" meaning to go on living. If we proclaim the "will to live" and "survive" as an ideological "centre" then we are participating in the narrator's brief dismissal of Decoud's

perspective. This becomes problematic in the context of both Monygham and Nostromo, who are quite willing to die for the sake of their own subjective ideologies. If we believe in the worth of a "sacrificial lamb," Monygham's actions--which redeem him in his own eyes--may well seem to establish him as Conrad's chosen "hero." From a more distanced perspective, however, Monygham is undoubtedly a "dangerous man," whose faith in love turns him into a potentially lethal and impersonal dictator. Our moral perspective as readers is thus constantly wavering between interpretive analysis--a detachment from any preconceived motive--and the realization that we cannot understand a character's psychology unless we refract it within our own ideological vision of the world. This is the point at which Conrad's texts seem to align themselves with a Lacanian point of view, one which implicitly challenges Bakhtin's theory of "disassociation": we lose sight of the unique self whenever we attempt to stratify the individual "voices" and include them in a general interpretation of the text's "symbolic" cohesiveness. The interpretive intent, embodied by the narrator on an internal level and by the reader in his or her response to the text, has been exposed as a subjectively ideological exercise in its own right. In other words, when we expose the "irrationality" of a subject's attitude and behaviour within the perceived unity of the author's work (which is in fact the Bakhtinian critic's intention), we are assuming our own intellectual and

moral superiority: disassociating language from its subjective meaning presumes an objective vantage point which is inevitably challenged by Conrad's use of self-subversive narrative frameworks.

The complex interaction between different levels of narration is taken even further in *Under Western Eyes*, where the tension is literally the product of an ongoing masquerade between the author's, the narrator's and the protagonists' "texts." In *Nostromo*, the narrator merely identifies himself as a character and thus establishes the subjective nature of the entire enterprise. But his omniscience or access is not questioned on an internal level, and this often encourages the reader to equate the narrator's voice with the author's. By contrast, in the later work, Conrad draws explicit attention to the teacher of languages's dual roles as a translator and a novelist. Conrad reformulates the tension between communal and subjective meaning through a narrative framework which explicitly embodies the epistemological parallels between critical interpretation and subjective creativity. The teacher of languages's first-person account can be seen as a further exploration of Conrad's notion that any naturalistic vision of reality is paradoxically based on the imaginative creativity of a unique self, which becomes the defining factor in any "mediate" response.

In both novels, the search for self proceeds through the reader's attempts to determine the objective meaning of words in themselves despite

the realization that any subjective account is ultimately a rationalization based on an imaginary and fictional self-conception. As the teacher of languages asserts, "words" often are "the great foes of reality"(3) as they seek to create meaning both within and between individuals. Throughout both novels, speech, writing and language in general have been shown to operate in a fundamentally paradoxical movement between the self and external reality: the conscious self creates its own truth by situating itself within a communal system of meaning and in doing so clothes an emotional need with the rational trappings of verbal interaction. The "enactment" of Razumov's self-analysis through the diary is itself "mediate" since it consists of an attempt to organize and unify chaotic contingencies and internal impulses within the parameters of a cohesive "story."

The notion of a structurally privileged reader in *Under Western Eyes* ties in with Conrad's basic theme of a "secret" or "independent sharer"(UWE 230) of the protagonist's inner self. (Conrad wrote his short story, "The Secret Sharer", in the middle of his work on *Under Western Eyes*.) Razumov's sense of a separate self, one which observes his reflection in the "mirror"(214) of the diary, is to a certain extent paralleled by the reader--and indeed the narrator--who perceives aspects of the student's fragmented and contradictory decision making process which he himself is unwilling or unable to consider. Our judgment of the protagonist ultimately

depends on the extent to which he fulfils the demands of our own "moral universe," and this is perhaps why it becomes easier to identify with Razumov's predicament on a second reading, when we ourselves are "in the fullness of knowledge," when we know that he will ultimately condemn himself in order to satisfy the demands of his own moral self-conception. In our pact of complicity with Conrad, the search for an understanding of the self is enriched by his works' constant revelation that the reader's method of responding to an imaginary reality must be based on an approach which questions its own mythical and symbolic frameworks of meaning. Even if (to use Bakhtin's term) "magical" visions are subverted amidst the polyphonic refractions of a text, we must recognize that any verbal exercise, whether it is fictional or analytical, is based on an emotional need to share our unique experience of isolation with others. The creation of an impersonal entity--such as the text, the society or the "large canvas"--is simply an echo of the self's need to rationalize its emotional needs, to transform the language of desire and the need to connect into a forum of communal meaning. The text is written for another; it is a canvas exhibited to an audience. But in its production, the text is an evolving search for meaning between the self and language, between the emotional and magical self and its dialogic interpretation of the world through the written word.

ENDNOTES

- 1) Said's discussion in *Critical Essays on Joseph Conrad* explicitly applies Bakhtin's theory of the polyphonic novel to Conrad's fiction.
- 2) See *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (p. 221-7) for Lacan's somewhat "deconstructive" treatment of positivistic readings of the Cartesian *Cogito*.
- 3) In this context, I would argue that Conrad's narrative methods and portrayals of characters echo Lacan's theoretical objection to "philosophical idealism": "...every representation requires a subject, but this subject is never a pure subject.... this is the essential flaw in philosophical idealism which, in any case, cannot be sustained and has never been sustained. There is no subject without, somewhere, aphanisis [disappearance] of the subject, and it is in this alienation, in this fundamental division, that the dialectic of the subject is established (*Four* 221).
- 4) *Letters of Joseph Conrad to Marguerite Poradowska, 1890-1920*, trans. and ed. John A. Gee and Paul J. Sturm (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), p. 64. This reference is taken from J. Hillis Miller, p. 27.
- 5) For an in-depth discussion of the parent-child relationship between Marlow and Jim, see Ian Watt's *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* (University of California Press: Los Angeles, 1979), pages 311-322.
- 6) The extent to which a person--including a reader-- defines himself or herself by reference to a "myth" or an ideology therefore depends on his or her creative inclusion of the memory within his or her self-conception. Thus not only is the connection between memory and imaginative creativity developed through Conrad's narrative framework and the reader's relationship to the narrator, but this same formula also seems applicable at the level of the self-definition of individual characters.
- 7) This is an intriguing example of self-conception through a "social" or "family" dialectic, an expression of a "world-view" which produces

meaning in and through the alienation of the subject. See my note (#2) for Lacan's intriguing notion of "aphanisis" and self-definition through "other."

- 8) Conrad has himself suggested that the use of the legend in the opening chapter functions to establish "silver" as the central "pivot" of the story. He then goes on to say that the legend "strictly speaking, has nothing to do with the rest of the novel." (The reference is taken from Robert Hampson's discussion of the novel [p. 138] and is quoted from a late letter to Ernst Bendz.) It therefore seems problematic to equate the narrator's explicit use of the myth to portray Nostromo with the author's perspective.
- 9) This quotation clearly illustrates Conrad's subtle use of free indirect discourse to complicate interpretive possibilities for the reader. Unlike Nostromo's earlier spoken statement that "the Capataz is undone, destroyed" (365), the use of free indirect discourse allows the narrator's voice to blend with the character's voice, to in a sense "subvert" it through an ironic and interpretive distance from Nostromo's self-conception. Conrad's alternation between dialogue and free indirect discourse is significant here, since various critics (including Robert Hampson and Bruce Johnson) quote Nostromo's expostulatory "resignation" as a turning point on his journey of corruption through material interests. (Suresh Raval's reading seems to correspond.) And yet Conrad's use of free indirect discourse clearly suggests that Nostromo still sees himself as an "incorruptible" and "faithful" (416) Capataz even after he decides to keep the treasure. Perhaps the force of the first statement as a "self-conviction" is encouraged by the use of dialogue, while the use of free indirect discourse is more subtle: we can interpret the second statement as a further expression of Nostromo's sincere sentiments, or see it more judgementally, as an ironic catalogue of the character's various labels--with the moral intimation that he is neither faithful nor incorruptible and in the final stage of realizing his mercenary ambitions.
- 10) When Nostromo leaves Decoud, he simply tells him that he will "try" to be back within a few days, and it is clearly stated that Decoud will have to remain on the island for a month, until the next steamer arrives. But there is no mention of how many days the scant provisions provided by Mitchell will last (see pages 259-262).
- 11) It seems interesting that Nostromo still sees Monygham as "the worst despiser of the people" (428) so many years after his fateful encounter:

Monygham is in a sense the symbol of a sceptical outlook which would undoubtedly refuse to believe in the sailor's rationalization for the theft (and Raval's positive reading of Monygham and identification with his credo ensures his own scepticism towards the confession).

- 12) Josiane Paccaud's article is interesting in this context. In her Lacanian approach, Paccaud argues that Razumov's illegal birth makes him "the victim of a perverted filiation process, since his father denied him a name as a metaphorical attribute, as signifier of self and subjectivity"(112). This is undoubtedly an important component in our understanding of Razumov's self-definition, since we can see him as an individual who is inherently alienated from any "other" from a literal and practical, as well as from a metaphorical and psychological perspective. As Paccaud suggests, Razumov is thus a prototype for the "rootless" individual.
- 13) Lothe's argument seems comparable to Roussel's discussion of the relationship between "narrator" and "author" in *Nostromo* (see my quote on p. 38).
- 14) Kenneth Grahame's discussion of the novel is interesting in this context: " [the narrator's]...frequent comments that he has been observing an essentially foreign and mysterious phenomenon...strengthens the dream-effect conveyed by so much else in the narrative. This latter form of 'observation'--emphasized by the book's title--makes us frequently aware that we watch Razumov and the events of his life from a distance that may not be enormous but is still definite enough to have self-consciousness--our self-consciousness written into its perspective"(133).

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