

"A PURELY SPECTACULAR UNIVERSE":
JOSEPH CONRAD AND IMPRESSIONISM

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ABSTRACT

This study essentially offers an alternative method for the comparative study of literature and visual art in general, and of Conrad's fiction and the artistic movement known as Impressionism in particular. Rather than dealing with literal resemblances between visual tableaux and prose passages (a practice of limited usefulness), the comparative critic should deal in analogy; he or she should deal with the various ways in which artists working in widely varying media strive to express the same essential visions.

The works of Joseph Conrad, when thus studied from the point of view of Impressionist theory--the theory of man's basic inability to ascertain anything beyond the ephemeral and the apparent--reveal a curious transition from a sparkling vision of man striving to discover the mysteries within himself, to what G. K. Chesterton called the essence of Impressionism: "that final scepticism which can find no floor to the universe." In fact, the subtle gradations range from the technical virtuosity of the early Almayer's Folly to the final, deterministic fragments of Suspense. The pivotal point of Conrad's gradually darkening vision is to be found in the masterpieces of his middle years--Nostromo and The Secret Agent--wherein the perfect balance between Impressionist philosophy and artistic expression is tinged with an ever-deepening cynicism.

One of the main and basic contributions of this thesis, however, is simply the argument that Conrad was not only an Impressionist author but an Impressionist philosopher. His far-ranging curiosity, his immediate grasp of abstract notions and his associations with figures such as Bertrand Russell all speak powerfully of a mind always searching, as is Marlow in Lord Jim, for "some exorcism against the ghost of doubt."

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"If there be any suspicion that the course of nature may change, and that the past may be no rule for the future, all experience becomes useless and can give rise to no inference or conclusion."

--David Hume, An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding.

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INTRODUCTION

CONRAD, IMPRESSIONISM AND THE COMPARATIVE PROCESS: FROM TRANSLATION TO ANALOGY

In characterizing the temper of the century which spawned the works both of Monet and of Conrad, Charles Baudelaire noted that "all the arts tend, if not to act as a substitute for each other, at least to supplement each other, by lending each other new strength and new resources."¹ Indeed, although commentators such as the Italian scholar Mario Praz have observed that the collaboration among the various arts actually weakened during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, we witness several authors and painters echoing the very spirit of Baudelaire's remark. "Painting and writing," theorized Virginia Woolf in "Walter Sickert," "have much to tell each other; they have much in common. The novelist, after all, wants to make us see."² This statement, with its obvious echoing of Conrad's now famous pronouncement in the "Preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus," ("My task... is, before all, to make you see!"³), provides the vital link between the nineteenth-century collaborations among men such as Baudelaire, Debussy, Oscar Wilde and Emile Zola, and the later resurgence of Impressionist theories in the works of Woolf herself, of Joyce and Faulkner.

Nevertheless, the theory of such collaboration among the various arts, reaching back to the Renaissance revival of the ut pictura poesis doctrine, needs no further documentation here. The research of prominent scholars (most notably, Jean Seznec in his Literature and the Visual Arts in Nineteenth-Century France) and the musings of artists such as Wallace Stevens in "The Relations Between Poetry and Painting" from The Necessary Angel, provide all of the general background of man's search to relate picture to text. It is my concern, rather, to observe exactly how critics--those dealing exclusively with Conrad especially--have approached such a delicate operation of comparison, and to arrive at the most satisfactory, potentially most enlightening method of analysis possible.

In pursuing these ends, I found that these comparative studies dealing with verbal and visual art tend to cluster around two basic methods of procedure: what I call comparison through "translation" and comparison through "analogy." The former process (by far the more common among comparativist critics) involves a simple, direct equation between a literary tableau and a painted representation of the same subject matter. For example, a critic of this school might discuss Millet's The Gleaners as an appropriate visual "translation" of the subject and mood of novels of rural life such as Ringue't's Thirty Acres.

Such a comparison is literal, particularizing--and singularly lacking in any further significance to be inferred on the part of critic or reader. The critic who focuses on comparison through "analogy," however, reaches further, behind the surface, behind the apparent subject being represented, to the philosophical underpinnings of both canvas and novel. He or she notes, for example, that the same awesome power inhabits both J. M. W. Turner's whirling cosmos in The Slave Ship and Shelley's whirling thoughts in "Mont Blanc." Considerations of thematic similarities, such as man's miniscule role before the elements, might be further supplemented by stylistic observations. The critic might, for instance, note that Turner's sea consists of a glaring sheet of brilliant colour, just as Shelley's perception of the looming peak is frustrated by the same sense of a terrifying veil separating man from any direct contact with the awesome presence:

All things that move and breathe with toil and sound
Are born and die; revolve, subside and swell.
Power dwells apart in its tranquillity
Remote, serene, and inaccessible.⁴

Here, the whirling effects of repetition and alliteration, instead of the elements of colour and composition, create the same sense of helpless passivity before nature. This, therefore, is a representative example of a method which

reaches beyond the obvious to the essential visions of two minds separated not in spirit but by the restrictions imposed by their chosen media. This same distinction between the analysis of the "thing seen" and the "ways of seeing" was intuitively grasped by Arnold Hauser in his Social History of Art:

Atmospherical impressions, especially the experience of light, air and colour, are perceptions native to painting, and when the attempt is made to reproduce moods of this kind in the other arts, we are quite within our rights to speak of a "painterly" style of poetry and music. But the style of these arts is also painterly, when they express themselves, forgoing distinct "contours", with the aid of colour and shade effects, and attach more importance to the vivacity of the details than the uniformity of the total impression.⁵

It is precisely this division in method which I found segregated the works of recent comparative scholars into two distinct "schools." Jeffrey Meyers' influential work of 1975, Painting and the Novel, today enjoys the status of a definitive work on the "painterly" aspect of the modern novel. Nevertheless, Meyers' assumptions and very method of comparison bespeak his place among the critics of literal "translation." The novel, he theorizes, "is essentially a linear art which presents a temporal sequence of events, while painting fixed reality." It is, therefore, in Meyer's view, the role of "evocative comparisons with works of art...to transcend the limitations

of fiction and to transform successive moments into immediate images."⁶ Such an equation explains why Meyers never strays from specific allusions to visual images or painters appearing in the fiction which he analyses (He discusses, with some insight, for example, Forster's evocative use of Giotto's paintings to reflect theme and to reveal subtle character traits in A Room With A View).

Nevertheless, this concept of linearity in fiction forces upon Meyers a too narrow field of study. Certainly, Virginia Woolf would find much to criticize in this assumption; fiction (and life) for her and for her Impressionist colleagues, is not a linear, temporal sequence of cause and effect but a cluster of experiences, a "semi-transparent envelope" surrounding man.⁷ Closer to Conrad, we find his literary collaborator, Ford Madox Ford (whose self-proclaimed Impressionism I shall discuss in Chapter Two), attacking this same linear fallacy in the novel. In "Impressionism and Fiction," he argues that "Impressionism exists to render those queer effects of real life that are like so many views seen through bright glass."⁸ This multiplicity of perspective is, of course, a feature shared by Lord Jim, Absalom, Absalom and Ulysses. Moreover, it is this very multiplicity which renders a comparative study of Conrad's fiction and Impressionist technique both viable and natural; freed from Meyers'

need to separate visual experience and novelistic convention, these two elements are allowed to fuse so completely in literary Impressionism that one naturally moves beyond literal comparisons to a comparison of essential visions.

This realization of the suitability of Conrad's fiction to comparisons with the philosophies of visual art has not yet been adopted by most Conradian scholars. Adam Gillon, for example, in "Conrad as Painter," is loth to move beyond Meyers' method of literal comparison; it is, therefore, not surprising that he first concentrates on a later work, The Arrow of Gold--a less successful attempt yet one which abounds in explicit art metaphors.⁹ Moreover, Gillon emphasizes to a preponderant degree the purely descriptive aspect of Conrad's Impressionism; he investigates characters such as Doña Rita in The Arrow of Gold as "verbal paintings."¹⁰ In his treatment of Lord Jim, this purely visual concern increases, as Gillon discusses the actual use of "a principal colour scheme" of light and dark, and at one point asks, "What did Jim actually look like?"¹¹ The resulting analysis, a step-by-step recounting of the actual physical details considered as "dashes of colour," does not greatly assist our understanding of literary Impressionism. How, one asks, would a verbal portrait written by Jane Austen, Thackeray or Henry James differ from that of Conrad? Do they not also paint portraits

from minute yet possibly ironic details?

The problems created by this exclusive attention to visual technique reach a climax when Gillon discusses the actual sketches completed by Conrad while writing The Arrow of Gold. These sketches of the heroine, Doña Rita, Gillon relates, have been analysed by Conrad's psychoanalytic biographer, Bernard Meyer (with predictably neurosis-unmasking results). Gillon, however, regards these sketches as proof that Conrad "looked at people and things with the eyes of the visual artist."¹² No doubt this is so, but one wonders how, in terms of philosophy and method rather than of strict literary "draughtsmanship," Conrad incorporates the basic concerns of art into fiction. One notes that Gillon occasionally approaches these larger, more penetrating analogies most suggestively in his discussion of Conrad's "dynamic" painting. "With each scene, each narrative point of view," Gillon observes, "a significant detail is added to the fictional canvas, either by filling up a blank spot or by superimposing a new layer of color upon the earlier surface."¹³ This is an intriguing point, indeed--one which I will discuss in relation to Nostromo--but in Gillon's criticism it is not applied to any specific novel and the subject is hastily shifted to Jim's physical portrait.

Such limitations are largely overcome in the work of

Ian Watt, whose Conrad in the Nineteenth Century provides a thought-provoking mixture of critical perspectives both old and new. In his section on Heart of Darkness, Watt includes a short resumé of the theoretical frameworks of Impressionism and Symbolism--a resumé which links visual effects and the philosophy of experience, to uncover what Watt rightly terms Conrad's "subjective moral Impressionism."¹⁴ (A fuller discussion of the major fictional techniques described by Watt will appear in my section on Heart of Darkness.) Nevertheless, Watt still reveals the traditional tendency of the literary critic to ignore basic, inescapable differences in media. For instance, he writes that Conrad's Impressionism differs from its visual counterpart in that "it loses the fugitive, hypothetical, subjective and primarily aesthetic qualities which it usually has in the impressionist tradition."¹⁵ First of all, it is indeed perplexing to consider one particular artistic medium as more "aesthetic" than another. Secondly (and more significantly), the epithets "hypothetical" and "subjective" are not (as we shall discover in both Conrad's early and late works) entirely inappropriate terms when considering Conrad's view of the ultimately unknowable creature--man.

Watt's conclusion, that "it is very unlikely that Conrad either thought of himself as an impressionist or

was significantly influenced by the impressionist movement"¹⁶ is largely born of this tendency to discount the philosophical import of Impressionism. Moreover, factual errors enter into Watt's conclusions as well; he bases his argument regarding Conrad's dislike of Impressionist art on his distaste for Van Gogh and Cézanne.¹⁷ Both artists, however, were Post-Impressionists--men who reacted against Monet and Renoir's presentation of a hazy, indefinite world. Conrad did, in fact (as I will discuss in later chapters) reveal an admiration for and sense of artistic kinship with Impressionist figures such as Whistler, Rodin and their British counterpart, Rothenstein. Similarly, Watt quotes Conrad's early, negative reactions to the literary Impressionism of Stephen Crane (all dating from the period before Conrad met and befriended Crane) and passes lightly over Conrad's later tribute to this literary associate. The fact remains, however, that Conrad felt not only a personal but an artistic sense of community with Crane--a sense deeply rooted in the Impressionist temper shared by both men.

The full reaction to the literal approach to comparative studies coincides, significantly, with the movement to locate literary criticism, in general, on a more theoretical (and even scientific) level. One of the

leading figures in the movement towards a more "analogical" approach to the comparison of literature and the visual arts, was the late Mario Praz. In his 1970 work, Mnemosyne: The Parallel Between Literature and the Visual Arts, Praz does not hesitate to criticize what he calls the "purely thematic parallels"¹⁸ between literature and art drawn by his academic predecessors. In fact, one notes an implicit denunciation of the methods which Jeffrey Meyers was later to employ in Painting and the Novel. "The fact that a poet had a painter in mind while composing his poem," argues Praz, "does not necessarily involve a similarity in poetics and style."¹⁹ Predictably, it is the similarity between verbal and visual art on the level of style, more precisely, on the level of artistic structure, which engrosses Praz. Like other structuralist critics of the 1960's and 1970's, Praz elevates the work of the early Russian Formalist critic, Vladimir Propp, as his theoretical precedent. Praz proposes to perform the same study methods which Propp used to isolate similar motifs and situations in Russian folktales, with the various arts. His key injunction, therefore, becomes, "the media vary, the structure remains the same."²⁰

The application of this formalist theory, however, to painting and literature, tends to produce rather insubstantial, if not superficial discoveries. Praz muses,

for example, on the structural similarity between a Greek temple, with its precisely spaced columns and a Greek tragedy, with its alternations of chorus and dialogue.²¹ One cannot help wondering, though, exactly what such parallels have to offer us, in our attempts to understand the mind and motives of the architects who designed the temple, or the playwright who shaped the tragedy. Indeed, the very fact that Praz chooses the more formulaic genre of architecture rather than painting or sculpture as his representative visual art,²² reflects his bias in favour of strictly structured products of man's inventiveness.

Another such attempt to create a theoretical basis for the study of literary Impressionism in particular, occurs in the recent criticism of Todd K. Bender. As in the work of Praz, however, the relocation of the ancient problem of image and text within the framework of the "New New Criticism" does provoke more confusion than it actually removes. In the case of Bender, in his article, "Conrad and Literary Impressionism," the striving to compare Impressionist and "Post-Modernist" fiction is difficult indeed to justify. (Bender mysteriously chooses to compare at some length Ford Madox Ford's Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance with the fictionalized Richard Nixon of Robert Coover's The Public Burning.) When Conrad finally enters

the article (at the halfway point), the issues are already sufficiently obscured so as to be incomprehensible.

The major theoretical confusion occurs in Bender's conflating of the movements of Realism, Positivism and Impressionism. Although Bender lists the positivism of Auguste Comte as one of the primary bastions of Impressionist philosophy,²³ one can only remain sceptical. It was, after all, Monet, who was reported to have advised his pupils:

When you go out to paint, try to forget what objects you have before you--a tree, a house, a field or whatever. Merely think, here is a little square of blue, here an oblong of pink, here a streak of yellow, and paint it just as it looks to you, the exact color and shape, until it gives your own naive impression of the scene before you.²⁴

This is, in effect, a far theoretical cry from Comte's emphasis on the quantifiable study of man. Such a scientific bias is more evident in the works and thought of Post-Impressionists such as Seurat and Signac, who sought to reproduce through the optical technique of pointillism the very workings of the human eye.

This confusion of the sociological with the individual, perceptual focus of the Impressionists raises further problems when Bender includes in the *mélange* the theories of nineteenth-century literary realism, and of British philosophical Impressionism. Again, the two

realms are perplexingly merged, as Bender associates positivism and the naturalist novels of Zola with the idealist philosophy of David Hume.²⁵ First of all, his assumption that "Hume's psychology, in turn, is basic to the methods of the positivist scientists who think that knowledge of the laws governing phenomena can be discovered only through careful and extensive observation of the phenomenal world,"²⁶ is frankly misleading. Although it is true that Hume placed sensation at the very basis of all human knowledge, he also propounded the theory that no rational deduction of relationships such as cause and effect could be firmly established. Thus, man can only infer, or learn to expect through custom or habit, that a certain cause will normally be accompanied by a certain effect. In An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding, Hume's realization of this ultimate unknowability of such events prompts him to conclude that "we never can, by our utmost scrutiny, discover anything but one event following another, without being able to comprehend any force or power by which the cause operates....All events seem entirely loose and separate.... They seem conjoined but never connected."²⁷ Such a protest is ultimately closer in spirit to Conrad's numerous complaints about the unknowability of events, fellow beings, and ourselves, than to the positivist's confidence in man's rational faculties and in observable facts. ✓

Furthermore, the school of Conrad, Ford and Crane does not coalesce with that of Zola and the naturalists quite as easily as Bender suggests that it does. Zola, although he declared that "reality" in a work is ultimately subjected to temperament,²⁸ believed nevertheless in the absolute existence of the former matter: "There are," he observed in "Mon Salon," "two elements in a work: the element of reality, which is nature; and the element of individuality, which is man. The element of reality, nature, is fixed, and always the same. It exists equally for every one."²⁹ Such comments reveal definitively the essential incompatibility of Zola's realism with the empiricism of Hume--and of Conrad. One should note, as well, that although Zola was among the most vociferous defenders of the Impressionists (Manet's portrait was executed as a labour of gratitude for Zola's frequent defenses of his art in the French press), he later reviled the nonrepresentative painting of artists who carried the late vision of Monet in his Waterlilies only a few steps forward. In the final analysis, therefore, Bender's theoretical method results in the same confusion which many students of art have made between Realism and Impressionism in the visual arts. Although Impressionism grew out of the concern of Realists such as Courbet, with the capturing of the momentary

and prosaic, the final break is deep and philosophical in nature. Courbet's apostrophe to a group of students, that "painting is an essentially CONCRETE art and can only consist of the representation of REAL AND EXISTING objects"³⁰ is the true counterpart to Zola's realism. As such, it remains diametrically opposed to the Impressionist temper, as captured, for instance, in Whistler's definition of a Nocturne: "It is an arrangement of line, form and colour first; and I make use of any incident which shall bring about a symmetrical result."³¹ With Whistler and the Impressionists, therefore, objective reality was as un-touchable as it ultimately was for Hume; arrangement, style and temperament became the watchwords of the new artistic (and philosophical) order.

It is this distinction, therefore, in Western thought, between spirit and matter, which is essential to this study of Conrad as an Impressionist. Albeit ignored by many critics such as Bender, it is a distinction which a near-contemporary of Conrad's was quick to seize upon. The Impressionists, asserted D. H. Lawrence, in "Introduction to These Pictures," "escaped from the tyranny of solidity and the menace of mass form. They escaped, they escaped from the dark, procreative body which so haunts a man...."³² Nevertheless, according to Lawrence, such an escape from

gross materialism was only provisional; later artists such as Derain and Braque (waspishly rendered as "defiant and howling cats" by Lawrence) enforced a return to earth-bound "form and substance."³³ Notwithstanding the fact that the analysis resembles more closely Lawrence's fiction than it does art history, the fact remains that such critical, philosophical distinctions must be made in any comparative study of literature and the visual arts.

It is for this reason that my study of Conrad will not focus on literal similarities between painting and text (although blatant art references must form part of my concern insofar as they reflect Conrad's aesthetic sensitivity). My main focus is rather how Conrad creates and refines techniques suitable for the expression of this Impressionist theme of "the inability to know." Such a design naturally explains why my analysis is replete with the study of oppositions (subjectivity and objectivity in Chapter One, action and passivity in Chapter Two and "passion and pessimism" in Chapter Three), for any attempt to express the ungraspable is, by nature, paradoxical. In fact, Lawrence intuitively sensed this same tension in another philosopher of the unknown--Cézanne:

Man, like other men, he was likewise not allowed to know--except by a few, few touches.

The earth likewise he was not allowed to know....After a fight tooth-and-nail for forty years, he did succeed in knowing an apple, fully; and, not quite as fully, a jug or two. That was all he achieved.³⁴

This tribute, with its emphasis on the saving efforts of an artist surrounded by cynicism and ignorance, reveals exactly the same attitude voiced by Conrad in a moving letter to R. B. Cunninghame Graham, in which he remarks that "It is impossible to know. It is impossible to know anything tho' it is possible to believe a thing or two."³⁵ Interestingly, I will be tracing in this study the same gradual deepening cynicism noted by Lawrence in Cézanne, in the vision of Conrad, from the inability to penetrate the shifting mists of another man's personality in Lord Jim to the final, nihilistic determinism of his last novels.

In spite of this sombre prospect, Conrad also resembles Lawrence's verbal portrait of Cézanne, in that the very act of plumbing the depths of illusion is in itself, an act of revelation. This strand of comfort--tenuous though it is--was glimpsed by Conrad himself in a remark he once made to his confidant, Edward Garnett: "If one looks at life in its true aspect, then everything loses much of its unpleasant importance and the atmosphere becomes cleared

of what are only unimportant mists that drift past in imposing shapes."³⁶ For Conrad, as an Impressionist, the path towards the "true aspect" of experience lay through precisely those shifting, treacherous and unplumbed "mists" lying deep within every man.

CHAPTER ONE

SENSATIONS AND MEMORIES--1895--1900

Although Conrad in his early years confessed a passion for Daudet and Maupassant, his true affinities, as he later recognized, were with Marcel Proust. "What we call reality," Proust pondered in A La Recherche de Temps Perdu, "is a certain relationship between sensations and memories which surround us at the same time."¹ At no other time in his long writing career was this as true for Conrad as in his earliest writings, from 1895 to the turn of the century. This five-year period saw more than the gradual development of language competency and a fluid style of writing (although any glance at a single page of Lord Jim, in comparison with Almayer's Folly, is sufficient to convince us of that verity). It was an apprenticeship period in all senses; a period during which Conrad's basic conceptions of art and human life were set, as well as a period when Conrad (like Dickens and Hardy) moved from autobiography to an intensely philosophical fiction.

As many acquaintances and men of letters were willing to testify, Conrad radiated the very spirit of curiosity about the intellectual currents of his time. Perhaps his closest literary friend, John Galsworthy,

remarked that "Fascination was Conrad's great characteristic-- the fascination of vivid expressiveness and zest, of his deeply affectionate heart, and his far-ranging and subtle mind. He was extraordinarily perceptive and receptive."² One of the areas into which this far-ranging and perceptive mind sought entry was the world of the visual arts. Although it has become a critical commonplace to state that Conrad knew little of the arts, his close friendship with British Impressionist painter William Rothenstein speaks convincingly of his awareness and curiosity. Indeed, Rothenstein displays an uncanny insight both into Conrad's sometimes tempestuous personality and into the nature of literary Impressionism itself: "There was always an element of strain in Conrad...But I sympathized with him acutely in his desire to impress the passion of life on to his pages. This sympathy was, I think, the basis of our friendship; for Conrad seemed to understand what I too was aiming at in my painting."³

It was this relentless drive to literally impress the sensation of life upon the pages of his writing which consumed Conrad even in his earlier years--from the minute gradations of the tropical sun in Almayer's Folly to the dazzling vision of a figure in white silhouetted against a distant shore in Lord Jim. Such strivings recall Monet's

perfectionistic claim (so close in mood and expression to some of Conrad's despairing letters) that he is seeking, "instantaneity, above all, the envelopment, the same light spread over everywhere; and more than ever, easy things achieved at one stroke disgust me."⁴ In the literary sense, this effect is purely visual, descriptive, and obvious to even the most hurried reader of Conrad. What these readers (and generations of critics) fail to realize are the philosophical implications of this single-minded pursuit of the texture of life. As we connect optics with novelistic (often moralistic) purpose, we come to sense that for Conrad, as for Zola and later for Virginia Woolf, the world of psychological complexity and inner mystery is lurking ever so slightly beneath the surface detail of life. In response to Galsworthy's work, in which he sensed much the same associations, Conrad actually clarified his own philosophy: "In fact, the force of the book is in the fidelity to the surface of life, to the surface of events--to the surface of things and ideas--To me you have absolutely touched the bottom, and the achievement is as praiseworthy as though you had plumbed the very ocean."⁵ Thus, what begins as a seeming accusation of superficiality becomes praise for psychological depth. Many of the early works of Conrad (An Outcast of the Islands, for example),

have suffered the first charge without a full consideration of the second possibility. Moreover, if we accept Ford Madox Ford's opinion that the ethics of Conrad could be summed up in one word--"fidelity"⁶--this concept of visual fidelity to natural sensations is indeed rich in moral associations as well (as Lord Jim and Nostromo will later reveal).

At the same time that Conrad was musing on a possible visual and moral Impressionism, his far-ranging curiosity plunged him into the study of psychology as well. By 1901 at least, Conrad had come into contact with William James's The Will to Believe, which was published in 1897.⁷ A major idea which was certain to gain a fascinated reader in Conrad was the belief that the consequences of the isolated act of a man may tip the scales of the universe in favour of morality or savage materialism. In larger terms, the entire question of the moral nature of the universe rests, at last, on the experience of man (a veritable inversion of Thomas Hardy's opposition of "Crass Casualty" and the unsuspecting mite which is man). For Conrad, such an idea was indeed sympathetic to his concept of the mysterious, universal forces which lie beneath the surfaces of human life and habit. James' theory of the isolated act would resurface, along with the

Impressionistic emphasis on the momentary state of things, in Lord Jim and in Nostromo.

The series of adumbrations, however, which lead to this intensely psychological and moral Impressionism begin much more humbly, with Almayer's Folly. Although Conrad, in A Personal Record, describes the first day of composition as beginning one morning in London, Ford Madox Ford refers to the drafts of the first few pages being scrawled in the margins of Conrad's copy of Madame Bovary while he was at sea. Whether or not Ford may be credited with this rare instance of truth-telling (for Conrad did take copies of Flaubert on the Eastern sailing trips which inspired the novel), Flaubert does loom large in Conrad's development. Although Ford and later critics have cited Daudet and Maupassant as the prototypes for the novel's style, the influence which outlasted that of both French writers was that of Gustave Flaubert. Over twenty years later, Conrad was to write to Hugh Walpole, saying that his early enjoyment of Madame Bovary was, above all, a delight in "the rendering of concrete things and visual impressions."⁹ One notes, however, that this visual rendering in Flaubert is always a means toward an intense psychological study. One such example of this double level of observation occurs in the justly famous scene at

the Comices-- Agricoles, as the booming voice of the politician breaks into the tête-à-tête between Emma and Rodolphe, with his vociferous comments on livestock and agricultural practices. The fleeting impression of bustling life is thus combined with an ironic commentary on Emma's ravishing flights of romantic fancy. The comparison with a Renoir Paris scene is fitting here, as are Henry James's comments on the similarities of Picture and Text: "The forms are different, though with analogies; but the field is the same--the immense field of contemporary life observed for an artistic purpose."¹⁰

In many passages of Almayer's Folly, this combination of observation and artistic commentary is clearly sought by Conrad, in the fashion of his French predecessor. At the end of Chapter Five, after the absorbing passion of Nina's meeting with Dain, Almayer sleeps fitfully in his cabin while Nina watches "the angry river under the lash of the thunderstorm sweeping onward towards the sea."¹¹ The simultaneous presence of Almayer's false calm and Nina's inner tumult is rendered more powerful by the natural tempest. The vigilant reader, too, would recall the curious opening scene of the novel, with Almayer fascinated by the progress of a drifting tree, tossed and smashed (as later are his fortunes) by the elements. At the end of

this chapter, too, Almayer sleeps "quietly, oblivious alike of his hopes, his misfortunes, his friends, and his enemies, and the daughter stood motionless, at each flash of lightning, eagerly scanning the broad river with a steady and anxious gaze."¹² Thus, a heightening of intensity, as well as a contrast between vigilance and ignorance is created. Such scenes, however, lack the compact insight of Flaubert, which has all of the incisiveness of a razor's edge simply because the reader is denied the psychological insight granted by Flaubert to his readers. One knows that Almayer is displaying a false confidence; one expects his fall to opium addiction as one expects Emma's poisoning but for no other reason than that Conrad is heavily hinting that mysterious forces are at work.

What most prevents Conrad from attaining this Impressionistic double level of detail and psychology in Almayer's Folly is his handling of narrative point of view. Throughout the novel, Conrad as narrator can only hypothesize about, for example, Nina's implacable mask, behind which lies "a vague suggestion of ferocity."¹³ Indeed, her first appearance in front of Dain and Almayer, her face half-hidden by the curtain, is emblematic not only of how she is manifestly unknown by her father but of how she appears to the reader as well. Nina's veiled personality even becomes the subject

of a narratorial comment, as Conrad detaches himself momentarily from the narrative to ask about her smile: "Who can tell in the fitful light of a camp fire? It might have been a smile of triumph, or of conscious power, or of tender pity, or, perhaps, of love."¹⁴ Although Ian Watt, in Conrad in the Nineteenth Century, locates one of the problems of the novel as exactly this sort of psychological "distancing," he neither identifies the type of point of view Conrad is employing, nor why, in terms of the novel's theme.¹⁵ In fact, Conrad is using a limited third person point of view, much as Dostoyevsky uses in Crime and Punishment, in order to create that psychological immediacy, that sense of being enclosed in the psyche of one man. One may consider, for example, whether Raskolnikov's second victim, Lisaveta, receives any more psychological treatment than does Nina Almayer:

She raised her hand a little, opened her mouth, but did not utter a cry. She began walking backwards, backing away from him slowly...but still without uttering a sound, as though she had no breath left in her body to cry out. He rushed at her with the hatchet.¹⁶

The difference, however, lies in the fact that Lisaveta's inner thoughts at that moment do not specifically cause Raskolnikov's fall whereas Nina's inner life (her love for Dain) does cause Almayer's. This is the reason for

the failure of the method in Almayer's Folly as well as the reason for Conrad's search for new narrative methods which would allow for simultaneous detachment (observation) and psychological and moral intensity.

A further hallmark of literary Impressionism discussed by Ian Watt in reference to Heart of Darkness is "delayed decoding."¹⁷ This technique, which has its beginnings, like the other aspects of Conrad's Impressionism, in Almayer's Folly, consists of the relating of the physical sensations or impressions of an event or object before actually naming or "decoding" it in a conventional way. In Almayer's Folly, for instance, a startling effect is produced by Mahmat's sighting of "something red" hidden and tossed by logs in the sea which "looked to him at first like a strip of red cloth."¹⁸ As we read, we discover with a start (just as the Malaysian inhabitants hearing Mahmat's shout) that "There's a man amongst the logs!"¹⁹ Beyond this effect of startling the reader, this mode of presentation through "misapprehension" has, in retrospect, a thematic role as well, for everyone including Almayer "misapprehends" the corpse in identifying it as Dain. Their realization, like Mahmat's, comes well after the original sensation.

It is crucial, however, to note that this technique

was not unknown to those familiar with Russian literature and critical theory. What Watt calls "delayed decoding" is nothing other than what the Russian Formalist critics called "defamiliarization," or the process of "making strange," in Victor Shklovsky's terms. Nineteenth-century practisers of this effect included Tolstoy--an influence Conrad could not but feel (bitter as he was towards most things Russian). In the battlefield sections of War and Peace, for example, the naive Pierre first perceives playful-looking puffs of smoke which cavort on the battlefield--seemingly innocuous puffs which the reader "decodes" as the cannon smoke of mass killing. Not only in literary circles was this mode of vision explored; Edgar Degas, in studies such as After the Bath* and Two Ballet Dancers* effectively defamiliarizes the human body by representing it in "unaesthetic," awkward poses. Again, for Conrad, this impressionistic rendering of sensation is most appealing to him as an artist when it is firmly tied to thematic intent.

There is a curious link in Almayer's Folly, to be influential in An Outcast of the Islands and Heart of Darkness, between visual Impressionism and the cruel nature of the exotic wilderness. In the Preface to the novel, Conrad mixes the description of the elaborate detail of his Malaysia with the following sober postscript: "Only in the cruel

serenity of the sky, under the merciless brilliance of the sun, the dazzled eye misses the delicate detail, sees only the strong outlines, while the colours, in the steady light, seem crude and without shadow."²⁰ In the light of both Impressionist theory and the novel, this moves beyond the Conradian rhetoric for which it is often mistaken and becomes a key concept in many of the novels to come. The elements within this statement--sun, detail, outlines and shadows--form part of the thematic structure of the novel (and are not merely repeated descriptive ornaments).

Repeatedly, at key points in the novel, the visual experience of contours and outlines are played off against elements conventionally described as "Impressionistic"--haze, mists or fog. The existence of such elements, however, does not qualify Conrad as an Impressionist writer--his thematic juxtaposition, though, of the two visual realms to suggest two entirely different ways of perceiving the world does for it relates visual effects to thematic concerns. In Chapter Six, after finalizing the plans for Dain's hiding, Dain and Babalatchi are met by a violent thunderstorm which shows, by momentary flashes of lightening, "all the elusive distinctness of detail characteristic of such a scene."²¹ This paradoxical pairing of "elusive" and "distinctness of detail" is surely ironic in light of the failure of the

"details" which have just been determined upon by the two men. Furthermore, although Dain can perceive with certainty "the narrow black line of the forests" it only requires the shift of momentary conditions to produce a terrifying (and ominous) vision: "Suddenly, in a vivid white flash, the low point of land with the bending trees on it and Almayer's house, leaped into view, flickered and disappeared."²² Accordingly, the destruction of the plan and Dain's loss of friendship with Almayer are momentarily and visually prefigured. This playing off of certainty and doubt reaches a climax in Almayer's showing of the corpse (supposedly that of Dain) to the officers. As he drunkenly stumbles towards the body, another momentary vision is created:

The sun was sinking rapidly, throwing long shadows of house and trees over the courtyard, but the light lingered yet on the river, where the logs went drifting past in midstream, looking very distinct and black in the pale red glow.²³

The description of the drifting logs and the colour red both recall the scene of Mahmat's discovery of the body. Thus, the seeming distinctness of the logs is again linked to Almayer's false certainty as to the identity of the corpse. This intolerable half-way position between ignorance and the inescapable fact of a body is perfectly captured in the image which follows, of the trees with top branches bathed in a "departing sunlight."²⁴

This contrast between contour and shadow, to be of even greater significance in later novels, reveals a conflict between knowing and uncertainty not unfamiliar to the Impressionists. Camille Pissarro, a life-long adherent to the Impressionist canon, advised his pupils: "Precise drawing is dry and hampers the impression of the whole; it destroys all sensations. Do not define too closely the outlines of things."²⁵ For these men, subjective realism was the ideal; all other forms of scientific rationalism were simply not applicable to the world in which men live. Rodin's comments on photographic realism are a case in point: "it is the artist who is truthful and it is photography which lies, for in reality time does not stop."²⁶ Post-Impressionists, however, called for the return of the contour and line in art just as they called for a return of "meaning." Gauguin formed this connection when he stated that "distinctness of outline is the attribute of the hand that is not enfeebled by an hesitation of the will."²⁷ Current, then, in artistic debates of the day was this symbolic use of outline and haziness to represent two modes of "realism" and "knowing." That Conrad intended to engage himself in such an ontological debate in Almayer's Folly is confirmed in Nina's declaration:

You told me yesterday...that I could not understand

or see your declaration of love for me: it is so.
 How can I? No two human beings understand each other.
 They can understand but their own voices.²⁸

This note of subjective knowledge as the only certainty available to man will be struck (more subtly) throughout Conrad's career, in novels and personal musings alike.

In terms of the craft of the novel, this emphasis on subjectivism is closely linked to the natural wilderness and the wilderness of memory. The wilderness suggests more than a capricious mixture of appearance and certainty of climate; it represents the inner regions of mystery within man (most clearly shown in Heart of Darkness). In a letter of 1895 to Edward Noble, Conrad's personal associations of such images are made clear. After praising Noble's Impressionism (Conrad's term) and "artistic feeling for the world around you," he offers the following advice:

You must squeeze out of yourself every sensation, every thought, every image--mercilessly, without reserve and without remorse: you must search the darkest corners of your heart, the most remote recesses of your brain--you must search them for the image, for the glamour, for the right expression."²⁹

For Conrad, the search had begun, and Malaysia and the tortured soul (of Almayer) were the wildernesses which obsessed his imagination.

Both elements are obsessions not only of the fancy but of the memory of the apprentice-author as well. Both

Almayer and many of the subsidiary characters are figures from Conrad's Malaysian experiences with only glancing changes for literary effect. The key question, however, is not the relative boundaries of truth and fiction but the reason for Conrad's fascination with the world of his past. The words which opened this discussion, from perhaps the most Impressionistic author in western civilization, Marcel Proust, suggest a kinship between sensation and memory. Proust was not alone in making this association, for Degas theorized in "Shop Talk" that "There is a transformation during which the imagination works in conjunction with the memory. You put down only what makes an impression on you, that is to say the essential."³⁰ Again, the note of subjective realism is sounded; whatever resonates within the mind of the perceiver has a superior degree of reality which cannot be denied or superseded. For the apprentice-novelist, the world of the past is most immediately accessible as well as most credible in a personal way. In Notes on Life and Letters, Conrad gives voice to an apparent commonplace which is actually a comment on the role of subjective experience in art:

In truth every novelist must begin by creating himself a world, great or little, in which he can honestly believe. This world cannot be made otherwise than in his own image: it is fated to remain individual and a little mysterious.³¹

Again, the enclosed world of the self, into which our fellow beings cannot truly enter, intrudes upon Conrad's thoughts. Nevertheless, Conrad does not ignore the opposite side of the memory question. Writing of Henry James, he noted that the artist, by the "snatching of vanishing phrases of turbulence out of the native obscurity," allows them "the only possible form of permanence in this world of relative values--the permanence of memory."³² In setting up such oppositions between permanence and flux, certainty and doubt, and detachment and intensity, Conrad formulated the Impressionist problem of experience and knowledge which his later novels strove to illuminate.

An Outcast of the Islands reveals Conrad striving to resolve some of the problems of his first novel and (more importantly) creating a more complex inter-relation between the Impressionist technique and his psychological inquiry. Almayer's Folly had certainly been the most amended and revised manuscript ever in his possession (for reasons of language difficulties as well as technical apprenticeship problems). That Conrad felt dissatisfied with the final result is evidenced by Jocelyn Baines' account, that when asked by Edward Garnett what the next step in his illustrious career would be, Conrad replied with an icy stare and the assertion that Almayer's Folly was both his

first and last literary "step."³³

Faced with such misgivings, Conrad did take the next step towards an Impressionist vision--a vision which demanded a more complex framework for psychological scrutiny. The chief modification which made such scrutiny possible was his experimentation with point of view. Interestingly, Conrad's adoption of the third person point of view strengthened his theme of the ultimate mystery of the common person (paradoxical though it may seem). Conrad as narrator could now enter Aïssa's thoughts as he could not do with Nina: "From the short contact with the whites in the crashing collapse of her old life, there remained with her the imposing idea of irresistible power and of ruthless strength."³⁴ How vitifful, though, is the contrast between this all-knowing, God-like narrator and the uncomprehending mortals who strive to penetrate the masks of even those they love:

Those two, surrounded each by the impenetrable wall of their aspirations, were hopelessly alone, out of sight, out of earshot of each other; each the centre of dissimilar and distant horizons; standing on a different earth, under a different sky.³⁵

The impact of these two statements, occurring within sentences of each other, strikes us with the full force of utter contrast.

This method of narration which suggests several levels of "knowing" is further complicated by what I call "emergent mediating figures." Only dimly suggested in An Outcast of the Islands, these figures who reflect and refract given information later play a major role in the Impressionist design of Lord Jim. When Lingard, for example, confronts Willems and Aïssa, we are made conscious of the angle of vision which is peculiarly Lingard's: "He backed away a little from Willems and Aïssa...He had a notion of surveying them from a great and inaccessible height. He said slowly: 'You have been possessed of a devil.'"³⁶ Before Lingard's position becomes too great and inaccessible, however, the reference to his own "divine" folly calls to mind the discrediting view of Lingard which we receive near the very beginning of the novel. In Chapter Two, in fact, the centre of consciousness does briefly shift from Willems to Tom Lingard: "The sea took him young, fashioned him body and soul; gave him his fierce aspect, his loud voice, his fearless eyes, his stupidly guileless heart."³⁷ Almayer himself (who until this point plays a subsidiary role in this novel) becomes the final narrator, years later, of the murder scene. He too, though, is just one refracting "lens" open to doubt and charges of unreliability. Not only is he quoting another narration (that of the eye-witness,

Mahmat) but he is ironically relating the story to a drunken business companion who distances our perception of the affair by surveying the now-older Aïssa and exclaiming, "That doubled-up crone?"³⁸ More ironic still is the narrator's own reputation as a chronic dreamer and complainer to the universe (his last futile act is to shout through the darkness at the tombstone of Willems).

These refracting views, like the series of Monet paintings depicting Rouen Cathedral at different times of the day, under precise conditions of sunlight and shadow, reject the average "composite" view for the shifting perspectives of experience. As a student of Monet reflected, "He always insisted on the great importance of a painter noticing when the effect changed, so as to get a true impression of a certain aspect of nature and not a composite picture...."³⁹ Conrad, in experimenting with the distancing effects of the mediating figure, was aspiring to the same complexity as was Monet--to gain not a set description of a man, suitable for all occasions and conditions of stress but a multi-perspective, constantly shifting view of a complex being--man. That this was unquestionably Conrad's conscious intent is revealed in a letter to Galsworthy:

I could allow free play to my temperament, attending

only to the plain sense and clear connection of the story...with all of its implications...rising not from a conflict of motives or passions but simply from various points of view.⁴⁰

In the gradual process of developing this complex system of impressions, Conrad was to produce the ultimate mediating figure--Marlow.

Another experiment which would produce the complex texture of experience was the shifting of chronology. Such shifts did occur in Almayer's Folly but their thematic purpose in An Outcast of the Islands is clearer than in the former novel. The re-telling of Dain and Nina's meeting, for example, from two different perspectives is difficult to justify in terms of theme. In An Outcast of the Islands, however, the shift back to Willem's salvation at the hands of the gullible Lingard softens our harsh judgment of his theft and flight at the age of thirty (as narrated in Chapter One). In returning to this fateful thirtieth birthday in Chapter Three, Conrad again manipulates our judgment by having us witness Mrs. Willems' berating of her husband, in the light of his full personal history. This effect is essentially part of Conrad's overt design to influence the conceptual content of his work through a manipulation of the temporal factor. In explaining exactly this process, Conrad rejected the terms

"realist" and "romantic" in favour of an artistic metaphor: "...it is fluid, depending on grouping (sequence) which shifts, and on the changing lights giving varied effects of perspective."⁴¹

This emphasis on constantly shifting experience is further linked to the "Conradian" outlook in terms of the significance of the momentary act. In Conrad's fiction, beginning properly with An Outcast of the Islands, there is a recurring contrast between the permanent and the ephemeral in human personality. Indeed, the very first chapter of the novel reveals Willems debating within his own conscience this very point; we are told that he "stepped off the straight and narrow path of his peculiar honesty" but with the firm belief that "It was going to be a short episode...in the flowing tale of his life."⁴² This event--the theft of his beneficiary's funds--ironically leads to the meeting with Aïssa, the plot to overthrow Lingard and his own death. This, then, is the momentary act which irremediably colours a lifetime.

In the art of the Impressionists, it is this primacy of the ephemeral which forms the basis of the entire theory. In Britain, John Constable, who in his shimmering studies of trees and clouds prefigured the Impressionist movement, claimed that "No two days are alike nor even two hours,

and even since the creation of the world no two leaves on a tree are the same."⁴³ In this spirit, he would meticulously note the exact time and atmospheric conditions on the backs of his private cloud studies. When Degas located this study of the ephemeral in the ballet studio, in the opera house (as in Singer With A Glove, 1878*), it is the pose and the lighting of the moment which he sought to convey. In both painters the basic paradox is the same: Nature and daily experience are both common, habitual and undergoing fleeting changes with every moment. The philosophical implications of this Impressionist concern are sensitively explored by Arnold Hauser in The Social History of Art:

Every impressionist picture is the deposit of the moment in the perpetuum mobile of existence, the representation of a precarious, unstable balance in the play of contending forces.⁴⁴

In the art of Conrad, the contending forces of the momentary act and the permanent identity meet and do battle within man--within Willems, Jim, Martin Decoud, Nostromo and others.

On yet another level, Conrad visually ties the momentary to the universal through a system of imagery much more sophisticated than in Almayer's Folly. In An Outcast

of the Islands the proper term is indeed "system" for the images of sun and mist are closely tied to the theories of knowing which pervade the novel. The sun imagery, in particular, is striking in its complexity for it reveals the subtle mysteries of both individual characters and of the universal "forces" at large. For Aïssa, the "sinking red disc that glowed, rayless, through the floating mists"⁴⁵ is a bloody reminder of Willems' absence and his constant personal danger in plotting the overthrow of Lingard. To Joanna Willems, wasting away emotionally in Almayer's household, the sun holds for her only "a ray merciless and crude"⁴⁶ which is filled with her own cynicism about her "lost" husband. On a universal level, the sun (traditionally the source of life and the centre of a unified system) is a force of malice and false security. Part Two opens after Willems' flight from Almayer's home, with a ghastly sense of things to come: "The land lay silent, still and brilliant under the avalanche of burning rays that had destroyed all sound and all motion, had buried all shadows, had choked every breath."⁴⁷ There are repeated references to Willems catching a sunstroke as well as ominous links between the blind Omar (who later tries to kill Willems) and the setting sun. The culmination of this association, in the murder scene, is thus powerfully prepared and all the

more sinister. As Aïssa hears Omar's voice urging, "Kill! Kill!", the deadly sun prompts her as well with its dark associations:

The sunlight streamed on her, on him, on the mute land, on the murmuring river,--the gentle brilliance of a serene morning that...seemed traversed by ghastly flashes of uncertain darkness.⁴⁸

This paradox of the deadly sun is extended in the death sensations of Willems, in his feeling of the "triumphant delight of sunshine and of life"⁴⁹ before he realizes that he has been shot. This mingling of the momentary effect and the universal attitude characterizes Conrad's art especially in contrast to more common uses of a similar motif by other British writers. D. H. Lawrence, for example, in his short story, "Sun," is representative of a rather large group of writers who associate the rays of the sun with all that is life (and soul) sustaining, earthy and healthy in its mysterious primitivism:

With her knowledge of the sun, and her conviction that the sun knew her, in the cosmic carnal sense of the word, came over her a feeling of detachment from people, and a certain contempt for human beings altogether. They were so un-elemental, so unsunned.⁵⁰

Conrad, on the other hand, conceives of a mystery in the forces of the unknown (the sea is another example) but he is closer to Melville in his horror at the image of finite

man approaching these infinite powers too closely.

Predictably, the theme of "knowing" which grows out of such visual effects, is much more intense than in Almayer's Folly. Intensity is precisely the effect of the scene of Omar's attempt to kill Willems. Surfacing and receding in a misty nightmare of half-consciousness, Willems only dimly apprehends the menacing, surrealistic figure of Omar, creeping towards him with the kriss pressed between his lips. It is this experience which reveals to Willems that his (and man's) fear is not of death but of the "glimpse into the unknown things, into those motives, impulses, desires...that had lived in the breasts of despised men, close by his side."⁵¹ Such a declaration is artistically more successful than Nina's disquisition on the same theme in Almayer's Folly; here the concept is tied to a vivid dream-like representation of the peril of not "knowing."

Ironically, just as Willems is constantly aware of Omar's menacing advances but remains inert, it is the element of consciousness which makes man's ignorance all the more intolerable. "What makes man tragic," wrote Conrad in a letter to Cunningham Graham (a letter which richly deserves the title "Impressionist"), "is not that they are the victims of nature, it is that they are conscious

of it. There is no morality, no knowledge and no hope; there is only the consciousness of ourselves which drives us about a world that...is always but a vain and fleeting appearance."⁵² Later contemporaries of Conrad, most notably the young T. S. Eliot, would reach the same conclusions about this crippling self-consciousness of an age.

What makes Conrad's vision essentially Impressionist is the constant hearkening back to the subjective vision, to the extent that external reality is no longer distinguishable as a concept from the perceiving eye. This is precisely the confounding sensation which assails Willems, shortly after Lingard's departure from the island. Again, the dichotomy of permanence and transience of objective knowledge and sensation is set up, as Willems' horrifying personal vision of death is met with the rational proof, "And yet the world was full of life."⁵⁴ The entire relationship between subject and object becomes submerged in Willems' sensibility; he experiences above all a desire "to embrace solid things; he had an immense craving for sensations; for touching, pressing, seeing, handling, holding on...."⁵⁵ One need only compare this flight to reassuring sensation with the episode of the "madeleine" in A La Recherche de Temps Perdu to make the association with literary Impressionism undeniable: "Un plaisir délicieux...



m'avait aussitôt rendu les vicissitudes de la vie indifférentes...en me remplissant d'une essence précieuse: ou plutôt cette essence n'était pas en moi, elle était moi."⁵⁶

One finds this same merging into subjectivity in the thought of Heisenberg, in the criticism of Zola, and even in the practical artistic advice of masters like Degas: "Drawing is not form but a way of seeing form."⁵⁷ In this respect, Conrad truly belongs in the company of these artists and philosophers rather than with the tellers of melodramatic tales of adventure, set in far distant and exotic lands.

The publication of The Nigger of the Narcissus (with its critical manifesto, the Preface) and Lord Jim firmly established Conrad in the ranks of Impressionist thinkers. These two works are, in effect, a culmination of the experimentation and deep thought of the preceding ten years, yet they are experiments of rather different kinds with widely differing degrees of success.

The experimental nature of The Nigger of the Narcissus has been largely ignored by critics of the last eighty years. The dangerous tendency (in Jocelyn Paines' critical biography, for example) to regard the novel as a descriptive tour de force alone has been overcompensated in recent years by critics who see the entire drama as a

consistent allegory (Singleton as the intuitive moral man, Wait as the seething force of evil). The impressionist analogy is particularly valuable in sorting out the exact relationship between the visual and the "moral."

The very fact that Conrad himself nervously regarded the novel as an experimental departure should signal to critic and reader alike that new solutions are being applied to the same novelistic set of "problems":

Candidly, I think it has certain qualities of art that make it a thing apart. I tried to get through the veil of details at the essence of life...I only dare to hope that there...may be found a few men and women who will see what I have tried for.⁵⁸

It is precisely this mingling of the illusionistic "veil" of detail and the underlying "essence" which characterizes the vision of the literary Impressionist.

Interestingly, it is the literary manifesto of the Preface (not at all surprising in an experimental work) upon which the debate over Conrad as Impressionist and thinker is concentrated. Baines declares that it is "a declaration of belief identical with that of the Impressionists, although in practice Conrad was never an Impressionist."⁵⁹ Underlying this comment is the assumption that visual Impressionism and moral or judgmental Impressionism are mutually exclusive, for Baines makes the

distinction between method and result (the former as "sensuous" and the latter as "moral").⁶⁰ A close study of The Nigger of the Narcissus both vindicates the theory as applicable theory and makes such distinctions between method and aim simply non-existent.

From the opening words of the Preface, Conrad takes care to link exactly those two aspects of art; it is a "single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect" [emphasis mine].⁶¹ This balance is repeated throughout the essay, for Conrad again is at great pains to point out that the novelist can only attain the richness of a complete vision "through complete, unswerving devotion to the perfect blending of form and substance."⁶²

It is at this point in Conrad's argument that most critics (Jocelyn Baines and Ian Watt, for example) signal Conrad's break with Impressionist thought. This assumption reveals a common tendency among literary critics to make a too literal equation between visual and verbal art. Although it is true that Monet and Renoir were concerned with optics and sensation rather than with interpretive processes, it is also true that working in a visual medium facilitated this concern. Language, on the other hand, is

a medium of a necessarily dual nature (as any linguistic theorist will avow). It is both concrete and referential, or as the semiotician would distinguish, both "signifier" and "signified." Thus, when Ian Watt comments that Conrad's resonant intention, "It is, before all, to make you see!"⁶³, is enriched by the several levels of meaning contained in the concept "see" (visually, intellectually, morally), he is unquestionably right. It is mistaken, however, to assume that such a doctrine is not Impressionist in nature.

The Nigger of the Narcissus was the work upon which Conrad felt "I stand or fall as an artist in prose"⁶⁴ precisely because he was testing the limits of literary Impressionism. He presents pure sensation (the gale scenes, the burial of James Wait) and gives to the reader the burden of extracting the "fruyt" from the "chaff" (Hence his extreme apprehension about the novel's reception). One is reminded of Seurat's experiments with pointillism--extracting the visual compounds of colour and allowing the perceiver's eye to mix or synthesize them into a coherent vision. The scene of James Wait's burial at sea is one such example of reader "synthesizing." When Wait's corpse refuses to slide into the sea, the effect moves beyond the mere ghoulish and sensational. Conrad is, in fact, ironically contrasting the ephemeral nature of Wait's mortal life with the

tenacious hold he has on the mind and spirit of the men of the "Narcissus." Within individual characters, the same contraries exist. Singleton is both the monolithic seaman who clings stubbornly to the wheel (and to life) and the mortal man who sadly recognizes, "I am getting old...old."⁶⁵ In terms of the entire design of the novel, this contrast between the ephemeral and the permanent is revived at the end, as the narrator contrasts the frozen scene of the dispersing men in front of the Mint with their permanent identity as "mad castaways making merry in the storm and upon an insecure ledge of a treacherous rock."⁶⁶ Thus, the "temperament" of which Conrad speaks in the Preface is close to Zola's use of the term to denote "the element of individuality" through which "objective" reality is apprehended and organized into vision. As this supposed recorder of harsh outer reality commented, "The name 'realist' does not signify anything to me who declares reality to be subordinated to temperament."⁶⁷ Conrad tested exactly this relationship in The Nigger of the Narcissus.

The results of this experiment with pure sensation were not successful (even though Conrad attempted to justify the novel in his writings up to his death in 1924). The major problem was the awkward combination of narratorial digressions and Conrad's need to distance his narrator from

the story. The only solution which he could find was a continually-shifting point of view; the narrative begins with a third person omniscient narrator and suddenly shifts to the perspective of a crew-member ("We hesitated between pity and mistrust...").⁶⁸ These shifts occur throughout the narrative, ending with a rather problematic insight into the melodramatic scene between the young sailor Charlie and his mother, the narrator finally resolving: "I disengaged myself gently...I wasn't anxious to stand the brunt of his unconsolable sorrow."⁶⁹ Amid the uneasy shifts between all-knowing observer and participant, one can sense Conrad striving towards the involved yet disengaged narrator--the Marlow which his Impressionist viewpoint indeed required.

In more purely philosophical terms, Conrad was striving towards new conceptions of knowledge which would influence the later visions of Lord Jim and Nostromo. Conrad's developing use of concrete objects and shadow is more complex than his use of the sun motif in the Malaysian novels; it becomes a vehicle for a comment on the relative reality of man's surroundings. One such example is the vision of the silent "Narcissus":

And nothing in her was real, nothing was distinct and solid but the heavy shadows that filled her

decks with their unceasing and noiseless stir:
 the shadows darker than the night and more
 restless than the thoughts of men.⁷⁰

This curious paradox--the assigning of as much substance to shadow as to concrete objects--is an assertion of the tangible power of mystery and the subconscious. In the scenes of hellish gales, the memories of the crew members gain an actuality equal to the thundering seas and the cruel winds. Indeed, Conrad as narrator interrupts to state that "at that time the memories were incomparably more vivid than anything actual."⁷¹ It is not difficult to sense the same spirit of testing the limits of "knowable" reality in Monet's Poplars*, where two levels of reality, object and reflection, are daringly fused or in Rodin's sculpture, Jules Dalou* which plays with the tangibility of convex and concave planes. The work of Conrad, Monet and Rodin alike reveals the vital experimentation with reality which led to the subjective visions of men like Kandinsky in the visual arts and James Joyce in literature.

If The Nigger of the Narcissus is Conrad's flawed experiment, it at least prompted him to the ingenious solutions of Lord Jim. This novel truly is, as Albert J. Guerard declares, "Conrad's first great Impressionist novel."⁷² To be more precise, Conrad here discovers the forms which accommodate the Impressionist vision of

the last twelve years.

Unlike his characterizations of Almayer and Willems, Conrad's story of "Tuan Jim" reaches the level of successful tragedy. Through the remarkable method of a narrator within a narration, Conrad allows his character all of the naivety of Almayer while convincing us of his universal importance through the musings of the world-weary raconteur, Marlow:

The occasion was obscure, insignificant...yet the mystery of his attitude got hold of me as though he had been an individual in the forefront of his kind, as if the obscure truth involved were momentous enough to affect mankind's conception of itself...."73

Even before Marlow's entry as storyteller, Jim's role in the clash between certainty and doubt is well established. Immediately before the crisis on the Patna, Jim calmly surveys the ship's chart, its scientific instruments (the parallel rulers and dividers) and the complacent straight pencil line which marks the ship's course--"the path of souls towards the holy place."⁷⁴ As confidently as Ishmael at the tiller, Jim sees behind him another reassuring line--that of the foaming waters left in the ship's wake, being "drawn as straight by the ship's keel upon the sea as the black line drawn by the pencil upon the chart."⁷⁵ Although past and future alike appear to Jim to be predictable and certain at that moment,

the true danger of the situation (and the inner danger, the possibilities of cowardice within Jim) lie, like the wreck which they are about to strike, deep below the surface. It is therefore appropriate that the crisis occurs not as a dramatic disaster but almost imperceptibly--"as though the ship had steamed across a narrow belt of vibrating water and humming air."⁷⁶ This line is every bit as faint and as ambiguous as the one which Jim crosses the instant that he jumps from the Patna to the waiting boat (from his idealized heroism to the plain fact of cowardice) and it is every bit as deadly.

We approach the full moral implications of this ambiguity (and the essential vision of Lord Jim) when we realize that for Conrad, as for the Impressionists, distortion is an inescapable part of perception. Claude Monet's The Houses of Parliament: Effect of Sunlight in the Fog* is less a study of the physical buildings than a study of the atmosphere--a combination of distance, fog and the human eye. Indeed, the Impressionists were fascinated by these intangible elements--mists, fogs--precisely because they held the power to transform or distort perceived reality (Ian Watt's example of "delayed decoding" in relation to Heart of Darkness is one such example of distortion in perception, although he tends to emphasize

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the visual, experiential aspects of the technique rather than the moral implications.) The example cited (of the Patna's mysterious crossing of the lines of security) is not purely visual but moral and thematic, when considered in the light of Jim's own fateful "crossing."

Such an intellectual concern in Lord Jim aligns Conrad with other contemporary thinkers who were reshaping the concept of Hume, Berkeley, Kant and the Romantics of reality as created by man's eye and mind alone. In addition to the already-quoted Zola, one notes this query from a conscious British Impressionist, Oscar Wilde: "Where, if not from the Impressionists do we get those wonderful brown fogs that come creeping down our streets, blurring the gas-lamps and changing the houses into monstrous shadows?"⁷⁷ In this mode of thought, perception not only precedes but defines essence.

For Conrad, this contemporary debate between subjective and objective reality becomes fused in Lord Jim; the mists and fogs are the outer manifestations of the hazy, ambiguous conditions in which man must nevertheless make clear critical judgments. In fact, the entire novel revolves around the simplicity of the "object" (Jim) and the complexity of the perception (on the part of other characters in the novel, Marlow and ultimately the reader).

Marlow's references to the inscrutable mists surrounding Jim's nature are thus much more than Impressionistic in style; they emphasize that the complexity lies in the act of perception, in Marlow himself rather than in Jim: "I don't pretend I understood him. The views he let me have of himself were like those glimpses through the shifting rents in a thick fog--bits of vivid and vanishing detail, giving no connected idea of the general aspect of a country."⁷⁸ The reader, too, is in danger of becoming lost in these mists, of losing his moral footing, his orientation, by lazily shifting to Marlow the burden of judgment.

This critical laziness is overcome by realizing that just as Monet's parliament buildings are a simple physical fact, so too Jim is a rather simple psychological type--the Romantic. This Marlow realizes even before Dr. Stein delivers his summary diagnosis, as he witnesses one of Jim's reveries ("Ah, he was an imaginative beggar!")⁷⁹ and again, as one of his biting comments on Jim's heroic desires completely escapes the intended victim: "Upon my word, he was too unsuspecting; he was not fair game."⁸⁰ In fact, Jim's dreams are as pure and as shining as his immaculate white clothing; it is only in the private act of perception that for Marlow "the white figure in the stillness of coast and sea seemed to stand at the heart of a

vast enigma."⁸¹

The key to this paradox of complexity within the simple lies, as in Monet's painting, in the critical distance and attitude of the perceiving eye. Jim, Marlow muses, "complicated matters by being so simple, too--the simplest poor devil!"⁸² Over and over, we hear that Jim is "one of us," to which Marlow significantly adds, "...he was too much like one of us not to be dangerous."⁸³ The fact of the matter is, in his very simplicity, Jim becomes a type of Everyman for Marlow, touching the "hidden plague spots" of mankind.⁸⁴ If the momentary act of cowardice rather than the ideals of heroism defines the man, then where does this leave human aspiration? Moreover, if a man so conscious of heroic ideals is suddenly caught up by the darker side of his personality, what man is safe?

This concern with the ephemeral acts of man and his permanent identity not only runs through the earlier characters of Willems and Singleton but through Conrad's personal correspondence as well:

When once the truth is grasped that one's own personality is only a ridiculous and aimless masquerade of something hopelessly unknown,... Then there remains nothing but the surrender to one's impulses, the fidelity to passing emotions, which is perhaps a nearer approach to truth than any other philosophy of life.⁸⁵

It is this common need to pierce beyond the shadowy, passing emotions of men that drives Marlow to insist that Jim's plight "appealed to all sides at once--to the side turned perpetually to the light of day, and to that side of us which, like the other hemisphere of the moon exists stealthily in perpetual darkness with only a fearful ashy light falling at times on the edge."⁸⁶

The Impressionist vision of the earlier novels is complicated, too, in that total subjectivity and identification become, as Marlow vaguely senses, "dangerous."⁸⁷ One need only trace all of the errors and disasters in Lord Jim which stem from an emotional identification with something from which we should critically distance ourselves in order to survive. For example, Brierly (ironically in a position which demands clear distinctions and detachment--that of a judge) identifies so strongly with Jim's cowardly act that he commits suicide. Similarly, Jim's death is less a murder than it is a suicide resulting from this same inability to make distinctions, in this case, between the failings of a naive idealist and the guilt of an unabashed murderer and thief. Gentleman Brown's crafty suggestions of a common bond of guilt between the two men thus strikes a tender chord in Jim's romantic nature. Such failures of perception should

sensitize us, especially on a second reading, to the problems of Marlow's critical distance from Jim. Although (as in viewing Impressionist art) one must remain detached from the subject in order to judge the whole, in human morality, the urge to identify, to sympathize, is always conflicting with our critical faculties and producing a frustrating split allegiance. Conrad, through Marlow, touchingly voices this very frustration: "It is when we try to grapple with another man's intimate need that we perceive how incomprehensible, wavering, and misty are the beings that share with us the sight of the stars and the warmth of the sun."⁸⁸ Conrad thus captures, through Marlow, the very distance sought by the narrator of The Nigger of the Narcissus ("I disengaged myself gently") and allows the reader to make this gentle, sensitive act of disengagement.

Part of this disengagement involves distinguishing between the carefully fused appearances and realities of Lord Jim--a method much more imaginative than the mere stating of the illusory nature of appearances in Almayer's Folly or The Nigger of the Narcissus. Conrad achieves this fusion within the very lives of characters surrounding Jim (a technique rendered impossible by the point of view in Almayer's Folly and only briefly experimented with in

his characterization of Singleton). In comparison, when the disproportion within Captain Brierly's personality between the haughty judge and the guilty, tormented being is fully revealed in his act of suicide, Marlow reflects that he had "committed his reality and his sham together to the keeping of the sea."⁸⁹ Similarly, appearance and reality are inextricably bound up together in the richly suggestive scene of Marlow's conference with Stein. Stein's confusion of dream and reality is contained in his own experiences as a "learned collector."⁹⁰ As he describes the capture of his prized butterfly specimen, the blunt physical fact that he has just shot three men dissolves, as the shadow passing across the dead man's face is recognized to be the elusive butterfly. Nevertheless, like Jim's dream fulfilment in Patusan, the triumph of the butterfly is invariably linked with death; Stein fittingly captures this paragon of beauty and perfection on a mound of dirt. Moreover, the fact that the butterfly can only be preserved and shown to others dead, behind a glass case, severely undercuts the nature of Stein's ideal: "The frail and beautiful wings quivered faintly, as if his breath had for an instant called back to life that gorgeous object of his dreams."⁹¹

Similarly, Stein's advice to Marlow paradoxically

reverses the idea that immersing oneself in a dream is inevitably destructive:

A man that is born falls into a dream like a man who falls into the sea. If he tries to climb out into the air as inexperienced people endeavour to do, he drowns--nicht wahr?...No! I tell you! The way is to the destructive element submit yourself, and with the exertions of your hands and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you up.⁹²

Although Stein's wise, meditative tone tends to sway our better judgment, upon closer examination, we find that Stein has reversed and misapplied the terms of his metaphor. To a man falling into the sea who struggles to reach the air, the waters more closely correspond to a physical reality; they surround his physical being and threaten to put his mortal life to an end. To climb into the air (the medium always associated with the intangible) is the ideal, the dream.

This battle to distance oneself, to catch subtle threads of irony (what Guerard calls the conflict between sympathy and judgment in the novel) is thus a calculated result of Conrad's Impressionist method. That such a "distanciation" was indeed expected of the reader is disclosed in Conrad's abrupt comment to Blackwood: "It is my opinion that in the working out of the catastrophe, psychological disquisition should have no place. The

reader ought to know enough by that time."⁹³

Conrad again interrupts our tendency to shift our critical burden to another figure's shoulders by using the same elements of air and the waters of the sea to distinguish his landscape of dreams (Patusan) from the world beyond. In Patusan, as in Stein's idealistic philosophy, sky and water become intermixed and confused at the horizon, as Marlow forbiddingly notes "the gradual darkening of the river, of the air; the irresistible slow work of the night settling silently on all the visible forms, effacing the outlines, burying the shapes deeper and deeper, like a steady fall of impalpable black dust."⁹⁴ Later, Marlow compares this visual effect in Impressionistic terms when he describes Patusan as appearing "with its colour, its design and its meaning, like a picture created by fancy on a canvas upon which, after long contemplation, you turn your back for the last time. It remains in the memory motionless, unfaded, with its life arrested, in an unchanging light."⁹⁵ The use of the word "meaning" in this context reveals that Conrad intended to establish a relationship between the atmospheric haziness of the landscape and the dangerous critical haziness of the dream.

Indeed, the reference to Impressionist landscape becomes explicit when Marlow refers to turning from this

momentarily-frozen scene to a "world where events move, men change, light flickers, life flows in a clear stream, no matter whether over mud or over stones."⁹⁶ This last detail in particular reflects the revolutionary exploration by Monet and Renoir around 1867, of visual effects such as the mingling of colours as water flows over different objects and the observation that shadows are not simply black or brown but tinted with the colours of the surrounding objects. Water and objects receiving light and shadow are never precisely the same the moment after we perceive them--an effect with which Monet experimented by painting a series of fifteen paintings depicting rural scenes with haystacks at different moments in the day. It is in turning from such a transitory landscape that Marlow welcomes with relief the seascape beyond Patusan, full of objects reflected in water but with clear delineations between the object and the reflection, between sea and sky:

Below us the plain of the sea, of a serene and intense blue, stretched with a slight upward tilt to the thread-like horizon drawn at the height of our eyes...A chain of islands sat broken and massive facing the wide estuary, displayed in a sheet of pale glassy water reflecting faithfully the contour of the shore...A tiny black canoe put off amongst them with two tiny men, all black, who toiled exceedingly, striking down at the pale water: and the canoe seemed to slide painfully on a mirror.⁹⁷

Throughout this passage, expanses are broken by the contours of objects and by the precise black figures which inhabit those spaces. It is thus entirely appropriate that the harsh, disgusting parcel of reality which confronts Jim--Gentleman Brown--sails in from the sharply realistic world of the open sea. By combining such elements of visual art in his symbolic landscapes, Conrad establishes appearance and reality as equally present in experience (just as air and water form one hemisphere) but as separate elements into which man must not blindly plunge.

Conrad and the Impressionists shared not only a common concern with ambiguities and appearances but a willingness to break with artistic tradition in order to express the nature of man's experience. As Conrad wrote to a close friend, Barrett H. Clark, "I am no slave to prejudices and formulas and I shall never be. My attitude to subjects and expressions, the angles of vision, my methods of composition will...be always changing--not because I am unstable or unprincipled, but because I am free."⁹⁸ In Lord Jim, Conrad chose to approach a pure impression and judgment of a man through the use of the multiple viewpoint. He draws together a wide range of moral perceptions of Jim's act, from the French lieutenant's unquestioning yet sympathetic insistence on honour ("And

so that poor young man ran away along with the others")⁹⁹ to Chester's flat refusal to recognize any ideal whatsoever in human behaviour ("Takes it to heart?...Then he's no good").¹⁰⁰ This constant tugging at the reader's judgment, however, is always carefully weighted against Jim's favour. When Jewel and Stein bring together the two extreme perceptions of Jim's final act, "He was false" and "No! No! Not false! True! true! true!...Some day she shall understand", Marlow interrupts Stein with the biting question, "Will you explain?".¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, Marlow reveals within himself the outer conflict which divides Jewel's view from Stein's. Marlow's own Romanticism cannot allow his brutal but true admission to Jewel that Jim does not belong to the world "Because he is not good enough" to stand alone. He must immediately add his own qualifying, sympathetic view: "Nobody, nobody is good enough."¹⁰² Significantly, Jewel does not heed Marlow's second statement and by the end of the novel, neither should we.

Conrad and the Impressionists broke with tradition in presenting not only many viewpoints but oblique visions and startlingly unconventional arrangements of elements as well. In Degas' L'Absinthe* we instantly notice that the spatial arrangement of the painting seems unbalanced; the

two figures are crowded to the extreme right of the picture area, while the jutting edges of the table occupy the rest of the composition. Nevertheless, these elements are not haphazardly scattered but meticulously arranged by Degas in order to direct our attention to the desolate-looking couple. The lines of the tables, for example, draw the eye first into the space of the picture and then to the right, towards the figures. Degas even uses a folded piece of paper to link the white surfaces of the two foreground tables, thus helping along our eyes.

Conrad's narrative consists of this same unconventional arrangement and meticulous linking of elements to produce a desired effect. The chronology of the story is jumbled in such a way that events are often covered several times--from widely different points of view. The first four chapters of Lord Jim, for example, are delivered through the eyes of an omniscient narrator--one who does not scruple to reveal Jim's dreams of heroism but who does scruple to actually narrate the central portion of the Patna incident. Time then shifts to the trial one month later, on the day when Jim's eyes meet those of Marlow across the courtroom. At this moment the association is made and the burden of narration falls quite suddenly to Marlow himself. He, in turn, traces the history from his

first glimpse of Jim, skips ahead to narrate the story of Brierly's suicide, back in time to his last ominous conversation with the troubled Brierly and closes the circle with the second description of the exchanging of glances with Jim in the courtroom. This one segment of the novel alone reveals a fidelity to experience which Conrad knew the conventional narrative could never capture. In our own experience, the importance of words spoken and events witnessed often is not fully grasped by us until much later, when we are in possession of fuller knowledge, or longer contemplation. Brierly's harried aspect, and his ominous advice to Jim, "Let him creep twenty feet underground and stay there!"¹⁰³ thus achieve full impact for Marlow and for us only in the light of his subsequent suicide.

Conrad, however, does not spatially arrange elements in such a convenient way in regard to Jim. It is only on a second reading that we gain an insight into individual statements and shades of meaning which were before unclear. For example, it is only with the image of the aged Doramin raising his pistols to shoot Jim, a glittering aspect in his eyes firmly fixed in our mind, that we receive the full impact of the sinister, destructive quality of Stein's advice as we reread this line: "His [Stein's] extended hand aimed at my breast like a pistol; his deep-set eyes

seemed to pierce through me, but his twitching lips uttered no word...."¹⁰⁴ This, too, for the reader becomes a sudden glimpse through the shifting mists towards a closer perception of Conrad's design in Lord Jim.

This freely-associative technique of narration, with its striving to reproduce the workings of the human mind, ultimately foreshadows the novels of Joyce and Woolf, just as Monet's later paintings such as Waterlilies break down line, contour and the object itself until the mechanism of the mind's impressions is laid bare. This, too, foreshadows a twentieth-century art form--the abstract or non-representational painting. Both Conrad and Monet, in the final analysis, sought to represent in their art what Virginia Woolf knew to be true: "Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged, but a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end."¹⁰⁵

In this search to reproduce consciousness, Conrad's art surpasses in complexity and problematic nature the art of the early Impressionists (Renoir and Sisley, for example) which centred on optical complexity rather than on moral judgment. It was for this very reason that the Impressionist movement in art lasted only for twenty years; the pendulum was bound to swing back. Artists like Paul

Cézanne, in calling for "making out of Impressionism something solid and durable like the art of the museums",¹⁰⁶ were calling for the stylistic return of the line and contour as well as a return to several levels of meaning in art beyond the visual impression. Conrad turns this two-sided debate into a single paradox, the theses of which are the themes of the novels of 1895 to 1900--the recognition that life is inexplicably complex and the conviction that man must nevertheless make clear moral judgments in the midst of this chaos. In this sense, the novel becomes a representative test of our critical faculties as readers, as men and women, to sort out and make judgments upon the myriad details with which we are literally bombarded every day of our lives. Accordingly, many of Conrad's statements become, upon our closer inspection and introspection, directly aimed at us:

It's extraordinary how we go through life with eyes half-shut, with dull ears, with dormant thoughts. Perhaps it's just as well; and it may be that it is this very dullness that makes life to the incalculable majority so supportable and so welcome. Nevertheless there can be but few of us who had never known one of these rare moments of awakening when we see, hear, understand ever so much--everything--in a flash--before we fall back again into our agreeable somnolence.¹⁰⁷

This intense vision--at once visual, intellectual and moral--locates Conrad's place in fiction not with Wells,

Bennett and Galsworthy but with the Impressionist philosopher of sensation and knowledge, Marcel Proust:

Même l'acte si simple que nous appelons 'voir une personne que nous connaissons' est en partie un acte intellectuel. Nous remplissons l'apparence physique de l'être que nous voyons de toutes les notions que nous avons sur lui, et dans l'aspect total que nous représentons, ces notions ont certainement la plus grande part.¹⁰⁸

CHAPTER TWO

A SENSATIONAL WORLD: TOWARDS A PHILOSOPHY OF MORAL VISION 1900--1911

In The Problems of Philosophy Bertrand Russell described the quality of conscious doubt as the trait which distinguishes the pursuits of the philosopher from those of the painter. The visual artist, he theorized, "wants to know what things seem to be, the practical man and the philosopher want to know what they are; but the philosopher's wish to know this is stronger than the practical man's and is more troubled by the knowledge as to the difficulties of answering the question."¹ It is this element precisely which sets Joseph Conrad's works beyond the pale of conventional sea tales and which establishes him as a literary philosopher as sensitive as Proust and as deeply sceptical as Hardy. A letter which he wrote to R. B. Cunninghame Graham not only provides emphatic proof of this darkening vision but establishes Conrad's concerns as similar to those of the visual Impressionists--men who defied Russell's characterization of painters as those who seek "what things seem to be":

Life knows us not and we do not know life--we don't even know our own thoughts. Half the words we use

have no meaning whatever and of the other half each man understands each word after the fashion of his own folly and conceit. Faith is a myth and beliefs shift like mists on the shore, thoughts vanish; words, once pronounced, die; and the memory of yesterday is as shadowy as the hope of tomorrow...."2

This passage, rendered in the balanced cadences of Conrad's most striking prose, reveals several strands of thought which were to become major themes in his Impressionist vision after the turn of the century: the self-enclosed estrangement of man, the inability to express our innermost thoughts, the dangers of subjectivity and vanity and the seeming ineffectuality of belief. Moreover, the last clause, throwing as it does a gloomy shadow over the comforts of memory, signals Conrad's gradual turning away from the energetic recapturing of "sensations and memories" in Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands to the somberer visions of Heart of Darkness and Nostromo. In these early twentieth-century works, although the seed of the creation may lie in Conrad's own experience (the attempt to blow up the Greenwich Observatory in the case of The Secret Agent, for example) the germinating process is entirely one of independent imagination.

Accompanying (and perhaps inciting) this darkening mood which obsessed Conrad's imagination, was his growing fascination with the machinery and delusions of international

politics. Thus, the concerns explored in the first chapter, most notably the conflict between subjectivity and objectivity, reach beyond the problematics of life at sea and affairs of the heart to the more ponderous stage of political intrigue. In The Secret Agent and Under Western Eyes particularly, this question of subjective and objective realism which plagued Impressionists and Post-Impressionists alike becomes a more universal conflict between private and public visions.

A second, though related shift in Conrad's vision, and one which also firmly assures for him the title of "Impressionist philosopher" is the growing emphasis on the moral component of vision. It was this desire to bring "mind" into the representation of matter which led Maurice Denis to declare, "Who does not know the power of the mind's habits upon vision?"³ In fact, he harshly criticized the Impressionists for this very tendency to ignore tradition and compositional form for the sake of naturalistic sensation. Denis' uneasy query, "Where does the artist's temperament begin or end?"⁴ not only reveals a major issue in twentieth-century non-representational art but is the visual equivalent to Joseph Conrad's warnings of the moral dangers of rampant subjectivity in Nostromo and The Secret Agent.

These common concerns in various realms of art in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reveal the underlying philosophical concerns of the age--concerns which must be dealt with if we are to acknowledge Conrad as an Impressionist philosopher as well as an Impressionist writer.

The effect which nineteenth-century scientific thought had on the visual Impressionists and on Conrad is strikingly the same. Henri Focillon's characterization of the late nineteenth-century environment as that of a "noisy, unknown world"⁵ combines two deeply ingrained tendencies of man's experience in a changing milieu--complexity and obscurity. The primary discoveries affecting man's view of his own generation, those of Lyell and Darwin, are most often cited in literary histories to explain the insecurity of later nineteenth-century writers such as Arnold and Hardy about man's predominant role in the scheme of things. Judging from the letters of the major Impressionist artists and philosophers, however, such revelations did not occupy a place of singular importance. Rather, the new formulations of matter and mind, of sensation and human participation in the external universe (concerns linked albeit to evolutionary theory) remained

in the forefront of these minds. Such fascination is by no means accidental, for theories dealing with the experiential and the momentary processes of the mind are more closely akin to the Impressionist vision than are sequential, historical theories such as evolution. In support of such a distinction, one notes that the novelist and philosopher Eugenio d'Ors saw a clear connection between the Impressionists' emphasis on the ephemeral, the re-shifting of the scientist's world, and the new relativism in the world of the nineteenth-century historian.⁶ Impressionists such as Degas, moreover, were unquestionably more influenced by Chevreul's experiments with colour perception and by the developing art of photography than by The Origin of Species.

Conrad aligns himself with such philosophical preoccupations--especially in the warmly-contested debate between matter and mind. In a letter to Edward Garnett he abandons the subject at hand and quite clearly becomes entangled in the philosophy of sensations:

...there is nothing in the world to prevent the simultaneous existence of vertical waves, or waves at any angles...Therefore it follows that two universes may exist in the same place and in the same time...if by universes we mean a set of states of consciousness...It was so--said the Doctor--and there is no space, time, matter, mind as vulgarly understood, there is only the eternal something

that waves and an eternal force that causes the waves...and by virtue of these two eternities exists that Corot and that Whistler in the diningroom upstairs....⁷

That Conrad should cite the vibrant canvases of Corot and Whistler in connection with these visual "waves" is ample proof that he was aware of the aims and effects of such art, linked as it is philosophically and visually with such processes of seeing. Such queries--the physical solidity of human sensations such as sight--are a natural part of the larger query which Tyndall placed before the Oxford scholars and before the men of his time: "Divorced from matter, where is life to be found?"⁸

This interplay between mind and eye is the exact division which provoked the Post-Impressionist response. Cézanne's famous apostrophe to Monet, "Il n'est qu'un oeil, mais quel oeil!"⁹, speaks tellingly of what Cézanne found both to admire and to depart from in Impressionist art. One need only compare his Portrait of Madame Cezanne* to Renoir's woman in On the Terrace* to seize this difference in temperament and philosophy. Whereas Renoir's woman, rendered in broken, minute strokes, shimmers before our eyes and impresses us with her sheer, careless loveliness, Cézanne's woman is solidly defined in terms of facet-like planes. The resulting impression in the Cézanne portrait

is that of a complex personality beneath the monumental face, capable of being probed and ultimately discovered in psychological terms.

Like the Impressionists, Conrad especially in these middle years, sought a fusion of sensation and significance in his art--a fusion which will become progressively clearer as one examines the development from "Youth" to Heart of Darkness to Under Western Eyes. Like the Impressionists, too, he laboured under the stereotype of an artist who works merely with the surfaces of life, In spite of what Cézanne and Gauguin found to criticize in their predecessors (as every artistic movement seeks to distinguish itself from that of its predecessors), Impressionism did not exclude considerations beyond the visual surface. It, too, was a reaction against earlier traditions--most notably the Renaissance concept of vision as something quantifiable and transparently accessible to man. It is only natural, then, that pure, momentary vision should be stressed at the expense of "significance" or allegorical levels in art. As Sir Ernest Gombrich wrote, the Impressionists discovered the rules of ideal representation of fully realized subjects to be the "last hide-out of the ancient domination of knowledge over vision."¹⁰ Thus, the time was ripe for a reaffirmation of spontaneous vision over intellectual

calculation. Nevertheless, Monet's views of London tell us infinitely less about the subject than about how we attain knowledge; they do not assert a surface reality but rather dissect and throw into question our conceptions of external, "measurable" reality much in the manner of Conrad. As Jacques Lassaigue argues in his sensitive, polemical study of Impressionism, the "cult of the ephemeral...could not hide the fact that durable reality remains in structure and framework and also ideas. The water flows on, never the same, but the river remains."¹¹ In spite of this reflection, the key question--for Conrad and for thoughtful viewers of this revolutionary art--remains: How accessible and therefore how real is this hidden, uncertain stratum of reality?

Conrad's attempts to find a suitable answer to this universal doubt which reaches back to the age of Descartes, aligns him with the philosophy as well as the art of the day. In the novels of this middle period, the moral significance with which he invests streams of sensations far outweighs any such moral weighting in Almayer's Folly. Indeed, Conrad was unquestionably conscious, as was Cézanne, of the need to reach beyond surfaces. Thus, in a letter of advice to Edward Noble, he emphatically asserted this variety of moral Impressionism: "You have a remarkable gift

of expression, the outcome of an artistic feeling for the world around you, and you must not waste the gift in...illegitimate sensation."¹² Therefore, Conrad, as an earlier nineteenth-century man of letters, Coleridge, seeks in artistic expression a fusion of opposites; an "organic unity." The Impressionist vision differs, though, in that like Russell's philosopher, Conrad is acutely aware of the unlikelihood of finding satisfactory answers. Unlike his literary predecessor as well, Conrad is clearly an Impressionist and a late nineteenth-century philosopher in his persistent emphasis on vision first and foremost. His philosophy is virtually identical in this respect to the subjectivity of Heisenberg, who proclaimed:

The ancient division of the universe into an objective unfolding in space and time on the one hand, into a soul which reflects this unfolding, and on the other a division corresponding to that of Descartes into 'res cogitans' and 'res extensa' is no longer suitable as a point of departure if one wishes to understand the modern sciences of nature...."¹³

Like Monet, then, who saw no need to paint an ideal, fully realized representation of a locomotive in La Gare Saint-Lazare* rather than the smoky scene which is our experience, Conrad too found no need to separate theory from experience.

A final area to consider before exploring Conrad's darker, more philosophical works of 1900--1911 is the

growing cause of the feelings of instability, of transitoriness which promote the Impressionist vision. At the same time that the wave of subjectivity just described swept all areas of human thought, the impression of man as an infinitesimal speck faced with ponderous forces was felt more forcefully than ever. John William Cunliffe, a contemporary of Conrad (and a critic of the Wells, Bennett, Galsworthy circle) refers to the contemporary spectator of world events as "merely an atom in the whirl of conflicting tendencies."¹⁴ That Conrad himself voiced and was influenced by such views is evidenced in Edward Garnett's sympathetic review of Nostromo in Speaker:

In Mr. Conrad's vision we may image Nature as a ceaselessly-flowing infinite river of life out of which the tiny atom of each man's individual life emerges into sight, stands out in the surrounding atmosphere, and is lost again in the infinite succession of the fresh waves of life into which it dissolves.¹⁵

This searching response, uttered in the most impressionistic of terms, suggests most strongly that discussions of the ephemeral nature of man's existence must have passed between these closest of friends.

For Conrad in the years 1900--1911, this gloomy vision would be reinforced by the impact of external events, and his subject matter accordingly, would centre

increasingly on politics and intrigue. Evidently Conrad felt this impact of public catastrophes in an intensely personal way, almost as though international affairs were conspiring with private tragedies to make his existence upon earth even more hellish. Comments such as the following from a letter of December, 1899 are not by any means rare in his correspondence: "I am so utterly and radically sick of this African business [the Boer War] that if I could take a sleeping draft on the chance of not waking till it is all over, I would let Jim go and take the consequences."¹⁶ This sense of intense personal outrage at public disasters (not surprising in view of Conrad's early experiences in Poland, where public policy meant the ultimate loss of both parents) certainly found a wealth of disasters to feed upon during these years, from the 1905 Bloody Sunday riots in Russia to the formation of the Triple Entente and the growing tensions in Europe from 1907. This progressive darkening, therefore, in the novels of these years owes as much to Conrad's increasing interest in politics, as to his growing fascination with philosophies of knowing. In fact, the two concerns fuse in his middle novels to form a more sombre, intense expression of literary Impressionism.

The turn of the century finds Conrad, too, in a state of transition. Although he had by this time completed

Heart of Darkness (the first of his "darker" works, not published in a collection until 1902) he published in 1900 a fairly light tale of the sea, "Youth," which he described to his publisher, William Blackwood, as merely "a bit of life."¹⁷ Nevertheless, Conrad has posited both value and significance in this tale of a romantic young man's first experiences with the trials of the sea--a fact disregarded by most readers of the tale, who like George Moore criticized his British contemporary as a "marin litterateur" incapable, in his eyes [of] "faire oeuvre d'art."¹⁸ (NB)

Although the surface impression of Marlow--and of Conrad--as a raconteur of the sea predominates, there appear darker touches and profounder depths at certain points in Marlow's narrative. The use of natural description, for example, often discloses more than mere topographical information. The youthful Marlow, not as yet disillusioned by the harsher aspects of the sea, confronts the mystery of the East, whose capacity for cruelty and destruction is foreshadowed in the details of the very landscape:

The scented obscurity of the shore was grouped into vast masses, a density of colossal clumps of vegetation, probably--mute and fantastic shapes. And at their foot the semi-circle of a beach gleamed faintly, like an illusion. There was not a light, not a stir, not a sound. The

mysterious East faced me, perfumed like a flower,
 silent like death, dark like a grave.¹⁹

This interplay of solid contours and hazy illusions, so akin to the vision of Jim's opportunity in Patusan, sitting "veiled by his side like an Eastern bride waiting to be uncovered by the hand of the master,"²⁰ promises the same sort of disillusionment. In "Youth," too, this ironic reference to man's mastery of the obscure sounds an ominous note, immediately following this natural description: "And I sat weary beyond expression, exulting like a conqueror, sleepless and entranced as if before a profound, a fateful enigma."²¹ Thus, the correspondence between the external and concrete and the intensely personal (a connection to be elaborated upon in the political novels) is established even in this seemingly straightforward narrative. Moreover, the association of the East with forces incomprehensible to man is a prelude to the complex interplay between East and West in Under Western Eyes: "And then, before I could open my lips, the East spoke to me, but it was in a Western voice."²² Like Eliot's final fragmentary expressions in "What the Thunder Said," one assumes that the words of the East, could they be spoken, would be in a mode and tradition entirely removed from Western man.

The basic link, however, between physical hardship

and moral testing which is established in "Youth" continues to be one of the hallmarks of Conrad's Impressionist method in the novels to come. At the very beginning of the romance, Marlow does point out that "there are those voyages that seem ordered for the illustration of life, that might stand for a symbol of existence."²³ He then goes on to clarify this personal theory, by associating specifically the physical trials of the voyage with those which lead most directly to a moral wisdom: "You fight, work, sweat, nearly kill yourself, sometimes do kill yourself, trying to accomplish something and you can't...You simply can do nothing...not even marry an old maid, or get a wretched six-hundred-ton cargo of coal to its port of destination."²⁴ Such a declaration, so early in Marlow's narrative, should sensitize us to the hidden level of the adventures at sea--a level which lies, like Jim's "Eastern bride," silently veiled at our side.

Evidence that this veiling of moral intentions behind apparent surfaces was indeed Conrad's intention in such a work appears in his own writings and in those of his literary circle. At this time, Conrad was still under the influence of Daudet and Maupassant, both of whom employed the technique of relating the most common series of events to illustrate a moral point. In a self-revealing portion of Notes on Life and Letters, Conrad praises Daudet as a

man who "did not pretend to see any depths in a life that is only a film of unsteady appearances stretched over regions deep indeed."²⁵ The use of the sea metaphor in this context is interesting to say the least. This same homage he pays to Maupassant, with the added observation that the representation of the surfaces demands a corresponding moral observation on the part of the reader: "His facts are so perfectly rendered that like the actualities of life itself, they demand from the reader the faculty of observation which is rare...."²⁶

In "Youth" the influence of both of these monumental predecessors is evident. When the cargo of coal in the "Judea" is accidentally set on fire, the billows of smoke which flood the ship have a meaning far beyond the visual level: "The smoke kept coming out through imperceptible crevices; it forced itself through bulkheads and covers; it oozed here and there and everywhere in slender threads in an invisible film, in an incomprehensible manner."²⁷ This passage, suffering though it does from Conrad's tendency to multiply epithets, suggests a smoke which is as insidious as death itself. In the midst of the exhausting endeavours of the crew, however, the face of the sea and sky remains serene--"a miracle of purity."²⁸ Like de Maupassant, who according to Ford Madox Ford in "On

Impressionism," proceeded from the particular to the general,²⁹ Conrad revives this technique, adding to it his characteristic emphasis on physical action and courage.

That Conrad actually associated this method with the work of the visual and musical Impressionists rather than with the prevailing tradition of Thackeray, Scott and George Eliot, is clearly stated in a key letter to William Blackwood: "But these are great names. I don't compare myself with them. I am modern, and I would rather recall Wagner the musician and Rodin the sculptor...and Whistler the painter who made Ruskin the critic foam at the mouth with scorn and indignation. They too have arrived." Conrad then goes on to place his work in relation to these visual experimenters, with particular emphasis placed on the moral extractions from visual sensation:

My work...is not an endless analysis of affected sentiments but in its essence it is action... action observed, felt and interpreted with an absolute truth to my sensations (which are the basis of art in literature)--action of human beings that will bleed to a prick, and are moving in a visible world. This is my creed.³⁰

As a creed, this utterance is a fuller expression of Conrad's artistic aims than the much-quoted, much-disputed Preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus, for it shifts the emphasis from visual to moral perception and thus affords a maturer

insight into Conrad's peculiar form of Impressionism.

Another "transitional" piece, worthy of study in terms of Conrad's slowly darkening vision, is the short story, "The End of the Tether," published along with "Youth" and Heart of Darkness in the collected volume of 1902. It is in this story that the relationship between "knowing" and "seeing" gains the problematic nature which informs Heart of Darkness. Like Melville's "Benito Cereno," it explores the dangerous incapacity of man to perceive the subtler forms of evil. As in Lord Jim, perception must finally necessitate distinction of a decidedly moral nature, yet it is precisely this type of distinction which Captain Whalley is unfit to make. Persisting in the ebullient romanticism of his belief that "a disposition for good existed in every man,"³¹ he trusts the shadowy Massy in spite of his nagging instincts. Of particular note in terms of Impressionist vision is Conrad's clear association of vision and morality: "A pilot sees better than a stranger, because his local knowledge, like a sharper vision, completes the shapes of things hurriedly glimpsed; penetrates the veils of mist spread over the land by the storms of the sea." From this visual basis, Conrad presses home the concept of knowledge as inspired vision: "He [the pilot] recognizes because he already knows. It is not to his

far-reaching eye but to his more extensive knowledge that the pilot looks for certitudes."³² Although the certitude explicitly referred to in this instance is the ship's position, the reader mustn't forget that the chapter begins with the following disquisition on an entirely different sort of "knowledge": While gazing at Captain Whalley, the mate Sterne reflects that "The knowledge was too disturbing, really. There was 'something wrong' with a vengeance, and the moral certitude of it was at first simply frightful to contemplate."³³

Although Captain Whalley's defects are, in the final analysis, unconvincing in terms of moral choice (he happens to lose his savings just as he happens to go--symbolically--blind) they hint at the weaknesses which plague Kurtz and Martin Decoud. That is, the only fate which awaits those who are unable to filter perceptions and experiences through a distinctive, critical mind is obscurity and madness. As such, the story, in spite of its weaknesses, reveals the harsh truth which John Berger refers to in Ways of Seeing: "The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled."³⁴ Conrad takes this particular perceptual truth and progressively transforms it into a moral statement--a progression which reaches its full potential in Nostromo.

It is in Heart of Darkness, though, that Conrad's "dark Impressionism" fully matures. Free of the stylistic ebullience of "Youth" and the inconsistencies of "The End of the Tether," Conrad is here able to link visual effects to moral issues which are ponderous enough to bear the emphasis. In fact, Conrad himself pondered this new "weightiness" of his novella in relation to its visual impact in a letter to Ford Madox Ford's wife, Elsie Hueffer: "What I distinctly admit is the fault of having made Kurtz too symbolic or rather symbolic at all. But the story being mainly a vehicle for conveying a batch of personal impressions I...took the line of least resistance."³⁵ Underlying this overly-scrupulous concern is the fact that Marlow's journey was a fresh venture for Conrad the Impressionist as well, into unplumbed "hearts of darkness."

One way in which Conrad explored new depths in his art was his closer attention to the structure of a tale and the possibilities for new complexities therein. His major experiment in this direction was to interweave the Impressionist philosophy of uncertainty and doubt with the various levels of storytelling, until the tale itself was to become as subtle and foreboding as the Congo jungle. Starting from the outer extremities of the narration, filtered through the eyes of an impersonal narrator, Conrad

begins a weaving of clarity and indistinctness which is to continue into the heart of the story. As in "Youth," the tale opens with one of Conrad's most frequently-used Impressionist devices--the "paysage moralisé." Here we behold an enigmatic land where "sea and...sky were welded together without a joint."³⁶ The enigma, though, which opens the forebodingly-entitled story Heart of Darkness is England--a land familiar to all of the men present and yet a land which provokes Marlow's first troubling words: "And this also...has been one of the dark places of the earth."³⁷ Instantly, then, our conceptions of familiarity and estrangement are subtly undermined and the possibility that the enigma of the story lies in what is most familiar to us--our own beings--is masterfully suggested. Moreover, if we scrutinize the visual details of this "paysage moralisé" we find the oft-used image of the interpenetration of sea and sky, wherein horizons melt into obscurity--a precise image (in An Outcast of the Islands and Lord Jim as well) of the Impressionist struggle between subjective, often blind vision and visual distinctions and detachment. Although Kurtz, at this precise moment has already rejected any sort of critical detachment from the wilderness, leaving him "hollow" at the core,³⁸ Marlow's listeners are just at the point of glimpsing this horizon; of facing the critical

test of distinction and moral judgment.

This investing of the artistic elements of line and haze with moral forebodings continues on another level within Marlow's narrative. As Marlow sets off for the mouth of the Congo in a French steamer, he muses that watching the line of the coast "is like thinking about an enigma." Whereas the sea-line is "blurred by a creeping mist," the line of the gloomy jungle is solid and foreboding, "like a ruled line."³⁹ Indeed, as Marlow comes to perceive through the horrific events which culminate in Kurtz's death, the jungle is, in truth, the ultimate reality to be faced.

Interestingly, this same interplay between solidity and ambiguity reaches yet another level--that of the very act of narration. It is the impersonal narrator who informs us in the most impressionistic of terms that for Marlow "the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine."⁴⁰ Thus, we should be sensitized to the vision peculiar to Impressionism which is to dominate Marlow's (and Conrad's) narrative--that surfaces and sensations are not merely "illusions" to be

differentiated from a knowable "reality" as in traditional literature from Defoe to Thackeray. Rather, the external, treacherous though it is, becomes in the Impressionist vision the only route to knowledge accessible to man. This philosophical reversal of the ancient division between "appearances" and "reality" is, in fact, a result of the Impressionist vision. One of the first commentators on the new art, Jules LaForgue, contemplated the same inversion when he postulated the perception of line and contour as mere habit--a "convenience of experience."⁴¹ The trained Impressionist eye, however, is able according to LaForgue, to look beyond convention until it "reaches the point of seeing reality in the living atmosphere of form, broken up, refracted and reflected by beings and things in endless variations."⁴² It is such a miasma of sensations and appearances which Marlow must face when confronted with a being who is at once "a voice," a reputation and a "hollow sham"⁴³--Kurtz.

This apparent ambiguity voiced by Marlow and Conrad concerning the possibility of dealing with the "outer shell" often produces the impression on the part of readers and critics that the pith of the tale is similarly ambiguous. Jocelyn Baines, for example, wrongly interprets Marlow's belief about the meaningful exterior

of a tale by imputing a supposed fuzzy vision to the author himself: "Conrad did not live in a world of sharp emotional or intellectual distinctions, and the power and fascination of Heart of Darkness rest upon the tale's moral elusiveness and ambiguity."⁴⁴ Such a tendency to fall into the traditional segregation of delusive appearances and moral "reality" rather than recognizing the moral Impressionism of the tale leads to a too complacent obscurantism. Like the naive listeners of Marlow's tale, such an assumption leaves the reader only the dangerous alternative of concluding that "we knew we were fated, before the ebb began to run, to hear one of Marlow's inconclusive experiences"! Rather, it is our duty as readers to seek out and distinguish what Marlow in Lord Jim calls "the truth disclosed in a moment of illusion."⁴⁶

Along with this increasingly sophisticated structure develops a scepticism eventually deepening into the vision of Nostromo--a scepticism deeper because it, too, is felt on many levels of experience. Before Marlow experiences the impossibility of deciphering Mr. Kurtz (who appears, significantly, quite late in the tale) he confronts the utter incomprehensibility of the political and economic monster. The two wraith-like knitting figures in the Company Office, the sepulchral city itself, the "incomprehensible" man-of-war, unconcernedly "firing into a

continent"⁴⁷--all are unconceivable realities which exist nevertheless and must be deciphered by Marlow. In comparison with these manifest idiocies, at least the enigmatic Kurtz reveals, to Marlow's eye, a critical distinction of some sort, however late: "I understand better the meaning of his stare that could not see the flame of the candle, but was wide enough to embrace the whole universe, piercing enough to penetrate all the hearts that beat in the darkness. He had summed up--he had judged: 'The horror!'"⁴⁸ Kurtz's dim moral eyesight, then, does not alter the fact that he, like Jim, touches upon and penetrates the "hidden plague spots" of mankind.⁴⁹ This intolerable human ignorance, however, wherein public motives are a profound mystery and private glimpses of fellow men few and despairing, is far wider in breadth than in Lord Jim or Almayer's Folly.

Similarly, Marlow's complaints in Heart of Darkness about the inability of one man to express his peculiar vision to another reach profounder depths and wider applications in human life. Conrad achieves this depth by exploring layers of existence, finding each one as equally mystifying as the last. A striking example of this occurs during Marlow's talk with the supercilious agent. As Marlow's mind wanders from the inanities uttered by this "papier-mâché Mephistopheles,"⁵⁰ he contemplates "whether

the stillness on the face of the immensity looking at us two were meant as an appeal or as a menace."⁵¹ The utter indecipherability of this massive wilderness is absolute and rendered in terms of the absence of sensation; it is described by Marlow as deaf and dumb. Indeed, Marlow senses that its utter inscrutability is linked to a moral emptiness as well: "Yet somehow it didn't bring any image with it--no more than if I had been told an angel or a fiend was in there."⁵²

Faced with this utter vacuum of sense (in both perceptual and moral terms) the only place to which Marlow's inquisitiveness can flee is within himself and his story of Kurtz, and there too he finds only doubt: "Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything?"⁵³ Finally, faced with the inability to thus assure himself of his own existence, Marlow frames the underlying philosophical problem of expression: "It seems to me that I am trying to tell you a dream--making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream sensation."⁵⁴ At this point, aeons away from the scenario of Marlow and the agent in the Congo, we become caught up in one man's attempt to express and thus concretize an impression: "that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being

captured by the incredible which is the very essence of dreams...."⁵⁵ Marlow's attempt is doomed to meet with the silence which ensues among his listeners, for he is powerless to define his dream in any terms other than those of a dream. This, in effect, is the same stage which Marlow in Lord Jim reaches when he claims with exasperation, "I am trying to interpret for you into slow speech the instantaneous effects of visual impressions."⁵⁶ The Marlow of Heart of Darkness and of Conrad's darkening scepticism, however, takes this philosophy one step further, to utter negation:

No, it is impossible; it is impossible to convey the life-sensations of any given epoch of one's existence--that which makes its truth, its meaning--its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream--alone....⁵⁷

The same terrifying moral solitude is to be glimpsed again by Conrad through the eyes of Martin Decoud and Razumov.

This inability to express, a theme of an apparently literary nature alone, does play a prominent role in Impressionist theory. For its expression, however, one can only turn to the letters of Impressionists, for painting, unlike literature, cannot clearly reveal to the viewer the labours and woes of its composition. Cézanne put the balance between sensation and expression in a proper

perspective when he commented to a friend that "if the strong experience of nature...is the necessary basis for all conceptions of art...the knowledge of the means of expressing our emotion is no less essential and is only to be acquired through very long experience."⁵⁸ In a less meditative mood--one which probably reflects those labours and woes of composition--he reported to his friend, Joachim Gasquet, "At the present time I am still searching for the expression of those confused sensations that we bring with us at birth."⁵⁹ No utterance could be closer in spirit to Marlow's musings on the subject or Conrad's in his own personal correspondence. If anything, Conrad's own descriptions are the most consciously Impressionist in tone, combining the mood and imagery of Monet and Debussy: "Words blow away like mist," he reflected forlornly to W. E. Henley, "and like mist they only serve to obscure, to make vague the real shape of one's feelings."⁶⁰

At the same time, Conrad realizes most powerfully in Heart of Darkness that although sensations are fleeting and obscure, they are the only materials left for man to act upon--and act he must. Marlow proposes exactly this solution to combat the ceaseless flow of sensation:

The earth for us is a place to live in, where we must put up with sights, with sounds, with smells, too, by Jove!...And there, don't you see? your

strength comes in, the faith in your ability for the digging of unostentatious holes to bury the stuff in--your power of devotion, not to yourself, but to an obscure, back-breaking business.⁶¹

Through activity, as will be explored in Nostromo, man imposes himself on his surroundings and thus keeps the distinctions between subjective and external as clear as the line of the horizon.

Kurtz's devotion, on the other hand, is primarily to himself, and this moral error introduces a theme already noticeable in An Outcast of the Islands and Lord Jim--that of the dangers of subjectivity. In Heart of Darkness and in Kurtz especially, however, the process of the outer world appropriating and destroying the inner core of a man is more fully realized. Kurtz is repeatedly described, as is Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov, as a man who has stepped over a boundary. Kurtz's boundary is not primarily a social one typical of nineteenth-century fiction, however, but is entirely psychological and thus typically modern. In sharp contrast to Marlow, for whom the earth is a source of experiences which man must "put up with," Kurtz appears to Marlow as a man who has verily "kicked himself loose of the earth."⁶² Thus isolated from all that could assure him of his own existence, Kurtz can only become a hollow shell of a man, or as Marlow refers to him, "a tragic and familiar Shade."⁶³

Again, Conrad's treatment of this conflict between subjectivity and objectivity assumes a complexity far beyond the early novels. Marlow is not entirely repelled but fascinated by the figure of Kurtz, much as an earlier Marlow is at turns attracted and exasperated by Jim. Of their first meeting in the jungle, Marlow later reflects, "I had to beat this Shadow--this wandering and tormented thing" while at the same time acknowledging that "the foundations of our intimacy were being laid--to endure--to endure--even to the end--even beyond."⁶⁴ Unlike the earlier Marlow's judgment, however, this Marlow's dilemma is treated by Conrad as a much deeper philosophical choice. In terms of the subjective resources available to him in a world of fleeting sensation, Marlow finds principles to be extrinsic and therefore clearly of no use: "Principles? Principles won't do. Acquisitions, clothes, pretty rags--rags that would fly off at the first good shake. No; you want a deliberate belief."⁶⁵ Such a view was undoubtedly held by Conrad himself, who in A Personal Record speaks of Anatole France's opinion that no principles and rules exist as being "very true. Rules, principles and standards die and vanish every day."⁶⁶ These words, so close in spirit and expression to those spoken later by Hemingway on the lofty sentiments of honour and loyalty, betray a preference for an internal morality rather than an external "rule-book"

morality. Marlow's phrase is, after all, "a deliberate belief." The final distinction to be made, then, in Heart of Darkness lies between the nightmare which Kurtz allows his life to become and the "choice of nightmares"⁶⁸ which Marlow and all men are called upon to make. It is this choice of obscure alternatives which Marlow and Conrad--not to say Cézanne and Monet--conceive of as their "great and saving illusion."⁶⁹

A fresh perspective on this gloomy yet "saving" illusion is afforded us by the novel which Conrad undertook in collaboration with Ford Madox Ford, Romance. One would expect, since Ford's direct, simple prose is as far removed from the elaborately twisted syntax and generous modifiers of Conrad, to find a veritable "mixed bag" of expression. Certainly, Henry James, conscious at all times of stylistic decorum, exclaimed of the joint effort, "To me this is like a bad dream which one relates at breakfast! Their traditions and their gifts are so dissimilar."⁷⁰ Notwithstanding James's objection, however, the novel reveals a uniformity of purpose which, I maintain, bespeaks similar attitudes--especially those attitudes which may be summed up as "literary Impressionism."

Although Ford wrote several articles and manifestos on this particular approach (the most informative being "On

Impressionism"), the fact remains that Conrad did not make any such "manifesto" statement of that type. Notwithstanding this fact, Ford did not scruple to make such a statement on behalf of Conrad after the latter's death. In Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance, he issues a declaration which deserves to be quoted and examined at some length:

We accepted without much protest the stigma "Impressionists" that was thrown at us. In those days Impressionists were still considered to be bad people: Atheists, Reds, wearing red ties with which to frighten householders. But...we saw that Life did not narrate, but made impressions on our brains. We in turn, if we wished to produce on you an effect of life, must not narrate but render impressions.⁷¹

Conrad's questionable allegiance aside, such was the practice of Ford particularly in novels which reveal peculiarly Conradian themes. In The Good Soldier, for example, Ford remains faithful to his dictate of presenting sensations first while revealing the familiar theme of uncertainty. Thus, the narrator, recalling the night of his wife's suicide, reflects that "my recollection of that night is only the sort of pinkish effulgence from the electric lamps in the hotel lounge. There seemed to bob up into my consciousness, like floating globes the faces of those three [the Grand Duke, the chief of police and the hotel proprietor]." ⁷² After overtly signalling that "those are my impressions," the narrator goes on to narrate "What

actually happened."⁷³ This procedure, obvious and methodical though it is, is equivalent to what Ian Watt has identified as "delayed decoding" in Conrad and which, according to Ford, was most frequently practised by a writer greatly esteemed by both men--Guy de Maupassant.⁷⁴

In Romance, those sections acknowledged by Conrad to be mainly his own products (Parts Three and Four)⁷⁵ frequently conform most closely to the edicts of literary Impressionism as set down by Ford! In Part Four, for example, Conrad departs from the usual openings of chapters (frequently meditations on memory and romance or words taken in medias res of conversations) to present sensations first and commentary later: "There was a slight, almost imperceptible jar, a faint grating noise, a whispering sound of sand--and the boat, without a splash, floated."⁷⁶

Perhaps more important, though, than this stylistic distinction is the conscious link which Conrad in Part Four forms between physical sensations and the moral testing of man. In the midst of John Kemp's struggle to escape with Seraphina aboard the "Lion," the narrator interposes with the observation that "There are times when an austere and just Providence, in its march along the inscrutable way, brings our hearts to the test of their own unreason...And such moments remain marked by indelible physical impressions, standing out of the ghostly level

of memory like rocks out of the sea."⁷⁷ Thus Romance is of interest in that it restates the relationship between physical and moral testing already suggested by Marlow, but in explicitly impressionistic terms. Indeed, the thesis suggested by the narrator of Romance is precisely the link which Cézanne perceived in the visual works of his contemporary, Emile Bernard: "Your desire to find a moral, an intellectual point of support in the works...makes you continually on the qui vive, searching incessantly for the way that you dimly apprehend, which will lead you surely to the recognition in front of nature, of what your means of expression are...."⁷⁸ How significant, indeed, that Cézanne should isolate not only the moral and visual relationship but the entire problem of "means of expression" which plays such a dominant role in Heart of Darkness.

Finally, Romance not only looks back to Heart of Darkness but forward to Conrad's political novels, particularly on the subject of man's acts when faced with moral necessity. When Castro, surrendering to the physical temptation of thirst, betrays Kemp, whereas Kemp later resists the very same temptation, Conrad creates a vivid tableau which allows him to contrast the two moral choices. Castro, his thirst slaked, is bound to his captors, for he must then fulfil his promise to betray Kemp. Kemp himself (hidden and listening in a nearby cave) reflects that "the ultimate value

of life to all of us is based on the means of self-deception. Morally he had his back against the wall...."⁷⁹

When the time comes for John Kemp to be tested, we are subtly made aware of the differences in the moral reasoning of the two men. Whereas Castro reacts totally in terms of subjectivity, impulse and appetite, Kemp achieves detachment by distinguishing between the perception and the moral signification. First, the flask of water literally registers itself on his retina with luscious appeal: "It had been freshly filled with water; it was dripping wet outside and the silver top, struck by the sunbeams, dazzled my eyes."⁸⁰ Although his eyes are dazzled, Kemp's judgment remains wholly functioning and he is able to thus interpret the glistening apparition: "This was the danger--this bait...With a great effort I resisted the madness that incited me to hurl myself upon the flask."⁸¹

This ability to detach oneself from the more tempting obsessions of the political or economic type rather than the purely physical is the moral standard upon which rests the fate of the characters of Nostromo, The Secret Agent and Under Western Eyes.

Virginia Woolf maintained that "All great writers are great colourists...; they always contrive to make

their scenes glow and darken and change to the eye."⁸² With the three monumental novels which mark Conrad's period of a most intense preoccupation with political intrigues, the hue becomes correspondingly sombre and subdued. It is indeed fitting that this period, from 1904 on, marks as well the final break with Blackwood's Magazine, for this sombre vision along with the already-noted growing structural complexity of his novels, placed Conrad's narratives aeons apart from the hardy tales of adventure and romance which were "Maga"'s mainstay. It was at this juncture, therefore, that Conrad penned the fascinating letter to William Blackwood, comparing his art to that of Rodin and Whistler.

Nostromo reveals precisely why Conrad felt himself to be an alien among the other regular writers for Blackwood's, for it multiplies the storytelling possibilities which he tentatively explored in Lord Jim. Accordingly, the reviews of the day are filled with bewildered queries about the novel's basic structure--its chronological shifts, multiple narrators and interwoven clusters of characters. C. D. O. Barrie registered such frustration in the British Weekly: "...Nostromo is not well told. The plot is confused; the tale does not run smoothly from incident to incident; it is often difficult to say when or where we are." Ironically, though, Barrie unwittingly isolated the very

reason for his confusion and for the confusion of the earliest of viewers of Impressionist art: "It is as though he had chosen a new way to impart reality."⁸³

It is in this sense precisely that Nostromo reveals the Impressionist vision of Lord Jim writ large on an international scale. Conrad himself refers to the novel as "an intense creative effort on what I suppose will always remain my largest canvas."⁸⁴ In spite of the fact that Albert J. Guerard sees the novel as infinitely closer to nineteenth-century "realistic" fiction than to the experimental Lord Jim,⁸⁵ one need only explore the complications in narrative progression to throw this argument into some doubt. To isolate only a minute segment, for instance, we find that from the moment that a cry and a shattering noise reveal someone bursting through the shutters of Giorgio Viola's house, the scene shifts back in time to the already-mentioned Nostromo, and works its way back in time to the former scene at Viola's house. This shifting, in fact, occurs only in the first four chapters of the novel! Of course, in terms of narratorial complexity, one receives information and impressions filtered through such various eyes as those of Captain Mitchell, a mysterious involved narrator, Decoud (through his letter to his sister) and finally, after Nostromo's death, Dr. Monygham. The

fact that figures like Monygham undergo linear "adventures" should not detract from the novel's Impressionist structure as Guerard suggests that it does.⁸⁶ One must keep in mind that while filtering the events of the moment through the consciousness of a particular narrator, the other characters appearing on Conrad's canvas must of necessity be viewed from the exterior.

These constant shifts and disruptions are an obvious link to Lord Jim; other subtler techniques of literary Impressionism, however, exist as well in Nostromo. The masterful use of retrospection, for example, noted in Lord Jim, wherein sensations are often perceived in the light of more recently-acquired knowledge reappears in Nostromo. When we return to the shot which had earlier startled the dying Teresa, we now invest the event with the knowledge that the cowardly Hirsch has been tortured and shot. This concurrence shocks us with the realization that sensations and experiences which appear fortuitous or even meaningless may reveal unsuspected, treacherous depths.

The practice, too, of introducing major characters in what may be called an "oblique" fashion finds its roots most solidly in Impressionist theory. Degas, for instance, was fond of placing his figures at the side, or in remote corners of his compositions as is revealed in Miss Lola at

the Fernando Circus.* Nostromo himself first appears in literally this oblique way; as Antonia and Decoud are talking on the balcony of the Casa Gould, the shadowy, partially-concealed figure of the capataz de cargadores rides by "with a gleam of dim light."⁸⁷ Moreover, this appearance occurs one third of the way through the novel--a fact which has puzzled and irritated critics and readers alike. In terms of the vision of literary Impressionism, however, this practice of perceiving the significant out of the corner of one's eye is acknowledged by Conrad himself in a letter to R. B. Cunningham Graham: "And suppose Truth is just round the corner like the elusive and useless loafer it is? I can't tell. No one can tell...Straight vision is bad form--as you know. The proper thing is to look round the corner."⁸⁸ Thus, the elusive, oblique approach is associated most certainly in Conrad's mind with his ideas on knowledge and sensation.

Like Heart of Darkness, Nostromo opens with a foreboding image of a blurred horizon. The description, however, is more monumental (it occupies much of the first chapter) and more ubiquitous in its gloom. If we look closely, we discover that the point of Costaguana is "not visible at all" and that a "patch of blue mist" is in actuality the neighbouring peninsula of Azuera.⁸⁹ This sense of uncertain

solidity reaches a climax, as the peaks of the Cordillera, initially described as a "clear-cut vision" are suddenly and enigmatically lost amid the clouds of mist creeping out of the lower valleys.⁹⁰ The overall effect leaves the reader with no doubt that the enterprising spirit of "Youth" could not possibly exist in such gloomy circumstances.

In fact, it is precisely the spirit of enterprise which turns sour and deadly in Costaguana, along with the certitudes of what constitutes noble behaviour. Such uncertainty on a grand scale is suggested early in the novel, with Captain Mitchell's complacent pride in "his profound knowledge of men and things in the country."⁹¹ Judging from the atmosphere of the "things" in Costaguana already described, the reader can do little else but doubt Mitchell's perception in other areas even at this early stage.

This hint of "unknowability" becomes at once particular and universal in the episode of Señor Hirsch, the cowardly hide-merchant. This cowardice, so akin to the moral failings of Castro in Romance, is much more universal in its applications, for we are told that the fate of Hirsch is "suspended in the darkness of the gulf, at the mercy of events which could not be foreseen."⁹² If we have any doubts as to the applicability of such an uncertainty

to most of the characters in the novel (and most of mankind as a whole) they are soon dispelled by the following comment concerning Martin Decoud, a mere two paragraphs later: "Intellectually self-confident, he suffered from being deprived of the only weapon he could use with effect. No intelligence could penetrate the darkness of the placid gulf " [emphasis mine]. This intentional parallel of concrete landscapes speaks powerfully of the vulnerability of coward and intellectual alike before the impassive powers which surround them.

The monumental canvas of Nostromo allows Conrad to elaborate upon his earlier treatment of the no less treacherous conflict between Romantic subjectivity and critical detachment. Whereas in Lord Jim and Heart of Darkness this conflict tends to take place largely on two levels--that of the subject of the narration (Jim and Kurtz) and that of the narratorial voice (Marlow)--here Conrad multiplies the sheer variety of subjective dangers to which man is susceptible. If one isolates the dominant obsessions of Charles Gould, Martin Decoud and Nostromo, for instance, one realizes that although their moral handicaps are all founded on a common basis of subjectivity gone rampant, all represent nevertheless subtly different variations on personal obsession.

To clarify such distinctions, it is interesting to

start with the common epithets for each man's "tragic flaw"--Gould's ambition, Decoud's idealism based on love and Nostromo's pride in reputation and his avarice--and find those common bases and distinctions. I have chosen Spinoza's definitions of emotions in his Ethics--not because Conrad was in any way vaguely interested in the Dutch philosopher--but because they are useful in making distinctions of this sort. I found that ambition and avarice were founded alike on "desire," which is, according to Spinoza, "the actual essence of man."⁹⁴ The mainspring of Decoud's acts and thoughts, however, is love, which is pleasure-centred: "Love is pleasure, accompanied by the idea of an external cause."⁹⁵ These basic instincts--pleasure (its opposite, pain) and desire--form, in fact, Spinoza's triumvirate of the "primitive or primary emotions of man."⁹⁶ Thus Conrad, although he was certainly not as systematic or schematic as this comparison implies, did manage intuitively to cover the universal variations of subjective passion in Nostromo.

Such an analysis, too, sheds light on the key figure of Nostromo, for he unites the subjective excesses of both Gould and Decoud. Before we are aware of the avarice of Nostromo, revealed by his gradual pirating of the hidden silver, we are introduced to his pride in reputation.

Pride, like Decoud's idealism, is based on love, but with the important distinction that it is self-love. Thus, the subjective horrors of indulging one's own passions-- so clearly portrayed in Lord Jim and Heart of Darkness-- are compounded by the fact that they are turned inward by Nostromo, who becomes "the measure of all things." Even Teresa Viola, simple as she is, perceives Nostromo's "plague spot": "Always thinking of yourself and taking your pay out in fine words from those who care nothing for you."⁹⁷ In contrast, Gould sacrifices the enduring love of Emilia for the sake of external treasure--the silver mine--and like all external objects in the Conradian world, it is shimmering and uncertain. Martin Decoud, conversely, is a man who abandons all external considerations in the name of love; he is at one the "man...without a mission"⁹⁸ and the supreme sceptic, who invests outer powers with no particular virtue or malice. As such, there is no other route for him except utter solitude and solipsism when he is cast apart on the island. Faced with the overwhelming realization that "the world means intensely" and means anything but "good," he loses even this inner core to madness.

Nostromo, to complete the vision, not only desires the external felicities of wealth but the inner felicities

of an enduring love. Conrad, one notes, significantly gives Nostromo two loves--Linda, as his socially-sanctioned love to all external eyes, and Giselle, who provokes his secret, inner passion. Thus, when Nostromo, faced with a truly intolerable choice, attempts to combine his inner and outer passions--Giselle and the silver--both passions combine to destroy him. Nostromo, then, when considered from the standpoint of Conrad's Impressionism, becomes the natural focal point and title figure of Conrad's moral canvas.

The other alternative in the novel (in this instance left to the reader alone) is that of detachment. Unlike Heart of Darkness and Lord Jim, Nostromo presents us with no one narratorial figure, struggling to judge and distinguish. Rather, Conrad's subtle hints are for our eyes alone. For instance, when Nostromo does not succumb to the temptation of suicide (for "He was possessed too strongly by the sense of his own existence")⁹⁹, but does succumb to the insidious temptation of the silver, we are subtly distanced from him within the narrative itself. He suddenly becomes "Captain Fidanza" and his actions are repeatedly reported to us in an external, observatory fashion: He "was seen ...was recognized...was observed."¹⁰⁰ Moreover, the change which has taken place in our perception

of *Nostromo* is signalled in the very prose style of the passage, in short, staccato sentences which nearly resemble those of Hemingway. This regaling of critical duties directly to the reader is undoubtedly what moves Albert Guerard to note that the novel is "not to the same degree an 'interior' novel, either for the characters or for the reader" as is *Lord Jim*.¹⁰¹ It is true that *Nostromo* is singularly free of any one character whom I have earlier termed the "mediating figure." Nevertheless, in actuality, *Nostromo* is more emphatically than *Lord Jim* an Impressionist novel in form and especially in experience, for it recreates and demands on the part of the reader the very acts of critical judgment which are demanded of the inhabitants of Costaguana. The final figure of Giorgio Viola, utterly unable to conceive of the reality or consequences of his act of shooting *Nostromo* is Conrad's parting hint to the reader that such acts and consequences must be--as in life--puzzled out in solitude.

In the five years following *Nostromo*, Conrad gradually came to associate the type of subjectivity which ran rampant in *Gould*, *Decoud* and *Nostromo* with the much-publicized anarchist movement of his day. Such an association between the Impressionist theme of moral certainty and anarchism

would be stated much more explicitly years later in G. K. Chesterton's The Man Who Was Thursday. In that novel, Colonel Gabriel Syme, spying on the group of anarchists who appear to him visually as "black dots" amidst a wood "full of shattered sunlight and shaken shadows"¹⁰² is granted an impressionistic "glimpse" of a decidedly moral nature. This "bewildering woodland" becomes symbolic, in Syme's mind, of the confusing transitoriness and treachery of all things and thus, as Chesterton remarks, "He had found the thing which the modern people call Impressionism, which is another name for that final scepticism which can find no floor to the universe."¹⁰³ Conrad differs, however, in the final analysis from Chesterton, in that he implicitly incorporates the themes of subjectivity and philosophical scepticism in order to produce a novel which is at once a public statement and yet is intensely private in nature.

This novel, The Secret Agent, links uncertainty and anarchy internally in that it does not require, as does Chesterton's novel, an observer such as Syme, so clearly aligned with the forces of order. Rather, Conrad reveals the clash between subjectivity and objectivity on several levels (political and marital, for instance) and in several quarters (both within anarchists and representatives of

"order" in society). It thus becomes a much darker, more cynical novel than Chesterton's and exists on a more universal and philosophical level.

The problem of over-subjectivity examined in Nostromo here assumes a distinctly different flavour. The figure of Martin Decoud in the former novel displays what Spinoza would call passion without a suitable object,¹⁰⁴ that is, a displacement of his love for a woman to his love for a cause. Mr. Verloc, however, is a veritable foil for Decoud, for the passion which is singularly absent in his marriage with Winnie spills over to his revolutionary cause (so much so, in fact, that he is willing to risk the life of one most loved by Winnie--Stevie--in pursuit of this cause).

This reversal of perspective in The Secret Agent produces a heavy emphasis on the other side of the subjectivity "coin"--detachment. We are repeatedly told that Verloc, like Kurtz, has lost all sense of contact with the "earth." He succeeds, for example, in ignoring Stevie's existence until the boy becomes a ploy in the bombing attempt.¹⁰⁵ Verloc is similarly insensible of the pain of Winnie's mother's decision to leave the family unit, for "his intense meditation," we are told, "like a sort of Chinese wall, isolated him completely from the phenomena of this world of vain effort and illusory appearances."¹⁰⁶

This perspective in particular reveals a subtle refocusing of the Impressionist philosophy in Nostromo and Heart of Darkness, for the very cynicism which erodes our faith in the tangible world carries with it the terrifying potential to remove our human sympathy as well.

This mature vision is reinforced by Conrad in his moving portrait of the retarded brother of Mrs. Verloc--Stevie. If Verloc is detached to the point of being stonily impassive, Stevie on the other hand has no choice but to register his subjective feelings without any "censoring" whatsoever. Our first glimpse of the boy, during the secret conference of anarchists Michaelis, Ossipon and Verloc, reveals him drawing "circles, circles; innumerable circles, concentric, eccentric; a coruscating whirl of circles that by their tangled multitude of repeated curves, uniformity of form, and confusion of intersecting lines suggested a rendering of cosmic chaos."¹⁰⁷ This freely impressionistic expression, at once fusing form and obscurity, contrasts sharply with the political "masks" being donned during the conversation by the unlikely fighters for freedom. Moreover, Stevie's automatic and uncomprehending subjectivity, so alien to Verloc's intellectual detachment, still affords him a human insight far superior to that of the anarchist; when Winnie's mother departs in

the cab, Stevie's "vacant mouth and distressed eyes depicted the state of his mind in regard to the transactions which were taking place."¹⁰⁸ In fact, Conrad masterfully reveals what he calls Stevie's "convulsive sympathy"¹⁰⁹ on this occasion by displacing the boy's concern over the domestic disturbance onto the driver's treatment of the horse: "Don't whip," Stevie pleads and adds from the perspective of the animal, "You mustn't...it hurts."¹¹⁰

The violent contrast with Verloc is firmly established by Conrad in Impressionist terms: "Stevie, though able to forget mere facts such as his name and address for instance, had a faithful memory of sensations".¹¹¹ At one stroke, therefore, Conrad manages to integrate the clash between public and private concerns in this most internal of political novels.

Conrad adds a further complication to this question of subjectivity and detachment by pointing out that too great a subjective devotion to political ends may damage those same ends as well. The anarchist "Professor" (christened by Conrad with a significantly "intellectual" epithet) is so submerged in his political theories that he, like Verloc, remains in "astounding ignorance of worldly conditions."¹¹² Conrad, in this case, studies the effect of such submersion on the theoretical rather than the

domestic side of this man's life and concludes that "The way of even the most justifiable revolutions is prepared by personal impulses disguised into creeds."¹¹³ Again, in the case of Michaelis, the same criticism is made: "He was like those saintly men whose personality is lost in the contemplation of their faith."¹¹⁴ It is as though Conrad were taking David Hume's principle of no ideas without human sensations¹¹⁵ and applying it to a moral rather than a psychological problem. Finally, he concludes that on both private and public planes an egotistical engagement in a cause which is intellectual rather than humanly sensitive is a clearly reductive human choice.

Conrad's placing of this Impressionist conflict in a context of public and private interests not only unifies the domestic and political levels of the novel but raises the entire question of knowledge and proper judgment. For instance, Winnie's mother is praised as "heroic"¹¹⁶ for the very reason that she combines reason and emotion in her decision to leave Winnie and Verloc. Emotionally, she considers herself to be a burden and wishes to go elsewhere to die. Rationally, she realizes that Stevie may have a more persuasive claim to Verloc's generosity if she does, in fact, leave. Thus Conrad, elevating a simple woman (though "subtle in her way")¹¹⁷ above Verloc and his

fellow revolutionaries praises this private act of heroism in the most public of terms, as "an act of devotion and... a move of deep policy."¹¹⁸

A similar merging of public and private which ultimately defeats the person being tested occurs when Winnie, now the murderess of her husband, appeals to a "public" man, Ossipon, for help in this most "private" of affairs. Although Comrade Ossipon has felt tinges of sentiment for Winnie in the past, he most unheroically abandons her to her fate. Upon reading of her suicide later, in a newspaper article, a fresh realization of this conflict between feeling and self-love is reawakened within him. The brilliant rendering of this conflict is the merging of the words of the public newspaper with Ossipon's private thought, in "the mystery of a human brain pulsating wrongfully to the rhythm of journalistic phrases." "...Will hang for ever over this act..."--it was inclining towards the gutter--"...of madness or despair'."¹¹⁹ How typical it is, though, of Conrad's final cynicism that the concluding image of the novel is not of this tormented but awakening mind but of a mind utterly closed to all but its own inhuman obsession--that of the Professor.

The final uncertainty of the Impressionist vision, then, reflects the fact that acts which are meant to

clarify and to free--anarchist acts--serve only to obscure and mystify. Nowhere in the novel is this more apparent than in Winnie Verloc's murder of her husband. The act itself is performed swiftly and recounted through the momentary perceptions of Verloc. Again, Conrad masters the technique of defamiliarization in order to stress the momentary act, for Verloc slowly recognizes the form of a carving knife: "It flickered up and down. Its movements were leisurely. They were leisurely enough for Mr. Verloc to recognize the limb and the weapon. They were leisurely enough for him to take in the full meaning of the portent, and to taste the flavour of death rising in his gorge."¹²⁰ This horrifying account, its rhythms and repetitions reproducing the very motion of repeated stabbing, resembles a dream-like slow-motion sequence of a momentary act. This act, however, meant to transform Winnie into a "free" woman actually obscures her very identity, just as Jim's momentary act of cowardice "brands" the continuum of his life. This clash between act and identity begins to sink upon Winnie in these exact terms of "continuum," when she spots the visual consequence of her act, blood: "As though she had run through long years in her flight across the small parlour, Mrs. Verloc by the door was quite a different person from the woman who had been

leaning over the sofa...."¹²¹ Later, she voices this realization to Ossipon: "I was a respectable woman...Till he made me what I am."¹²² Such words echo a similar clash between act and identity centuries earlier in the words of DeFlores to Beatrice-Joanna in The Changeling:

Push! Fly not to your birth but settle you
 In what the act has made you; y'are no more now.
 You must forget your parentage to me:
 Y'are the deed's creature; by that name
 You lost your first condition, and I challenge you
 As peace and innocency has turned you out
 And made you one with me.¹²³

In twentieth-century literature, however, this link between an act and its consequences appears within a framework of political and subjective motivation rather than that of revenge tragedy. Winnie's act in Conrad's view becomes a metaphor of sorts for the sad irony of anarchist acts; released from the domination of Verloc, Winnie, ironically "no longer a free woman," can only timidly turn to the unlikely Ossipon to ask, "Where are we going to, Tom?"¹²⁴ Such a question gains a haunting and ominous tone in the light of Ossipon's desertion and Winnie's suicide.

One might compare this outlook to that of Henry James in The Princess Casamassima in which art is used explicitly as a metaphor for discussing anarchist acts.

James, however, uses classical art as a link with the order and tradition of the past, for Hyacinth enthusiastically writes to the Princess from Italy, saying that he feels "capable of fighting for...The monuments and treasures of art, the great palaces and properties, the conquests of learning and taste, the general fabric of civilization as we know it, based if you will upon all the despotisms, the cruelties, the exclusions, the monopolies and the rapacities of the past."¹²⁵ Thus, in James as well, we note that although the momentary act meant to free mankind may find sufficient and legitimate provocation in acts of aggression (as with Winnie's act), the final threat to a sense of continuity (here primarily social) is more terrifying to contemplate. Earlier, Hyacinth had glimpsed the same truth in his visit to another shrine of traditional art, the Louvre: "What was supreme in his mind to-day was not the idea of how the society that surrounded him should be destroyed; it was much more the sense of the wonderful, precious things it had produced, of the fabric of beauty and power it had raised."¹²⁶ The Princess herself plays a species of "Ossipon" to Hyacinth's "Winnie" in that her political ideals are drastically undercut by her own acts; when she professes to have given away her priceless bibelots as a revolutionary act of faith, Hyacinth later

discovers that she has withheld a few precious articles including some lavishly-bound books. Thus, James, although he approaches the issues from a different perspective than that of Conrad, finally asserts that an act of faith is all that matters; momentary acts which seek to destroy in the name of freedom become in the final analysis, reductive and inhuman.

In Under Western Eyes, Conrad returns, as the very title suggests, to the study of the explicit connection between "seeing" and "knowing" so masterfully explored in Heart of Darkness and Lord Jim. The focus, however, is entirely different, not only in its political nature but in its very method of proceeding. Albert Guerard is justified in commenting that the novel is "realistic"; "not an 'art novel' of infinite complexity" such as Lord Jim.¹²⁷ This effect, I believe, owes mainly to two intertwined factors: that Conrad here is using a less perceptive "mediating" figure" and that the movement from certainty to doubt occurs sequentially and not in simultaneous or scattered "glimpses" of several perspectives on one act as in Lord Jim.

That Under Western Eyes is closer to a novel of process and unfolding than of simultaneity is revealed in the transition from complacency to chaos in Razumov's

world. The novel opens, fittingly enough, with a foreboding declaration that "Words, as is well known, are the great foes of reality."¹²⁸ Although the narrator, himself a teacher of languages, is fully aware of this fact, it is a lesson which Razumov nevertheless has yet to learn. The young scholar, who sees himself as "the man with a mind," has all of the unswerving confidence in reason as does Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov; of the spectral Haldin he exclaims, "What are the luridly smoky lucubrations of that fellow to the clear grasp of my intellect?"¹³⁰ His faith in clear thought extends to the written word as well, for in the midst of his panic over his betrayal of Haldin he seizes paper and pen in order to fix and crystallize his "beliefs":

History not Theory
Patriotism not Internationalism
Evolution not Revolution
Direction not Destruction
Unity not Disruption¹³¹

It is a wiser and a more clear-eyed Razumov who later sees this manifesto of the moment, stabbed onto the wall with a penknife as one act "covering all the confused pile of pages, the record of his intellectual life for the past three years."¹³² Like Jim and Winnie Verloc, Razumov begins to realize the long shadows cast by the act of the

moment over the continuum of a lifetime.

Within Razumov, however, such a realization of the "Impressionist moment" is a long process involving several levels of "lessons." Although Razumov invests familiar, concrete sensations with the same complacent pride as he does his words and his reason, the familiar is increasingly overthrown by the incomprehensible. After his conference with the General and Prince, the scene of his betrayal of Haldin, he returns to his room with this delusion firmly planted in his mind: "Nothing would change....The sense of life's continuity depended on trifling bodily impressions. The trivialities of daily existence were an armour for the soul...and life goes on as before with its mysterious and secret sides quite out of sight as they should be. Life is a public thing."¹³³ These assurances of stability, continuity and clarity are upset at one stroke with the physical "fact" of Haldin, waiting in Razumov's room--"more alarming in its shadowy, persistent reality than the distinct but vanishing illusion."¹³⁴

This mystifying inversion of real and illusory, similar to Syme's sudden Impressionist vision in The Man Who Was Thursday, brings to Razumov the same share of cynicism and doubt. As he waits in his tiny rooms to hear of Haldin's capture, he begins to doubt in a frenzy even his momentary

sensations such as hearing the town clock strike. Similarly, his faith in his native reason is irreparably shaken as he wonders, "what security have I against something--some destructive horror--walking in upon me as I sit here?"¹³⁵ This mad inversion surfaces in social terms, as Razumov considers that even those who traverse the boundaries of social proprieties--thieves and "incorrigible lovers"--are at least secure in the knowledge that "The consequences of their actions were always clear and their lives remained their own."¹³⁶ Thus, as in Chesterton, the Impressionist distrust of concrete reality and sensation carries with it an insidious threat to man's intellectual and psychological grasp on his own inner reality.

For the first time in his career, Conrad specifically applies this Impressionist merging of fact and illusion to fully identified political entities. Russia, as is stressed by Miss Haldin, is a land where such moral entities intermix, for there, she insists, "all knowledge was tainted with falsehood."¹³⁷ Later, as Razumov's guilt and self-enclosure reach a climax, he realizes the full import of Miss Haldin's insistence from a truly personal perspective: "...everything abandoned him--hope, courage, belief in himself, trust in men. His heart had, as it were, suddenly emptied itself...His existence was like a great cold blank,

something like the enormous plain of the whole of Russia levelled with snow and fading gradually on all sides into shadows and mists."¹³⁸ This image of aridity, implicitly linked to the frequently-recurring image of the blank piece of paper, links Razumov's inner cynicism to his new scepticism about expression.

On a narratorial level, too, such inability to express and communicate assumes a political equivalent--the psychological blockade between East and West. In the conversations between Miss Haldin and the narrator, such a conflict is truly presented as a debate on "ways of seeing" framed in clearly artistic terms. On one occasion, the narrator counters Miss Haldin's hazy ideals of an eventual era of harmony with the following "hard-edged" observation: "Life is a thing of form. It has its plastic shape and a definite intellectual aspect. The most idealistic conceptions of love and forbearance must be clothed in a flesh as it were before they can be made understandable."¹³⁹ This philosophy, again so close to the idealism of David Hume, is plagued by the same flaws inherent in Razumov's experience--that sensations themselves may be both flickering and treacherous. The novel, therefore, is truly one of progress and disillusionment on the part both of Razumov and of the man who surveys the tale "under western eyes."

Faced on all levels by such universal scepticism, Razumov may either give in to despair in the manner of Martin Decoud, or work with the only broken tools accessible to man--his naive and illusory impressions. Certainly Razumov's double confession of his betrayal of Haldin, first to Miss Haldin and later to the group of revolutionaries, is an act of responsibility and self-knowledge. Ironically, though, these very acts, in the cynical universe created by Conrad, cut him off from the sensations of the world around him--first from Miss Haldin's love and secondly in a literal way, with his brutal deafening at the hands of the monstrous Nikita. Interestingly, then, Razumov is deprived of the very same commodities as is Nostromo--love, reputation and life itself. The critical difference, however (and one which speaks powerfully of the deepening scepticism of Conrad's universe) is that Razumov is not deprived by such things through his own desires. Rather, the factors of chance combine with the strange ineffectuality of honest action (and a certain fastidiousness on Razumov's part) in such a universe to bring us closer to the world of Victory and Chance.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that Razumov accepts the treacherous sensations of life in yet another sense--a literary one. His journal, notwithstanding his

new vision of the insufficiency of words, becomes his "attempt to grapple through the same means [of words] with another profounder knowledge."¹⁴⁰ Faithfully, as Conrad himself, he represents even the inability to express oneself, for his accounts are interspersed with segments of "incoherent writing" and "broken sentences."¹⁴¹ These faithful fragments, like Stevie's concentric circles in The Secret Agent, are a frustrating attempt to order chaos by allowing it to be sensed and expressed with no barrier whatsoever.

This absence of barriers between the private vision and the public utterance of the writer sheds an illuminating light on the other conflicts between the public and the private in Under Western Eyes. As in The Secret Agent, Conrad parallels political with private, domestic scenes in order to distinguish the human qualities which are most admirable in both worlds. For example, the glimpse "behind the scenes" of political intrigue which the narrator attains in the hotel,¹⁴² an impression which is described as curiously lifeless and static, contrasts powerfully with the private glimpse which the narrator gains into the lives of the Haldins. When he sees Mrs. Haldin, sorrowing over the knowledge of her son's betrayal confessed to her by Razumov, he reflects that the only worthwhile truth attainable by

man is, even in its uncertainty and sorrow, of a personal nature: "The thought that the real drama of autocracy is not played on the great stage of politics came to me as, fated to be a spectator, I had this other glimpse behind the scenes, something more profound than the words and gestures of the public play."¹⁴³ The narratorial frame, then, rather than robbing the novel of its internal form, as Guerard suggests, allows the reader to weigh judgmentally the virtues of acts both public and private, as the final "spectator" of the tale.

The levels of this amazingly complex novel of Impressionist concerns finally converge at the end, with the last commentaries on ways of "seeing" and "knowing." On the private level, Miss Haldin, now in possession of the cruel facts of her brother's case, can truthfully say, "My eyes are open at last and my hands are free now." Even this hope, however, is tinged with the sad remembrance of "the stifled cry of our great distress."¹⁴⁴ The subjective peace, therefore, cannot escape the intrusion of the collective misery--especially in the eyes of a woman sensitive to the claims of her countrymen. On the narratorial level, knowledge comes even more slowly to the Western observer. Of Razumov's intended confession and sacrifice to the revolutionaries, he can only look back

with regret that "this my Western eyes had failed to see."¹⁴⁵ In spite of the glimpses afforded him into public and private domains alike, the narrator is fated to remain "a mute witness of things Russian."¹⁴⁶ The final instance of blindness in the novel--and indeed the final statement--is of a political nature. In proclaiming that "Peter Ivanovitch is an inspired man,"¹⁴⁷ Sophia Antonovna gives voice to the eternal delusions of the political world--the domain least open to glimpses of truth in Under Western Eyes. Over all of this blindness and mute helplessness hovers the deafened figure of Razumov--the final passive product of the delusions of all worlds combined.

The end of Under Western Eyes, combining as it does the levels of illusion and chaos examined in all of the middle novels of Conrad, forms a vision not unlike the already-mentioned mad, coruscating circles of chaos drawn by Stevie in The Secret Agent. Along with the utterly hopeless delusion "declared in a firm voice"¹⁴⁸ by Sophia Antonovna--"Peter Ivanovitch is an inspired man"--we see the same maddening mixture of chaos and wilfulness which haunted Yeats' imagination and which turned Conrad's shimmering Impressionism into a canvas of a soberer hue:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity....¹⁴⁹

CHAPTER THREE

"PASSION AND PESSIMISM": THE LATER IMPRESSIONISM OF JOSEPH CONRAD, 1912--1919

When Paul Cézanne urged his fellow painters to make of themselves "a sensitive recording plate"¹ of the fleeting sensations of life, he was actually calling for a new freshness and daring in vision instead of the accepted academic traditions of "how to view" and render objects in experience. This desire for a freshness not unlike Locke's "tabula rasa," similarly present in Monet's desire to paint as though he were a blind man suddenly regaining sight, is not limited, however, to the canvas alone. Even the writers whom traditional scholarship has taught us to regard as realists par excellence were seeking, in the midst of the flux and excitement of the nineteenth-century world, to become "sensitive recording plates":

The power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implications of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern, the condition of feeling life in general so completely that you are well on your way to knowing any particular corner of it--this cluster of gifts may almost be said to constitute experience...If experience consists of impressions, it may be said that impressions are experience.²

This manifesto, with its immediate emphasis on power and scrutinizing vision is not a product of the later Impres-

sionism of Woolf or Faulkner but of the penetrating vision of Henry James.

Although Conrad's early and middle works attest convincingly to this hidden power of close scrutiny, the later novels reveal a curious mixture of conviction and loss of control. Often the familiar Impressionist themes and techniques are present but without the masterful structures of Nostromo or The Secret Agent to lend them weight and solidity. At times, in Chance for example, there exists an over-multiplication of impressionistic devices and at worst a mouthing of Conradian rhetoric which do not reflect and aid our perception but actually impede it. In contrast, the masterful balance of Impressionist aim and design which occurs in The Secret Sharer and The Shadow-Line speaks eloquently of Conrad's persistent flashes of brilliance.

This alternation of brilliance and infirmity in Conrad's works of 1912--1919 is accompanied by a similar tension between power and insecurity in the actual thematic fabric of the fiction. The struggle between deliberate thought and impulse, for example, receives a treatment in The Secret Sharer and Victory which is simply unparalleled in any of the earlier works, leading critics such as Guerard and Hewitt to formulate quasi-Jungian interpretations of such works as mystical "dark nights of the

soul."³ This division I will treat not simply as a psychological trait but as a result of Conrad's continued and heightened interest in rationalist and idealist philosophy during these years. Such issues--the conflict between positivistic thought and impressionistic "impulse"--bear directly on our understanding (and misconceptions) of literary Impressionism.

Other curious dualities which surface in this later work include the contrast between external and internal forces and the contrast between observation and participation. In fact, such contrary impulses reach a nearly neurotic level, as characters such as Captain Anthony in Chance and the narrator of The Arrow of Gold are torn between the desire to remain supremely aloof and the impulse to give vent to their passions. This crippling division signals a definitely qualitative shift from the vision of The Secret Agent, for example, in which Verloc is the very embodiment of moral detachment. In the later figures of Conrad's imaginings, however, the struggle is entirely internal, and the effect is strikingly similar to that of a suppressed scream.

This is not to say that other subtler tones and shifts of emphasis do not occur in Conrad's later Impressionism. In the years 1912--1919 we witness enough

references to visual art in Conrad's fiction to put to rest forever the critical commonplace which I mentioned at the beginning of this thesis--that Conrad knew nothing substantial about painting or the other visual arts. Moreover, Conrad's literary references take on an entirely different cast; there appear more references to the English literary tradition rather than to his earlier French influences. I maintain that this, too, becomes of interest to the student of Conrad's Impressionist techniques, for in works such as The Shadow-Line and The Arrow of Gold, Conrad produces variations on traditional literary themes in order to suit his own Impressionist design.

Nevertheless, the complex internal tearings within the hearts and minds of Conrad's characters remain the representative feature of the later period, not only of Conrad's fiction but of his life. These painful struggles between thought and impulse, pragmatism and idealism, reflect the very divisions which those close to Conrad sensed in his own character. Edward Garnett, perhaps the closest of these associates, perceived exactly these two categories of "experiencing" within his confidant: "There were two natures interwoven in Conrad, one feminine, affectionate, responsive, clear-eyed, the other masculine, formidably

critical, fiercely ironical, dominating, intransigent."⁴ Even Bertrand Russell, whose relationship with Conrad was comparatively brief but intimate, was able to survey the mutual attraction with a similarly penetrating insight: "I think I have always felt that there were two levels, [in the relationship] one that of science and common sense, and another, terrifying, subterranean and periodic... I suppose that the feeling for Conrad depended upon his combination of passion and pessimism...."⁵ It was this combination, indeed, of "passion and pessimism," power and terrifying insecurity, which characterizes much of Conrad's human outlook in general, and the literary outlook of his later novels in particular.

The Secret Sharer, from the 1912 volume of stories, 'Twixt Land and Sea, has been, like all of the later works, the object of much passionate critical disagreement. The critics of the 1950's and 1960's, most notably Albert Guerard and Douglas Hewitt, succeeded in elevating the story from its relative obscurity to a position of high importance in the Conradian canon. Guerard places it on a level with Heart of Darkness, as "the most frankly psychological of Conrad's shorter works,"⁶ rather cautiously invoking the Jungian theories of dark impulse

and the motif of the "classic night journey,"⁷ which we now associate with the mythic criticism of Joseph Campbell. Hewitt takes such interpretations even further, suggesting that Leggatt is a symbol of the internal "strangeness" felt by the young Captain.⁸ On the opposing side of the debate, Jocelyn Baines disagrees with the revaluations of both critics to such an extent that he pronounces the story to be "intensely dramatic but, on the psychological and moral level, rather slight!"⁹ As is frequent in such passionate literary quarrels, one senses that the truth of the matter lies somewhere between the two extremes; the theory of Conrad's Impressionism as expressed in his earlier works proves to be an extremely effective gauge for discovering exactly where this "middle ground" is located.

Guerard's thesis of the "night journey" tends to focus too much positive attention (and faith) on the curious attraction of the Captain to Leggatt; it becomes the dramatization of "a human relationship and individual bond at variance with the moral bond to the community"¹⁰ in a way more reminiscent of Antigone than of Conradian ethics. An awareness of Conrad's moral Impressionism, however, opens both our eyes and our suspicions to the possibility that apparently attractive bonds or perceptions

of similarity may be, as in the case of Jim and Gentleman Brown in Lord Jim, frankly deadly in their implications. One recalls, as well, the conflicting tendencies of attraction and repulsion in the breast of Marlow, as he analyses his perceived relationship with Kurtz. This critical assumption of goodwill is essentially the same mistake which Sir Kenneth Clark makes in ascribing to the Impressionist painters a fully confident bond with the natural world.¹¹ In reality, the vision of Monet in his late Waterlilies is one of a startling deconstruction and unmasking of the world of appearances. The viewer can no longer trust in the established "truths" of pictorial representation--that the lighter tones of the water will appear on top, that reflection and solidity will be unmistakably separate or that a canvas will have one central point upon which the eyes may rest. As Jacques Lassaigue perceives, "Thus the spectator, with his basic perceptions turned upside-down, his normal landmarks gone and his consciousness of the division of time now lost, feels himself carried away into a world where categories and orders of things are stumped off and then disappear."¹² The analogy with The Secret Sharer is a particularly apt one, for the "reflection" of himself which the Captain senses in Leggatt is just as confused and just as morally

disorienting.

Indeed, the very term "moral disorientation" expresses perfectly the experience which the Captain undergoes as a result of his stealthy association with Leggatt. The story opens with a palpable scene of visual confusion which foreshadows the tangled moral "web" to come:

On my right hand there were lines of fishing stakes resembling a mysterious system of half-submerged bamboo fences, incomprehensible in its division of the domain of tropical fishes, and crazy of aspect as if abandoned for ever by some nomad tribe of fishermen now gone to the other end of the ocean....¹³

This confusing state, in which the reassuring lines of vision dissolve under peculiar stresses, is invoked by Proust at one point in A La Recherche de Temps Perdu for an entirely different reason; as the narrator watches the young girls on the beach at Balbec he muses that "this absence, in my vision, from the dividing lines that I was soon to set between them, set up through their group a harmonious swaying...."¹⁴ Whereas Proust wishes to recreate the naive vision of childhood recollected, Conrad focusses on the hazy complications which experienced man discovers in his disillusioning career.

That this pattern is indeed the one which Conrad follows in The Secret Sharer--not the movement towards "a

final mature confidence and integration"¹⁵ which Guerard suggests--is apparent in the subtle usage of visual perception throughout the tale. When the Captain first sights Leggatt, dangling precipitously by the side of the ship, the image evoked is chilling in a Coleridgean fashion; the spectre which appears, "elongated and pale...ghastly, silvery, fishlike," creates a "horrid frost-bound sensation" within the breast of the incredulous Captain.¹⁶ Indeed, the first impression of this mysterious creature is a fragmentary one: "He was complete but for the head. A headless corpse!"¹⁷ Throughout the narrative, Conrad subtly plays with this image of headlessness and fragmentation to such an extent that it gains a much fuller moral resonance. When, for example, the Captain dares to risk approaching the reefs and rocks of the inland waters in order to free Leggatt, we are told that the ship has been enveloped by "the very blackness" of the land, "swallowed up, as it were,"¹⁸ just as Leggatt had first arrived bathed in ominous shadow. Indeed, the mate of the ship literally "loses his head" in the midst of this all-too-palpable threat--he goes mad, exclaiming and raising his hand "to batter his poor devoted head."¹⁹ This series of linked and subtly transformed images establishes the curious connection between the physical head, the faculty of reason,

and the proper, full functioning of the tiny social unit which is the ship.

Even more interesting is the reappearance of this associated imagery at the end of the tale. When the Captain altruistically offers his hat to the impulsive Leggatt, it is this hat which appears visually as the only residuum of Leggatt's escape, and as the only visual clue that safety is now in sight for both ship and crew. It is at this point exactly that the Captain regains his sense of distinctions (his head, so to speak), for he instantly turns to the task of saving the ship from almost certain destruction. Correspondingly, his emotional tie to Leggatt is dissolved with this return to responsibility: "But I hardly thought of my other self, now gone from the ship, to be hidden forever from all friendly faces...with no brand of the curse on his sane forehead to stay a slaying hand...too proud to explain."²⁰ Thus, Leggatt relaxes his grip on the reasoning powers of the Captain and returns to an uncertain world governed by passions, impulses and violence. Explanations, indeed, as Leggatt himself confesses,²¹ hold no sway in a world where survival is all. Finally, then, Leggatt's descent into the water "to take his punishment"²² is another example of submitting oneself to Dr. Stein's "destructive element," for the freedom and

pride of the swimmer must meet the brute forces of "a new destiny"²³ after all. In this instance especially, the use of such "visual clues" allows the reader to penetrate beneath the apparent force of the relationship between the Captain and Leggatt to see a deeper comment on the insidious threat posed by passion and impulse to an extremely sensitive human rationality.

The inward-turning nature of The Secret Sharer is accomplished through a subtle use of various modes and problems of perception on the part of Conrad. This crippling sense of internality is, in fact, a natural expression of an age in which the subjective view of the Romantics was carried to extremes in many of the arts. The difference between Renoir's personal impression of an afternoon at La Gr  nouill  re* and the same perception filtered through another consciousness (that of Monet*) speaks powerfully of Impressionist painting as an intensely interior art. From this realization to the inner expressions of Kandinsky and Jackson Pollock there stretches no great distance.

In The Secret Sharer, the impression of the Captain as a man "locked up in his senses five" is created through the use of both visual and aural "clues." Again, the scene is set first and foremost in a concrete way; while surveying the "immense stillness" of the opening landscape

of the story, the Captain suspects that "There must have been some glare in the air to interfere with one's sight," for just before sunset he has managed to dimly make out "something which did away with the solemnity of perfect solitude."²⁴ Leggatt, too, arriving suddenly like the darkness of the night "does away" with the Captain's feeling of inner peace. Moreover, various sounds break in upon the Captain and the stars are eclipsed by the night as he is musing silently on his ship. Amid this confusion he distinctly senses that "the comfort of quiet communion with her [the ship] was gone for good."²⁵ In light of the above comments on Leggatt's passion as antithetical to the functioning of human reason and the social microcosm of the ship, this preparatory passage is ominous and important indeed.

Later, this scene is paralleled, with the source of the disturbance--Leggatt--immediately at hand. While the escaped man is narrating his story to the Captain, the latter senses that Leggatt's whisper is "getting fainter and fainter" and that, as in the preceding passage, "there was not even a star to be seen."²⁶ Stars, of course, are the original, fundamental directional guides for mariners, as Conrad was well aware, just as competent rationality is the fundamental "guide" for human

behaviour. Notably, the Captain's thoughts flit to this very absence of rational analysis embodied by Leggatt: "There was something that made comment impossible in his narrative, or perhaps in himself; a sort of feeling, a quality, which I can't find a name for."²⁷ Thus, the lack of critical distinction is mysteriously transferred from Leggatt to his "double" and the foreboding of confusion which opens the tale finds its realization.

The other levels of perception which occur in the story become increasingly self-enclosing and paranoid. The vague annoyance with himself for dismissing his officers, with the accompanying fear of appearing "eccentric" to the crew, invade the Captain's mind only instants before Leggatt bodily "invades" the ship.²⁸ This sensation grows as steadily as the bond with the invader grows; soon the Captain cannot even bear to meet the eyes of one of his men (the steward) for fear of unconsciously revealing his secret.²⁹ Finally, this mania becomes one of intense self-observation: "I was constantly watching myself, my secret self, as dependent on my actions as my own personality,...It was very much like being mad, only it was worse because one was aware of it."³⁰ Such an admission recalls the already-quoted comment which Conrad made to Cunninghame Graham: "What makes man tragic is not that

they are the victims of nature, it is that they are conscious of it. There is no morality, no knowledge and no hope; there is only the consciousness of ourselves...."³¹ Although the Captain may be literally referring to his surveillance of Leggatt in the cabin, his first, instinctive utterance rings true: "I was watching myself...." It is surely no coincidence that the Impressionist mood, too, was one of intensive research into the mechanics of perception (by Seurat and Signac, for example) and into the way in which mind assimilates or distorts experience.

This movement in perception in The Secret Sharer from external to minutely internal corresponds to a gradual qualitative change in the relations between the Captain and his "other self." At first it is the sheer physical resemblance which so strikes the Captain that he cannot help glancing at his double from time to time in the cabin. As time goes on, however, the physical resemblance is less emphasized and it is his "mental vision" which the Captain becomes more and more loth to detach from his soul-mate.³² In fact, he becomes fully aware of this gradual change: "I had become so connected in thoughts and impressions with the secret sharer of my cabin...."³³ Finally, though, the return to the external is accomplished

and the "cheery cries"³⁴ of the ship's crew replace the insidious whispers of the two secret sharers.

With this progression revealed, the entire interplay between external and internal in The Secret Sharer assumes its full importance. At the beginning of his trial the Captain fears that he has become both " a stranger to the ship and...a stranger to myself."³⁵ Significantly, the sense of being a stranger to the ship resurfaces one more time--immediately before the threat to "quiet communion," Leggatt, takes leave of the ship. The final communion with this tiny world on water assumes, in Conrad's phrasing, the air of a marriage contract: "Nothing! no one in the world should stand now between us, throwing a shadow on the way of silent knowledge and mute affection...."³⁶ This, in fact, is a perfect communion for it represents, as does the marriage contract, the most intensely private of public attachments.

This duality looks forward to the conflicts between detachment and intensity which are the concerns of Chance and The Arrow of Gold. In one scene in The Secret Sharer, Conrad again reveals his remarkable talent for compressing image and motif for even greater suggestiveness, as the Captain observes the isolated islands of the eastern gulf with a telescope. His yearning to see some form of

life and human communication is frustrated and he thus significantly refers to their harboured life as "an unsolved secret."³⁷ One is reminded certainly of the detachment and attachment of Tennyson's "Lady of Shalott."

Such yearnings for human contact make the symbolic grasping of Leggatt's hands entirely understandable: "Our hands met gropingly, lingered united in a steady, motionless clasp for a second."³⁸ This exacting grasp, though, is implicitly linked to another, more compelling "grip"; when the mate loses his senses during the final exploit, the Captain is forced to grasp his arms in order to protect and calm him.³⁹ Already one senses that the claims of solidarity between men are overpowering the "grip" of impulse upon man. Indeed, the entire last scene of the story, the risking of the ship in order to facilitate Leggatt's escape, is a further physical enactment of this movement of approach and distancing. The full moral impact of the Captain's approach to Leggatt is appreciable as we realize that like this physical approach, it, too, harbours unseen terrors in its very shadow.

Thus, the conflicts set up in this most compelling of short stories are deeper and more disturbing than might appear at first glance. It is as though Conrad were fulfilling his avowed aim, as disclosed to Garnett,

to reveal "the hidden weakness in the springs of impulse."⁴⁰ The notes of insecurity and internal division are to be struck again in Chance and The Shadow-Line, for although Leggatt and the impulses he represents are free and "striking out for a new destiny,"⁴¹ they are never entirely submerged in Conrad's world.

Chance offers us not only a striking contrast with The Secret Sharer but an opportunity to study at close range one of Conrad's failed Impressionist experiments. Like the preceding short story, Chance, too, deals with the submerging of human passion but this time the deleterious effects of such a repression are the subjects of Conrad's scrutiny. Captain Anthony and Flora de Barral both continue the inward-turning focus of The Secret Sharer in their inner lives, for the passions which they feel so intensely (love combined with a sense of utter unworthiness) appear as festering, crippling wounds of the spirit.

What separates this love story from any of Conrad's previous works, however, is its raising of issues central to the concept of literary Impressionism. Unlike the critical debate over The Secret Sharer, the furor which surrounds this novel dates not from our age but from the

time of publication. In spite of the fact that Chance won for Conrad his long-awaited popularity with the reading public, the literary men and women of his day were literally "of two minds" about this experimental work. Interestingly, this very division segregated those who value particularly the Impressionist "effect" taken to its extreme, from those for whom form is the primary consideration. John William Cunliffe, for example, hailed Chance as the harbinger of a new novel form,⁴² precisely because of its expanding of the effects of multiple viewpoint far beyond the confines of Nostromo. Aldous Huxley, too, was an adherent to such a view, but even in his humorous comments on the novel to Lady Ottoline Morrell we note a separation of "effect" and "moral intent":

I am reading Conrad's Chance--an admirable work, tho' like all Conrad's works it leaves you with almost no idea of what it's all about. It is exactly like a dream--tremendously important and true things are said--but one forgets them all and is only conscious of the continuous stream of it all, a single impression, blurred and dim yet very intense, almost nightmarish... It's like being under the influence of a drug.⁴³

It is interesting to note that precisely those critics who sensed this Impressionist design in Conrad were led (perhaps through their acquaintance with the corresponding visual tradition) to entirely deny any moral purpose

below the shimmering surface, for Cunliffe too had maintained that "Of criticism, of doctrine, and of general philosophy his novels contain little or nothing."⁴⁴ Such warm commendations, then, are but shaky foundations upon which to build a theory of Joseph Conrad as moral Impressionist.

Henry James, however, in the Times Literary Supplement of 1914, was not to be so easily overwhelmed by impressionistic effect and his formal analysis represents the other aspects which one must consider in judging any Impressionist novel. For James, the wish to multiply complexities and viewpoints in the novel was simply more than the structure could bear; Conrad, in his eyes, was running "such a danger of steeping his matter in perfect obscuration as we recall no other artist's consenting to with an equal grace."⁴⁵ Conrad himself, although he was deeply offended by James' article, was perfectly aware of the need to match aesthetic effect to a supporting fictional form, for twenty years before, he had offered similar advice to Edward Noble: "A capital thing," he commented à propos of one of Noble's horrific tales, "wonderfully well put as far as the impressionism of the thing went," only the construction, the mechanism of the story had seemed false to Conrad.⁴⁶ This critical debate forces us, therefore,

to approach Chance with a clear sense of what we expect of a successful Impressionist novel--an expectation which must be formal as well as "phenomenal."

The curious interplay between detachment and intensity, as suggested, forms the basis of the novel. One is moved, in fact, to suggest a comparison with James, who studies through Isabel Archer of The Portrait of a Lady and Eugenia Münster of The Europeans, the conflicting impulses towards "detachment" and "attachment." Nicola Bradbury, reviewing a recent comparative study of James and Conrad by Elsa Nettels, qualifies this comparison somewhat by noting that "In the novels and stories there is a tendency for James to preserve a distance between the artist and his world which Conrad, for all his awareness of alienation, yearns to overcome. Both authors, in different ways, exhibit the 'double consciousness' which gave Strether in James' Ambassadors, 'detachment in his zeal and curiosity in his indifference'."⁴⁷

In Chance, such double allegiance is recreated on several levels within the novel. Although the familiar Conradian insistence on the primacy of sensation appears in the novel, its tone is one of twisted, sardonic indifference. Marlow, who in the earlier novels analyses his sensations with a view to uncovering "the truth disclosed

in a moment of illusion," here reduces his field of inquiry to the favourable effect of soft lamplight on his impressions of the rabid feminist, Mrs. Fyne: "Perhaps... I saw her then in a crude light. I mean this materially-- in the light of an unshaded lamp. Our mental conclusions depend so much on momentary physical sensations--don't they?"⁴⁸ Later, in reference to Flora's miserable treatment at the hands of her governess, Marlow's attitude towards this traumatic experience is one of pure indifference: "And no doubt...her life had been a mere life of sensations--the response to which can neither be foolish nor wise. It can only be temperamental."⁴⁹ Similarly, the role of experience shifts in Chance away from that of a maturing, strengthening force (as in The Secret Sharer, for instance) to that of an ineffective half-measure which destiny deigns to bestow on man. Traumas such as Flora's discovery of her father's bankruptcy are thus dismissed as "a gradual process of experience and information, often only partial at that, with saving reserves, softening doubts, veiling theories."⁵⁰ The source of Marlow's scepticism about the healing powers of experience lies in the same problem of mind and sensation which vexed the Post-Impressionists--"the inability to interpret aright the signs which experience (a thing mysterious in itself) makes

to our understanding and emotions...Our experience never gets into our blood and bones. It always remains outside of us."⁵¹ Such complaints certainly recall Cézanne's insistence that a full rendering of human experience must always consist of perception filtered through mind: "...let us strive to express ourselves according to our personal temperaments," he exclaimed to Emile Bernard, "Time and reflection, moreover, modify little by little our vision, and at last comprehension comes to us."⁵² The human condition which Cézanne celebrates, therefore, is precisely that which Marlow bewails, for the problems involved in interpreting human behaviour far outweigh those involved in realizing a landscape or still life on canvas.

For an older, disillusioned Conrad, the natural response of sensitive men and women living in this tangle of sensations and experience is one of complete detachment from sensation itself. As Flora de Barral allows Captain Anthony to lead her to the ship (and to a marriage of convenience for the sake of her newly-freed father) she reflects that "she had always been unrelated to this world. She was hanging on to it merely by that one arm grasped firmly just above the elbow. It was a captivity. So be it."⁵³ Flora's attempt at total detachment, however, is never completely successful, and the grasp which she now feels captivating her becomes a virtual lifeline of love and

attachment. Similarly, Captain Anthony's measured stride up and down the decks and his resolute grimness provide no real concealment for the passion for Flora which he continues to discover within himself. As Bradbury suggests, then, the god-like detachment which is for Conrad a stance devoutly to be wished is repeatedly overturned by the sheer humanity of his characters. Such an intolerable struggle between the two impulses constitutes what Conrad in Chance was to grimly christen "the sublunary comedy."⁵⁴

Stylistically, Conrad no doubt wished to convey this existence of half-measures and contingencies through a correspondingly fragmented presentation. Such was the aim of Impressionists working in literature, visual arts and music alike. Gauguin cautioned his protégés, "Do not finish your work too much. An impression is not sufficiently durable for its freshness to survive a belated search for infinite details."⁵⁵ Debussy, too, ascribed to this dictum in his creation of chords independent of the melodic line, for example. In his fragmentation of the orchestral sections (of strings and woodwinds especially) into individual players adding their tiny strands of music to the artistic "whole," Debussy reinforced the hazy, indefinite sense of a dream-like state in his compositions.⁵⁶ In Chance, however, fragmentation often serves to confuse

rather than to evoke. One loses track of the infinite layers of narration (Marlow narrating Fyne's narration of Anthony's narration of Flora's story, for example!) and the constant narratorial reminders serve to irritate more often than to enlighten or to contribute significantly to the core of meaning in the tale.

Moreover, the technique which Conrad exploits to the fullest in order to sensitize the reader to the necessary "piecing together" of the tale occurs with such frequency that it loses much of the power it commanded in Lord Jim: "You understand I am piecing here bits of disconnected statements...."⁵⁷ Albert Guerard, noting the preponderant amount of free speculation indulged in by Marlow, concludes that "the slighter Chance, rather than Lord Jim or Nostromo, anticipates the full Faulknerian extension of the impressionist method."⁵⁸ The assumption that Faulkner is the inheritor of the Impressionist novel rather than Woolf and Joyce aside, a close examination of Lord Jim reveals that it is as full of narratorial conjecture and filtering as is Chance. In Chance, however, the reader's attention is simply called to that intervention more (indeed, too) often. For that matter, the Impressionist method (in its full moral sense) has little to do with the amount of narratorial commentary; I would argue

that the relative perceptiveness and trustworthiness of the commentary are the main criteria to which we as readers should be sensitive.

Our judgment of Chance, therefore, involves the full range of criteria properly associated with Conrad's moral Impressionism--specific effects, philosophy, form and expression. Although the first two aspects of Impressionism hold firm in this late work, the flaws in form and expression establish its position as a failed (though fascinating) experiment in the Conradian canon.

It is at this stage in Conrad's career--1913--that his philosophical attitudes and interests were further sparked by a new, quickly intense relationship with Bertrand Russell. Although observers have suggested that personal, temperamental elements were the basis of this rapprochement (Russell himself later suggested that both he and Conrad suffered the same intense loneliness and sense of exclusion),⁵⁹ similarities of a more intellectual cast probably played a part as well. In fact, a consideration of such a relationship, wherein both participants are actively engaged in criticizing each other's works, is valuable to any study of Conrad as a philosopher. Moreover, the insights which he gained from a reading of

Russell could only reinforce the strongly-held views on matter and appearance already noted in the earlier works.

To clarify the first suggestion, that intellectual points of similarity must have formed a sizeable basis for the friendship, one might start at the very first meeting of the two men in September of 1913. Russell wrote in a letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell that the very first conversation between himself and Conrad turned into a literary discussion of a particularly fascinating nature: "I plucked up courage to tell him what I find in his work-- the boring down into things to get to the very bottom below the apparent facts. He seemed to feel I had understood him."⁶⁰ It is no wonder that such a deep note of understanding was struck between these two comparative strangers, for Russell, with the philosopher's ready sensitivity to appearances and depths, was bound to penetrate with unswerving aim to the very centre of what Conrad was attempting in Heart of Darkness and Lord Jim. An intriguing personal side-light is thrown on these abstractions, however, by Conrad's reported retort to Russell, that "he had grown to wish he could live on the surface and write differently, that he had grown frightened."⁶¹ This enigmatic comment raises several queries about Conrad at this particular stage of his career. One notes that the conversation,

according to Russell, had gotten underway with a light debate on the merits of Arnold Bennett (with Conrad leading the negative side).⁶² Could this wish to "live" on surfaces and write differently be a vague wish for the popularity which Bennett and other more "traditional" writers enjoyed at this time? (We must remember that Conrad only became popular, strange as it seems, with the widespread distribution of Chance.) Such a yearning would explain certain shifts in Chance and Victory towards the more popular vein (the use of the romantic plot, for example) and momentarily away from the bold experiments of Lord Jim and Nostromo. The fright, the "inward pain and terror"⁶³ which Russell discerned is more difficult to pin down but one suspects that it arose from the horrible depression which plagued Conrad after the publication of Under Western Eyes⁶⁴ and which was to torment him, at intervals, for the rest of his uneasy life. At any rate, Russell's use of the term "inward terror" is interesting indeed in the light of my discussion of the conflict between external rationality and inner impulse in The Secret Sharer.

Along this same line of inquiry into intellectual similarities between Russell and Conrad, one notes that Russell's own work at that time was taking a direction entirely sympathetic to the Impressionist themes revealed

in fictional form by Conrad. In particular, a new scepticism about the absolute division of mind and matter begins to creep into Russell's writings at this time, especially in "On the Nature of Acquaintance." As Russell's biographer, Ronald Clark, has noted, "The view of The Problems of Philosophy, that we are acquainted with ourselves, was now replaced by a denial that we ever have more than self-consciousness; and that we can thus be acquainted only with the contents of our consciousness."⁶⁵ How fascinating it is that Russell, in systematic philosophy, was experiencing at the same time as Conrad in The Secret Sharer a significant movement towards an inward-turning, ~~sceptical~~ theory of knowledge and experience.

The second area of inquiry--Conrad's reading of Russell--offers similar insights into the shared philosophical interests of the two men. Two months after their first meeting, Conrad reports to Russell that he has "just read the first chapter" of The Problems of Philosophy.⁶⁶ This first chapter deals with the matters which absorbed Conrad's interest in Lord Jim and Heart of Darkness--the problems of matter and sensation, as dealt with by thinkers such as Descartes, Berkeley and Hume. Proof of Conrad's avid interest in such questions surfaces only ten days later, when Conrad, already immersed in the Philosophical

Essays, enters into an ecstatic appraisal of a much earlier article, "The Free Man's Worship."⁶⁷ It is startlingly revealing of Conrad's concerns and temperament that he should lavish his most enthusiastic praise on an article which Russell claimed was "only for people in great unhappiness!"⁶⁸ The theme--that of man's position as passive victim in the universe--is not only typically "Conradian" but is typical of the concerns of Conrad in 1913: "In action, in desire," theorized Russell, "we must submit perpetually to the tyranny of outside forces; but in thought, in aspiration, we are free...."⁶⁹ Such a statement of faith in man's inner resourcefulness in the face of all contrary odds forms a fitting companion piece to Conrad's The Secret Sharer and Victory. Appropriately, too, Conrad's very terms of commendation are framed in the most impressionistic of terms: "You have reduced to order the inchoate thoughts of a life-time and given direction to those obscure mouvements d'âme which, unguided, bring only trouble to one's weary days on this earth...."⁷⁰

It is worth noting that Conrad's fascination with Russell's philosophy did not diminish after these first intense months of friendship. Even in 1921 we find him closely studying The Analysis of Mind and making detailed

comments to Russell by letter. In the final analysis, the relationship seems founded as much on intellectual sympathy as on emotional compatability and Russell's later comment must be interpreted in its fullest philosophical sense:

"In the out-works of our lives, we were almost strangers, but we shared a certain outlook on human life and human destiny, which, from the very first, made a bond of extreme strength."⁷¹ This outlook, to be elaborated upon by Conrad in the later novels, was most certainly deepened and matured by this most intense and special of literary friendships.

Not only Conrad's sense of destiny but his very manner of dealing with the problem of human thought must have been influenced by his contact with Russell. At the height of their friendship in 1914, Conrad penned a letter to Russell, confessing, "I've sold my soul to the devil in the shape of a Yankee editor."⁷² What Conrad actually sold to the "Yankee editor" (Knopf) were the rights to his unfinished novel, Victory. It was therefore at the height of the exchange between Conrad and Russell that Victory, with its deep interest in the human activity of thought, took final shape.

The *sceptical* attitude towards this thinking process

which Conrad had introduced in Chance overshadows Victory to the extent that Conrad extemporizes tongue-in-cheek upon the theme in his "Author's Note": "Thinking is the great enemy of perfection. The habit of profound reflection, I am compelled to say, is the most pernicious of all the habits formed by the civilized man."⁷³ The final (if only provisional) "victory" of reason over impulse which Conrad creates in The Secret Sharer is here twisted and corrupt. As Axel Heyst ponders what reasonable action he is to take to free Lena from her former life as slave-musician, we are offered the following cynical aside by Conrad: "For the use of reason is to justify the obscure desires that move our conduct, impulses, passions, prejudices and follies and also our fears."⁷⁴

The source of this profound cynicism is the realization that knowledge, as it comes to a mature mind, does not clarify but simply blurs the issues. Maddening complexity therefore becomes the inevitable result of consciousness. Of his father's philosophical disillusionment (and, by implication, of his own) Heyst informs Lena:

There is something of my father in every man who lives long enough. But they don't say anything. They can't. They wouldn't know how, or perhaps, they wouldn't speak if they could. Man on this earth is an unforeseen accident which does not stand close investigation.⁷⁵

One is reminded of the tangled web of images which opens The Secret Sharer, but in Victory such moral tangles are supremely impervious to human reason or articulation. Within Heyst, however, the gloomy recognition of these pessimistic truths is frequently enlivened by his passionate desire to articulate, to make distinctions, to act. When Heyst allows the treacherous Ricardo and Jones to land on the island, he muses that "everything round him had become unreasonable, unsettled, and vaguely urgent, laying him under an obligation, but giving him no line of action."⁷⁶ In fact, Heyst's misfortune is compounded by precisely this lack of action, for his decision not to dwell upon the presence of the nefarious couple only hastens the chain of events which brings about Lena's death.

This interplay between action and paralysis is further heightened by the very presence of Lena. After her sudden, vicious confrontation with Ricardo, a pale and trembling Lena confides to Heyst only her vague feelings of fear for his safety. Heyst's response truly characterizes his lack of critical instinct: "I...am so rebellious to outward impressions that I can't say that much about myself [i. e., that he is afraid] . I don't react with sufficient distinctness."⁷⁷ The very fact of this pronouncement being made to an obviously distraught woman

(an effect perhaps clumsy on Conrad's part) bears witness to the accuracy of Heyst's self-description! In contrast, Lena, too, suffers this lack of distinctness which Conrad would characterize as la condition humaine, yet her ruling passion is the desire to act. Within seconds of Heyst's declaration we are told of Lena: "A great vagueness enveloped her impressions, but all her energy was concentrated on the struggle that she wanted to take upon herself...."⁷⁸ This ruling passion which finds its outlet in Lena's snatching of Ricardo's gleaming knife, only results in her death. In a curious reversal of all of the encomiums on the value of action in Nostromo and Heart of Darkness, both decision and paralysis prove similarly futile in the world of Victory, and all human action becomes, in Conrad's phrase, "The barbed hook, baited with the illusion of progress."⁷⁹

This note of passive indifference finds its way even into Heyst's contrary impulses towards detachment and human affection. Although, like Decoud in Nostromo, Heyst's detachment is a deliberate policy, its enforcement is less passionate, less convincing. At first glance, Heyst's reaction to the financial plight of Morrison reveals all of the aplomb of practised aloofness: "In the face of this passion Heyst made, with his eyebrows, a

slight motion of surprise which would not have been misplaced in a drawing room."⁸⁰ Nevertheless, Heyst not only assists Morrison but is wounded to the core when he later discovers the ugly rumours which Schomberg creates about his demonic hold on Morrison. Such obvious susceptibility only confirms the long-held opinions of Davidson and the narrator: "Not that we were two romantics, tingeing the world to the hue of our temperament, but that both of us had been acute enough to discover a long time ago that Heyst was."⁸¹ This same discovery on the part of the reader definitely establishes Heyst's place with another of Conrad's incurable romantics--Jim--rather than with Decoud, for whom passion for Antonia and for revolution are coolly accepted as one and the same.

Similarly, Heyst's movement towards human affection is but a half-measure at best. Conrad again uses the motif of the grasping of hands which is so effective in The Secret Sharer but for a slightly different purpose. When Heyst vows to take Lena away from the music hall and the repulsive advances of the hotel-keeper Schomberg, he grasps her extended hands and is shocked "to find them so warm, so real."⁸² The greater shock is still to come, however, for when Heyst accepts the hands of Lena he embraces too the utter blackness from whence they project: "What he

saw was that, white and spectral, she was putting out her arms to him out of the black shadows like an appealing ghost."⁸³ Much later, when Heyst truly senses the danger surrounding himself and Lena (in the concrete form of Jones and Ricardo) he significantly reverses his earlier statement on the solidity of appearances: "How helpless a man is against the Shades! How is one to intimidate, persuade, resist, assert oneself against them? I have lost all belief in realities...Lena, give me your hand."⁸⁴ Nevertheless, this action, as though an externalization of the impotence which Heyst feels has taken place, remains pathetically incomplete: "She obeyed; he seized it with avidity as if eager to raise it to his lips, but halfway up released his grasp."⁸⁵ The barriers of ignorance and misunderstanding have become palpable, as it were, and Heyst's incomplete detachment is accompanied by a painfully incomplete affection.

Obviously Conrad is attempting to render this entire dilemma in a different light than in The Secret Sharer. In addition to the intolerable half-measures of Heyst and Lena, the only other representatives of passion and detachment take the form of extreme grotesques--Jones and Ricardo. These two "identical souls in different disguises"⁸⁶ recall the identical souls of The Secret Sharer but they

are extreme cases indeed. Heyst reflects that Jones and Ricardo are "the envoys of the outer world...evil intelligence, instinctive savagery, arm in arm."⁸⁷ Indeed, Jones' pride in his cold calculation is only surpassed by Ricardo's animalistic bloodthirstiness. Both figures, however, appear as comic-grotesque stereotypes and one has some difficulty in being sufficiently impressed by Conrad's creations. Undoubtedly his evocations of the inner forces of passion and detachment in Lena and Heyst are infinitely more convincing as literary creations.

Another aspect of literary creation which Conrad calls to our attention in his "Author's Note" is the impressionistic use of visual effects for a moral purpose. Such effects do appear prominently in Victory and they rank in subtlety with details of Lord Jim as some of Conrad's finest use of the visual element. In the "Author's Note" Conrad asserts that the only morality which he brings to his works is "that which pervades the whole scheme of this world of senses."⁸⁸ The examples contained in Victory lead the reader to conclude that this morality is of a considerable amount indeed. Early in the novel, Axel Heyst is virtually "swallowed up" by the landscape which surrounds him, in the eyes of the trustworthy Davidson:

He marched into the long grass and vanished--all but the top of his white cork helmet, which seemed to swim in a green sea. Then that too disappeared, as if it had sunk into the living depths of the tropical vegetation, which is more jealous of men's conquests than the ocean....⁸⁹

This image of man being jealously consumed by the land reminds us of the threatening image of the jutting coast, waiting to devour the ship and crew of The Secret Sharer. Such powerful evocations of rational man futilely struggling against annihilation at the hands of the irrational elements begin in the nineteenth century with Turner and are recreated in Monet's High Sea at Etretat* and Van Gogh's late canvas, The Ravine.*

Even the most visually impressionistic scenes in Victory reveal a moral echo lying stealthily below the shimmering surface. Heyst's first vision of Lena in the music hall is an extremely fascinating case in point. The scene is recorded as a brilliant glimpse of fragments of the objects and persons which fill the room: "The small platform was filled with white muslin dresses and crimson sashes...."⁹⁰ This vivid tableau soon turns sombre, however, as Heyst senses that "Their crimson sashes gave a factitious touch of gaiety to the smoky atmosphere."⁹¹ One element in this subdued scene of gaiety, constantly referred to as "the other white muslin dress" and "it,"

is later identified as Lena and this initial, impersonal perception only serves to emphasize how much of an inanimate, repressed creature she has become.

Such effects project forward in time as well, providing a species of foreshadowing which is extraordinarily striking. The Impressionist tableau surrounding Heyst and Lena on Samburan is a subtle but penetrating indication of the ephemeral nature of their life on the island:

Here and there great splashes of light lay on the ground...They turned about and looked from on high over the sea, lonely, its colour effaced by sunshine, its horizon a heat mist, a mere unsubstantial [sic] shimmer in the pale and blinding infinity overhung by the darker blaze of the sky.⁹²

It is at such moments that Victory rises above its many flaws in expression and characterization to reveal Conrad's Impressionist intent at its previous level of achievement. Moreover, in its violent imagery, its despair and cynicism and its almost Prufrockian fear of action, Victory approaches the modern neurosis of "measuring out life with coffee spoons" to an amazing degree.

It is The Shadow-Line, nevertheless, which joins The Secret Sharer as the most successful uniting of Impressionist form and content during these years. Neither work

suffers from the structural problems of Chance, the descent to stereotype found in Victory or the unbounded melodrama of much of the later fiction. The Shadow-Line creates a harmonious balance between visual effect and purpose, while sustaining an atmosphere of mystery which never disintegrates into mere horror or rhetoric. More importantly, however, Conrad's Impressionism is leavened by what I maintain is a parodic variation on the basic literary expression of the sea and the supernatural in English literature--Coleridge's The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.

Although general parallels between the two works have been noted (Albert Guerard likens the supposed spirit of the previous Captain to Coleridge's Polar Spirit)⁹³ the matter demands closer scrutiny. A close reading of both the novel and the poem provides convincing proof that Conrad was creating not only an elaboration but a variation on the poem, designed to accommodate and emphasize his familiar Impressionist themes.

Conrad's attitude towards the supernatural as expressed in the "Author's Note" should be sufficient to prevent critics from ascribing to his work a too-close parallel with Coleridge's poem. To the critics of the day, who were quick to label this tale as one of supernatural

intrigue, Conrad insisted that "I could never have attempted such a thing, because all my moral and intellectual being is penetrated by an invincible conviction that whatever falls under the dominion of our senses...cannot differ in its essence from all the other effects of the visible and tangible world...The world of the living contains enough marvels and mysteries as it is."⁹⁴ This separation of what Conrad terms the "marvellous" from the "mere supernatural"⁹⁵ is precisely the inverse of the sentiments expressed in the epigraph to Coleridge's The Rime of the Ancient Mariner. This quotation, from Thomas Burnet's Archaeologiae philosophicae is as passionate an assertion of the "merely supernatural" as one could ever hope to find: "Facile credo plures esse Naturas invisibiles quam visibiles in rerum universitate"⁹⁶ (I easily believe there to be more invisible Natures than visible ones in the universe). Such a doctrine, especially when applied to the concrete existence of the seaman, was bound to find an unsympathetic audience in Conrad. Furthermore, it is tempting to believe that Conrad was well acquainted with the contents of the 1798 Lyrical Ballads, for in the same "Author's Note" he makes a comment on perception which echoes the Wordsworthian dicta in the famous "Preface": "And as a matter of fact it is personal experience seen in perspective

with the eye of the mind and coloured by that affection one can't help feeling for such events of one's life as one has no reason to be ashamed of."⁹⁷ One cannot help feeling that, in spite of Coleridge's evocation of the sea, Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" might have found a more congenial reader in Conrad!

Notwithstanding these speculations, Conrad, throughout the course of The Shadow-Line, is continually making use of motifs and situations found in The Ancient Mariner and ever so subtly transforming or undercutting them. The first obvious example of this technique occurs well into the tale, when the ship is described as being under an "evil spell."⁹⁸ The passage from The Ancient Mariner, with its spellbinding repetition, creates a horrifying evocation of torturing stillness:

Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean⁹⁹

Conrad, however, is quick to qualify the evil spell of The Shadow-Line as one of an entirely different species--one more in keeping with typical marine experience: "Not that the evil spell held us always motionless. Mysterious currents drifted us here and there, with a stealthy power

made manifest by the changing vistas of the islands fringing the east shore of the Gulf."¹⁰⁰ Interestingly, though, Conrad relies on the same technique of repetition and alliteration to make his spell, too, entirely spellbinding: "And there were winds too, fitful and deceitful...dying into dumb stillness in which the currents had it all their own way--their own inimical way."¹⁰¹ Such a variation accords more closely with Conrad's view of the capricious waywardness of experience--a view not unfamiliar to readers of Victory.

Part of the delight which Conrad takes in this tale lies in his unmasking of supposedly "weird," supernatural events. When the Captain enters the sick-room of the superstitious Burns, he is instantly shocked by the vision of Burns attempting to jab at his throat with a pair of scissors. The supernatural expectations of the Captain (and of the horrified reader) are soon assuaged as he realizes with some relief that Burns is merely clipping his thick red beard.¹⁰²

More significant, though, are the variations which Conrad creates for more clearly thematic reasons. One of the most sustained of these themes is his treatment of the crew members. We recall that this observation applies to the crewmen of The Ancient Mariner as well, for

the reproachful glances and curses which they direct at their Captain are continually pressed upon the reader:

And I had done a hellish thing,
And it would work 'em woe:
For all averred, I had killed the bird
That made the breeze to blow...¹⁰³

* * *

One after one, by the star-dogged Moon,
Too quick for groan or sigh;
Each turned his face with ghastly pang,
And cursed me with his eye.¹⁰⁴

For Conrad, however, it is the unceasing stability of the men--even in misfortune--which is the one indubitable element in the entire universe. In fact, in these insinuations, one strongly suspects that The Ancient Mariner is foremost in Conrad's conscious design: "I had to force myself to look them in the face. I expected to meet reproachful glances. There were none."¹⁰⁵ It is from this context that Conrad's epigraph for the work arises, for it is precisely this human endurance which makes these men "so worthy of my undying regard."¹⁰⁶ This inner worth is repeatedly insisted upon, in the Captain's journals,¹⁰⁷ and in the quiet obedience to the orders which we observe through the Captain's eyes: "...when I asked quietly, 'Are you there, men?' my eyes made out shadowy forms starting up around me, very few, very indistinct; and a voice spoke:

'All here sir'."¹⁰⁸ This reversal, by which shadowy forms prove substantial in their loyalty, contrasts powerfully with the sequence of events in Coleridge's poem. One recalls that when the men appear to rise up and work the ropes of the ship, they are not substantial beings, "But a troop of spirits blest."¹⁰⁹ Conrad, however, insists upon the inverse. Although the Captain marvels that any physical work on his ship must have been accomplished through "sheer spiritual strength," his following characterization of his men establishes without a doubt their physical existence: "They toiled like Titans."¹¹⁰ Such subtle refocussing on Conrad's part serves to reinforce his primary Impressionist dictate--the existence of the "marvellous" in the sensations and creatures of the world we inhabit every day.

Certain motifs familiar to readers of Coleridge's poem also reappear in a slightly different light and context which we recognize at once to be Conrad's. Stars are assigned a complex^{role} in The Ancient Mariner; they are harbingers both of trial and of release. The "star-dogged Moon"¹¹¹ precedes the curse and collapse of the crewmen, but it is the appearance of the "journeying moon" with "a star or two beside"¹¹² which reigns over the critical scene of the Mariner's blessing of the water snakes.

Similarly, in Conrad's tale there occur two significant appearances of stars, but they are invested with a pessimistic determinism which recalls Hardy rather than Coleridge. Immediately before the scene of the crew members' devotion, the Captain muses that "The few stars overhead shed a dim light upon the ship alone, with no gleams of any kind upon the water, in detached shafts piercing an atmosphere which had turned to soot."¹¹³ Although the solidarity of the tiny social unit, the ship, holds true, the reigning atmosphere of detachment and inconstancy persists. The second occasion, however, more closely approximates the Coleridgean motif; before the appearance of the saving, favourable breeze, the dependable Ransome remarks "in a soothing tone that the stars were coming out."¹¹⁴ Although the ship members, like the Mariner, "penance more will do" in the form of a lashing gale, one senses that they, through their loyalty, have survived the worst of the experience.

The greatest concentration of similarities to the Romantic poem appear, in fact, at the end of the tale, but even these undergo significant changes in Conrad's hands. The rain which greets the Mariner's awakening in Coleridge's poem is definitely a result of his blessing of the snakes and a sign of expiation to come:

My lips were wet, my throat was cold,

My garments all were dank;
 Sure I had drunken in my dreams,
 And still my body drank¹¹⁵

In Conrad's tale, these associated motifs--nourishment and rain--are strangely twisted; the Captain, unable to eat or to put his mind at ease, is haunted by what appears to be "something going on in the sky like a decomposition, like a corruption of the air, which remains as still as ever."¹¹⁶ When the rain finally does come, it strikes his cheek just as the liberating breezes fan the cheek of the Mariner. Conrad's imagery, however, is not one of gentle "fanning" and softness but one of violence: "While I wondered at this mysterious devilry, I received a slight blow under the left eye and felt an enormous tear run down my cheek. Raindrops. Enormous. Forerunners of something. Tap. Tap. Tap...."¹¹⁷ The downpour which this rain foretells is so colossal that the Captain can only describe it in terms which suggest a terrifying last judgment rather than an expiation: "the darkness turned into water."¹¹⁸

This sophisticated play on a well-known literary tradition includes a resolution which very closely resembles the Mariner's own final fate. Like the enchanted ship of Coleridge's tale, the ship of The Shadow-Line suddenly moves forward "as of herself."¹¹⁹ Internal "control," too, is lost amid the chaos, as the muttering Mr. Burns,

entirely convinced of the supernatural curse upon the ship, is perceived by the Captain as a "lunatic who would be very likely to start roaming over the ship and break a limb or fall overboard."¹²⁰ Burns, in fact, does lose his tenuous

grip on sanity at the very mention of the word "devil":

"'The old dodging Devil,' he screamed piercingly, and burst into such a loud laugh as I had never heard before."¹²¹

One notes here a similarity to the Pilot's boy, who upon seeing the Mariner goes mad: "'ha! ha!' quoth he, 'full plain I see, / The Devil knows how to row'."¹²² Conrad's lunatic, however, is a member of the crew--not an outsider--and his lunacy is perceived as a bothersome (even if rather chilling) obstruction to the business of the moment--constructive action.

In the final event, it is the passive acceptance of the crew's situation which Conrad emphasizes at the end of The Shadow-Line. Although the Mariner is compelled to tell his story ad infinitum in order to relieve his conscience, the Captain's fate is of a more passive nature. The wise, paternal figure, Captain Giles, offers to the Captain a counsel of not making "too much of anything in life, good or bad" which the youthful, rebellious Captain interprets as living "at half-speed."¹²³ Such suggestions recall the life "at half-speed" to which Axel Heyst is

subjected in Victory. The resolution in The Shadow-Line is more positive, however, (and less solitary) because this humble acceptance is accompanied by the determination to go on. The Captain's final resolve, to take ship and crew back into the always enigmatic--but concrete--world is a sign that for him, as for the Ancient Mariner, "There's no rest for me...."¹²⁴

In Conrad's later years, one is similarly struck by the sense of there being no time for rest. In 1917 to 1918 he feverishly wrote (or rather dictated) The Arrow of Gold--an historical romance set in Marseilles. Conrad's second attempt to construct a viable romantic plot, however, turned out more disastrously than Chance and the novel is filled with melodrama and worn phrasing. Nevertheless, it is a valuable document in that it reveals how avid an art enthusiast Conrad actually was, and to what extent he attempted to incorporate artistic themes into his later work.

Artistic references appear with remarkable frequency at this particular point in Conrad's career. In "The Partner," for example--an unadorned tale of adventure from the collection Within the Tides--a fascinating reference to a contemporary artist arises amid the fairly

mediocre surroundings. As the narrator begins to listen to the tale of "an imposing old ruffian,"¹²⁵ he happens to glance at the seashore--"an acre or more of black dots scattered on the steel-grey shades of the level sea...the veiled whiteness of the cliff coming through, like a diffused, mysterious radiance. It was a delicate, and a wonderful picture, something expressive, suggestive, and desolate, a symphony in grey and black--a Whistler."¹²⁶ This passage, recalling the praise for Whistler and Rodin in an earlier letter to William Blackwood,¹²⁷ defines more clearly what Conrad saw to admire in Whistler's art--the radiance yet suggestiveness of works such as Nocturne in Blue and Gold: Old Battersea Bridge* and Symphony in White No. 2: The Little White Girl.* Both canvases, although one is a landscape and the other a portrait, exhibit a luminous mystery and a compositional genius. Moreover, such a reference indicates that Conrad was well aware of the current interchange between the arts of music and painting. In fact, the passage represents an attempt to realize a Whistler tableau in yet another medium--words.

In The Arrow of Gold, the references to art are not particularized to this degree but they are frequent and varied. We are briefly introduced to a Jamesian painter-collector figure in the person of Henry Allegre and we are

even treated to a revival of the ancient quarrel between painting and sculpture when Henry meets Doyen, a sculptor.¹²⁸ It is interesting to note that scholars such as Lyman Owen have researched such references and are fairly convinced that Conrad was attempting a "thumbnail sketch" in words of Gustave Doré.¹²⁹ Art "jokes" do abound, too, in the novel, in a light reference, for example, to an amateur sculptor named "Prax"¹³⁰ (an extreme diminutive of Praxiteles in every sense!). At times, too, the references are more enigmatic and thought-provoking, as in Conrad's description of Doña Rita, dressed in a peasant skirt and "concealed in a black shawl which covered her head, her shoulders, arms, and elbows completely," her face resembling "a face in a painting."¹³¹ Perhaps because of Doña Rita's Spanish associations (she is a supporter of Don Carlos' claim to the throne) one instantly recalls Goya's portraits of Spanish noblewomen.

Nevertheless, Conrad's more intensive use of the art motif is of primary concern, for it involves not simply scattered references but some attempt at creating a unifying element in the story. The frequent references to Doña Rita as an art object reveal not only this attempt, but suggest parallels with another famous female "objet d'art"--Browning's "My Last Duchess." Long before we actually

perceive Doña Rita, we are told by Mills that she was "without doubt the most admirable find" of Henry Allegre "amongst all the priceless items he had accumulated in that house."¹³² Blunt's sarcastic rejoinder, "But, you see, of all the objects there she was the only one that was alive"¹³³ recalls to our mind a similar case of "life" reduced to the inanimate level of canvas and paint: "There she stands / As if alive."¹³⁴ Our suspicions are further aroused by the conversation which ensues and in particular by Mills' protestation, "But she radiated life...She had plenty of it, and it had a quality."¹³⁵ Notwithstanding the rather flat, uninspiring prose, this statement matches in spirit a much less generous appraisal on the part of Browning's Duke:

She had
A heart--how shall I say?--too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.¹³⁶

Interestingly, Doña Rita, too, is perceived as a non-committal lover but Conrad ultimately expects us (as does Browning) to see beneath the common perception. Unfortunately, even in Browning's brief characterization, the temptation to see the Duchess as a vital, loving force is enormously more successful than one feels in relation to Conrad's treatment of Doña Rita. Nevertheless, through

the use of tiny details, one senses that this parallel is continually being drawn--for example, Rita is pictured at least twice riding a mule¹³⁷ as is Browning's Duchess. Moreover, her relationship with Allegre is identical to the picture which we as readers reconstruct of the marriage of the Duke and late Duchess. Allegre is described as being insanely jealous,¹³⁸ much in the same way that the Duke is loth to behold his wife enjoying innocent pleasures such as "The dropping of the daylight in the West, / The bough of cherries some officious fool / Broke in the orchard for her...."¹³⁹ In fact, the entire courtship of Rita is sneeringly portrayed in terms of the acquisition of artistic stock, in terms of "The sly approaches, the astute negotiations, the lying and the circumventing...for the sake of beauty, you know."¹⁴⁰ One need only remember that at the time of his lightly-veiled condemnation of his last Duchess, the Duke is absorbed in negotiations for the next hapless bride; his words "Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed / At starting, is my object"¹⁴¹ thus become as ominous and self-seeking as all of his previous comments. Conrad's increasing willingness to rely on artistic references, together with his more frequent use of the English literary heritage, make this parallel seem quite likely and apt. Whereas Browning's portrait, however, is

precise, full of reflexive irony, and poignantly sympathetic, Conrad's Rita suffers from the sort of melodramatic excess which results in her being described as having a neck "round like the shaft of a column"!¹⁴²

Notwithstanding such flaws in expression, The Arrow of Gold reveals Conrad theorizing as well on the relationship of visual art to story telling. His characterization of the narrator as an artist deserves to be examined in some detail, for it reveals much about Conrad's own artistic impulses and experiments:

He has broken away from his conventions. He is trying to put a special vibration and his own notion of colour into his life; and perhaps even to give it a modelling according to his own ideas. And for all you know he may be on the track of a masterpiece: if it happens to be one nobody will see it...And even he won't be able to see it in its completeness except on his death-bed. There is something fine in that.¹⁴³

In spite of the many flaws of the later novels, there is, indeed, "something fine" in Conrad's humble conception of the artist--something which George Eliot, with her visualization of the author painstakingly adding the minute last touches to her "Dutch painting"¹⁴⁴ would surely admire. This faith, then, in the verbal artist's power to render the minute sensations of life and to thus comment--albeit pessimistically--on the quality of that life is the abiding

faith which carried Conrad into his last years. This abiding faith was precisely what, we recall, Henry James called "The power to guess the unseen from the seen." Throughout both successful and unsuccessful attempts at mastering this power in his career, Conrad was unconsciously fulfilling the advice with which Henry James ended that same statement: "Try to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost!"¹⁴⁵

CHAPTER FOUR

LAST BRUSHSTROKES: 1919--1924

Throughout his career, Joseph Conrad's fiction both dwelt in and celebrated the twilight region of suggestion and precision which Verlaine evoked in his poetry: "Rien de plus cher que la chanson grise / Où l'Indécis an Précis se joint."¹ This Impressionist task--to shape and model a concrete expression of the ephemeral--was bound to create in Conrad's life and thought a strain of tension and paradox. We note, for instance, that the older Conrad turned towards a more sombre "chanson grise" in creating the worlds of Victory and Chance; man's grappling with the obscurities within his fellow men and himself begins to take place on a stage manipulated by blind fate and universal perversity. In the last novels, such a universe inevitably dampens the attempts of men like Marlow in Heart of Darkness and Lord Jim to delve into the manifold obscurities which they discover in their fellow men and within themselves; the controlling powers have become too tyrannical and men such as Lingard and Peyrol can only grimly submit to their rule. Thus, scepticism, the artistic cure which Conrad once enthusiastically recommended to Galsworthy as "the tonic of minds, the tonic of life, the agent of

truth,--the way of art and salvation"² becomes Conrad's own brand of literary "poison" in the works of the last years of his life.

The central question when dealing with The Rescue, The Rover and the unfinished Suspense is not one of "achievement" or "decline" (to borrow the terms of Thomas Moser) but one of the origins and causes of the artistic decline. The frustrated complaints of Conrad in his letters to Garnett and to other close friends during these years are enough to convince us of this palpable decline in his powers of expression, even before we examine the overblown prose of many passages in The Rescue or Suspense. When we turn, however, to the interpretation of such lapses in Conrad's art, there soon emerge as many explanations as there are interpreters. Thomas Moser, whose Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline deals most thoroughly with this very question, locates the problem in the personal sphere alone. "The failures of The Arrow of Gold, The Rescue, The Rover and Suspense," Moser theorizes, "inevitably lead us to think not of Conrad the artist but of the man living out the last years of his life down in Kent."³ Certainly, the compelling stories of Conrad's battles against the ever-encroaching nervous depression, the fits of gout and violent temper, and his

wife Jessie's ill-health, fill the pages of Frederick Karl's biography.⁴ Nevertheless, as in the critical treatment of his friendship with Bertrand Russell, personal factors are too often offered in isolation, without considering other philosophical or artistic elements.

Interestingly, the reactions of one of the earliest reviewers of The Rescue--Virginia Woolf--fall into precisely these two categories of psychological and aesthetic inquiry. In her private journal, Woolf all too blatantly characterizes the artistic decline as a psychological retreat into the past:

I can't help suspecting the truth to be that he never sees anyone who knows good writing from bad, and then being a foreigner, talking broken English, married to a lump of a wife, he withdraws more and more into what he once did well, only piles it on higher and higher, until what can one call it but stiff melodrama.⁵

In Woolf's public utterance, however,--the review published in the Times Literary Supplement--she reaches the same conclusion through a philosophical, aesthetic path of analysis; Conrad's famous belief in romance, she argues, has been frustrated by the deepening of his earlier cynicism. The stylistic tendency, towards purple prose and melodrama, is therefore an outcome of a philosophical panic and in the final event "Simplicity has been undone by sophistication."⁶

As one recalls the particular belief which haunts The Secret Sharer--that maturity and perception bring only moral haze and complexity--one sees that such tendencies must ultimately result in the peculiar state which Woolf describes. Perception becomes not a clarification nor a cleansing, but a maddening obscuration.

It is this conflict, therefore, between Impressionism and cynicism which makes the predominant feature of the last novels one of unsolved oppositions. This recurring pattern within the very fabric of the works--in both stylistic and thematic terms--reveals that Conrad reflected in his art the very division which plagued his artistic career in its last stages. "To be able to think and unable to express," he once woefully admitted to Garnett, "is a fine torture... I have had some impressions, some sensations--in my time:--impressions and sensations of common things. And it's all faded...."⁷

The fading of the lively sensations which once illuminated Lord Jim and An Outcast of the Islands is poignant indeed when one considers that Conrad originally intended the work which he began during those same years--The Rescue--to depend upon those very "impressions and sensations." In fact, with no other novel did Conrad take such

elaborate pains to insist upon its relation to visual art. In August 1897, he coyly hinted to William Blackwood that The Rescue was "a deliberate attempt to get in some artistic effects of a graphic order--but I mustn't weary you."⁸ Elaboration came only one month later, as Conrad fully explained his visual and moral method of that early stage in his career to the interested Blackwood. Conrad acknowledged that the situation (that of a man ostensibly torn between duty and love) was by no means a new one, and that "Consequently all the effect must be produced in the working out--in the manner of telling."⁹ For Conrad, as one recalls in Lord Jim and Nostromo, the "manner of telling" serves to illuminate and educate the reader's manner of perceiving. Thus, his method, as expounded to Blackwood, is completely visual in basis and moral in intent: "I aim at stimulating vision in the reader. If after reading the part I st you don't see my man [emphasis Conrad's] then I've absolutely failed and must begin again--or leave the thing alone."¹⁰ This ominous threat was indeed fulfilled in the eventual history of The Rescue--with a double vengeance. Conrad's fervent wish to stimulate vision was twice frustrated: once, by Conrad's early leave-taking of the novel to embark upon Heart of Darkness and Lord Jim and twenty-three years later, when his more embittered cast of mind

made such a sparkling creation virtually impossible to uphold with a clear conscience. It is the origin of the second failure which is my primary concern here, however, for it yields certain insights into the final decay of the Impressionist vision of Conrad's earlier years.

It is The Rescue--mixture as it is of early and late Conrad--which allows us to observe the gradual shift to a vision which is dominated by oppositions rather than by the delving into levels of storytelling and perception in Heart of Darkness and Nostromo. The most outstanding of these recurring oppositions is a nearly obsessional concern with solidity and insecurity in human life. As the novel opens, the pervading sense of "dead, flat calm" is broken only by the minute embodiment of a solid reality--the brig which "floated tranquil and upright as if bolted solidly, keel to keel, with its own image reflected in the unframed and immense mirror of the sea."¹¹ This image of reflection, reinforced by the repetition of the word "double" ("the double islands watched silently the double ship") conjures up, indeed, the very image which immediately follows--that of the ship and crew suspended as hopelessly as a "captive"; a "helpless prisoner of the shallow sea."¹² Such a sequence of images serves as a fitting prelude to Tom Lingard's intolerable position as a hapless captive,

suspended between the two imperatives of helping to restore the political power of Hassim, and obeying his passionate impulses to protect Mrs. Travers.

Like the vision of the tiny brig perched precariously between the two realms of sky and water, Lingard's alternatives of honour and passion become just as difficult to untangle as the reflections in the tranquil waters. Unlike the conflicts arising in earlier novels, such as The Secret Agent, the merging or confusion of alternatives in The Rescue produces a bedevilling moral tangle. The appeals of Hassim and Immada, for instance, are fraught with tears and other palpable signs of passion, and the passion which Lingard feels for Mrs. Travers is inextricably bound up with the questions of honour provoked by her hapless though binding marriage with the abominable Travers. Such mutations of supposedly clear choices, all but ignored by most critics of The Rescue, are truly different in quality and implication from the choices open to Mr. Verloc in The Secret Agent, for example. The latter character is free to choose either to serve revolution or human feeling, and his act, along with the resulting death of Stevie, may justly be abhorred by both Winnie Verloc and the reader. Lingard's dilemma, however, is not one which a single act can render either admirable or abhorrent.

Like the other figures in the late Conradian canon, the benefit of clear alternatives is kept well out of reach, and the character can only plunge blindly ahead into situations he neither engineers nor fully perceives. Proof of this distinction lies in the fact that Lingard's ruin and loneliness, like that of Axel Heyst in Victory, has its origins in the well-meant deceptions of a woman. Like Lena, Mrs. Travers attempts to perform a sacrificial act (the hiding of all knowledge of the ring sent as a warning by Hassim to Lingard) only to destroy whatever chances for happiness and possible clarity exist in this most obscure and cynical of universes. Again, honour and passion intermix to such an extent that Conrad's men and women are doomed to short-sighted half-measures by the very dint of their good intentions. Therefore, the sets of oppositions which Conrad chose as title headings for the last two chapters of The Rescue--"The Point of Honour and the Point of Passion" and "The Claim of Life and the Toll of Death"--are savagely ironic indeed, for just as passion and honour merge in the acts of man, so too do the consequences remain in a similar twilight zone. Lingard's fate--to be deprived of both the natives' respect and of the love of Mrs. Travers--is neither affirmation nor death but a hopelessly passive death-in-life.

It is this moral design, with its corresponding visual schema, which has won and continues to win the support of readers and critics. Richard Curle, in his memoir of Conrad, affirms the status of The Rescue as "a compromise between the earlier and the later Conrad,"¹³ and more recently Jocelyn Baines has praised the novel's "firm moral pivot."¹⁴ Such morally-based analyses, however, tend to ignore the sizeable flaws in expression and basic design which a closer examination of Conrad's shifting Impressionism reveals. In the last half of The Rescue, for example, Conrad attempts through various means to express this confused merging of moral alternatives, only to fail through over-elaboration. When Mrs. Travers, at great personal risk, is allowed to land on the island to join Lingard, her courage is perceived by Lingard (and supposedly by the reader) to be as faithful and illuminating as the torch which she bravely carries onto the shore. Nevertheless, Mrs. Travers' faithful intentions come to naught, and are discarded, just as the torch is ironically left "flaring and spluttering on the ground"¹⁵ as she runs towards the hidden figure of Lingard. Such an episode, albeit minute in itself, raises major questions about the very design and conception of the novel. If no security is to be found anywhere in the universe of The Rescue, then the acts

and meditations of the helpless Lingard are of less dramatic importance than Conrad would have us, as readers, believe. Thus, Lingard's excuse, after hearing of Mrs. Travers' hiding of the ring, that "if she had given the ring to me it would have been to one that was dumb, deaf and robbed of all courage,"¹⁶ diffuses at one blow the import of Mrs. Travers' decision to keep the ring a secret. Thus, the complaints of Conrad in the "Author's Note" move beyond humble self-criticism to a self-conscious awareness of the true flaw of the novel: "But as to the way of presenting the facts, and perhaps in a certain measure as to the nature of the facts themselves, I had many doubts.... What I had lost for the moment was the sense of the proper formula of expression...."¹⁷ The incongruity which Conrad sensed, between the expression and the actual thematic conflict in the tale, is an inevitable result of his combination of the earlier impressionistic themes of action and knowledge already studied in Nostromo, with the defeating cynicism which we witnessed creeping into the fabric of the later novels.

The second element of the criticism which Virginia Woolf made of The Rescue--that simplicity was irrevocably sacrificed to complexity and melodrama--is again an outcome of what we might call the clash of early Impressionism

and later determinism in Conrad. In spite of the doubts which he expressed as to the suitability of the novel's framework to support the weighty themes which he chose to examine, Conrad nevertheless continued to encumber The Rescue with his traditional reflections of knowledge and experience. The almost immediate burdening of the character of Mrs. Travers with the identity of "seeker of knowledge" is simply more than the rather insubstantial shoulders of this character are able to bear. One such example of this overburdening of character with philosophical import is the narrator's observation that Mrs. Travers, contemplating the freedom of Immada's passions, "felt invaded by that inexplicable exaltation which the consciousness of their physical capacities so often gives to intellectual beings."¹⁸ At such points in The Rescue, subtlety is sacrificed to verbosity and the earlier practice of leaving critical judgment to the sensitive eye and mind of the reader is all but abandoned.

These points of stress and weakness in The Rescue are worth analysing, for they reveal the Impressionist themes of knowledge and sensation in what I would call a phase of "decadence." The theme of "unknowing," taken to its logical extremes in Conrad, does result in first, cynicism, then deepening and irreconcilable oppositions and finally,

overcomplexity and obscurity. Fittingly, then, the volume entitled The Rescue reveals a further applicability--to the stresses and strains of the art of fiction in decline. "Action in its essence," Conrad revealingly wrote in Notes on Life and Letters, "the creative art of a writer of fiction, may be compared to rescue work carried out in darkness against cross gusts of wind swaying the action of a great multitude."¹⁹ Although Conrad's attempted "rescuing" of his twenty-three-year-old experiment was anything but a success, it has yet much to tell us of the contrary impulses, the gusts and strandings in the career of a novelist.

The element of melodrama--another outcome of the helplessness Conrad felt in relation to his powers of expression during his last years--plagues the slighter attempts of The Rover and Suspense. Although The Rover, in particular, has been reevaluated by recent critics such as Gary Geddes in his Conrad's Later Novels, the fact remains that the focus of this Napoleonic tale of adventure and intrigue remains external and thrilling rather than internal and penetrating. Indeed, sustained analysis of character did not figure in Conrad's original design, for he protested to Edward Garnett that "brevity was a conscious aim...brevity ab initio, in the very conception, in the

very manner of thinking about the people and the events."²⁰ Using one of his now frequent artistic metaphors, Conrad emphasized that a more intensive study of one of the characters--the jealous former Jacobin, Scevola--"would have required another canvas."²¹

Within the humble framework of this canvas, Conrad nevertheless attempts to incorporate several of his Impressionist techniques, with varying degrees of success. Throughout the novel, the recircling of events (a technique familiar to readers of Lord Jim and Nostromo) continues, but often without the thematic justification to be found in the latter works. The story of Lieutenant Réal's long-standing passion for Arlette is narrated only after the scene in the dining room when he suddenly kisses her hand, but this order of narration does not, upon reflection, affect our reactions to either character.²² A more successful use of this device, this time to create suspense, occurs earlier in the novel, when we discover that the rover, Peyrol, and the fisherman, Michel, have been harbouring a secret, in the form of the captured British officer. It is only then that we realize the cause of Peyrol's extreme nervousness while walking that very morning with Lieutenant Réal.²³ Nevertheless, such devices remain on the level of plot advancement and any knowledge which we receive in this manner

serves not to provoke any deeper kinds of reflection or suspicion but merely to satisfy our aroused curiosity.

In terms of contrasts and oppositions, one notes the same tension between security and insecurity which runs throughout The Rescue. In this tale of adventure, however, this device, too, remains external and one-dimensional. The single dimension is that of romantic love. At first, it is Peyrol who discerns in Arlette a basic solidity which lies beneath the apparent childishness: "this evasive yet frank mobility was so much a part of her being that the steadiness with which she met his inquisitive glance surprised old Peyrol for a moment."²⁴ Later, it is this abiding faith in Arlette which moves her to pursue Lieutenant Réal when she discovers that he is gone, and which unwittingly leads her to save his life. Such contrasts, however, seem slight even in comparison with the complex interplay between the solid and the ephemeral, the abiding and the deceptive in The Rescue.

Potentially, the most absorbing element in The Rover is the interplay between public and private sentiments. Although the figure of Lieutenant Réal is not subject to the intense scrutiny and sharp ironic play as is Decoud in Nostromo, his personality reveals much the same yearning for aloofness amid the affairs of the heart.

Conrad not only emphasizes that he is "taciturn," "guarded" and wary of social relations but that "He enjoyed the sense of remoteness from ordinary mankind."²⁵ In the midst of preparations for the chase which finally results in the deaths of Peyrol, Scevola and Michel, Réal attempts to comfort himself by imagining that Arlette will forget him in the space of a month's time. Instantly, however, he is filled with remorse and is tempted (significantly in religious terms) to "confess to Arlette this sacrilegious cynicism of thought."²⁶ Again, though, this internal drama remains a drama of one dimension--romantic love--instead of the universal drama of sympathy and detachment which ultimately surrounds and destroys Martin Decoud.

This motif, nevertheless, is much more sustained than any other element of The Rover, for the concerns of public and private utterance reach even to the historical character of Lord Nelson! When Nelson appears, painted as a rather neurasthenic hypochondriac near the end of the novel, he, too, is the hapless subject of "vehement feelings"²⁷ and outbursts of determined pride. His subordinate, Captain Vincent, capturer of Peyrol's tartane, is no less subject to such twinges of emotion. Although he realizes that the deaths of Peyrol and the other two men are fully within the limits of his duties, his uneasy

conscience about the entire affair reveals him to be "a man of generous feelings and of easily moved sympathies."²⁸ His last act, to let the French tricolours fly while the three men are buried with their ship, reveals his essential humanity. This double focus, in fact, reaches a climax at the end of The Rover, when the news both of Trafalgar and of the marriage of Lieutenant Réal and Arlette are coupled together in one sentence.²⁹ One must remember, however, that public and private do not stand on such easy terms of equality in Conrad's vision; the secret tale of Peyrol is symbolically treasured only by the mysterious depths of the Mediterranean waters in which he finds his grave--waters which are ominously both "the charmer and the deceiver of audacious men."³⁰ Thus, the "sweep of serene dignity"³¹ which Jocelyn Baines perceives at the end of The Rover is, in reality, a sombre prospect indeed. The work, in general, betrays a lonely, defeatist tone which is aptly and movingly summed up by the unwitting comment of the simple Michel earlier in the novel: "Somebody must be last in this world."³²

This sense of lonely, last things not too surprisingly pervades Suspense, the novel which Conrad was struggling to complete at the time of his death. The interplay between what I have called "solidity" and "insecurity" in

The Rescue here deepens into an overwhelming concentration on insecurity alone. In this tale of an enterprising young Englishman visiting a childhood friend in Genoa, it is the Italian milieu itself rather than any particular set of personal circumstances, which increasingly embodies this crippling insecurity. The youth, Cosmo Latham (a name significantly consisting of a variation of the Italian "Cosimo" and the ultimately British surname, Latham), soon perceives the inherent instability of his new surroundings; Genoa swiftly becomes "a maze of narrow streets,"³³ containing mystery and possible treachery at every corner. This "enchanted city,"³⁴ with its potential both for spellbinding beauty and for intolerable captivity (as revealed in his friend Adèle's confining marriage to Count de Monteverso and eventually in Cosmo's own physical abduction), recalls the city of an earlier Conradian drama--"Il Conde." This story (from the 1908 collection, A Set of Six), is located in Naples, but the psychological landscape is strikingly similar to that of Suspense. The main figure, a European count, comes to Naples seeking "life, movement, animation,"³⁵ but encounters instead a bedevilling psychological threat in the form of a cocky young Italian thief. The contemptuous thief, in brazenly presenting himself to his former victim in a café, flourishes the very bravado which the

nervous, neurotic Count is ashamed of having sacrificed during the incident of the theft. "His delicate conception of his dignity," observes the narrator, "was defiled by a degrading experience."³⁶ Thus, the curious clash between what Conrad considered the threatening, brash temper of Italy and the stolid impassiveness of the "refined" European is precisely the same clash which, we discover, Cosmo Latham is about to confront in the Genoese world of Suspense.

This fastidious fear of instability and chaos pervades the very mood of Suspense, touching the sensitive spots both of international politics and personal attachments. That this story of stealthy hopes and morbid fears is set in the context of one of the most unsettling periods of European history--Napoleon's exile in Elba--is surely indicative of the other, deeper conflicts in the very fabric of the tale. These deeper suspicions and neuroses do, in fact, invade the personal career of the conventional European traveller--Cosmo--as he finds himself more and more deeply attracted to the companion of his childhood--the miserably unhappy Adèle de Monteverso. Thus, his disappearance (the climax, at any rate, of the rather unsatisfying fragment of Suspense which alone is left to us) is indeed a culminating point of these collective and individual

"neuroses." The scene is certainly one of mass confusion, as we witness the arrogant Dr. Martel scouring the environs of Genoa for some trace of the vanished Cosmo. As he investigates one palace (complete with a slumbering footman) in the course of his search, Martel reflects that, after all, "all sorts of things might happen. This was Italy. The silence as of a tomb, which pervaded the whole house, though nothing extraordinary in the hour of siesta, produced the effect of sinister mystery."³⁷ The associative links between the disorganized household, the chaotic land and the disorder which undermines human sanity, are all too clear both in this passage and in Conrad's mind as well. One can well imagine how terrifying the prospect of such a landscape of disorder must have been to Conrad's hypersensitive sensibilities; while he and Jessie were in Naples in 1904, he irritably wrote to Ford Madox Ford that "This climate, what between Tramontana and Sirocco, has half killed me in a not unpleasant languorous, melting way. I am sunk in a vaguely uneasy dream of visions, of innumerable tales that float in an atmosphere of voluptuously aching bones."³⁸ In both personal and fictional utterance, then, we note Conrad's tendency to invest sensations (whether of sight or of temperature) with ontological or psychological associations--a habit at the

very basis of his Impressionist cast of mind.

Instability for Conrad--both in Suspense and in his own correspondence and musings--is inextricably linked with the struggle to express, to concretize sensations. Cosmo Latham, the rather naive recipient of a veritable bombardment of new sensations on his European tour, is faced with exactly the same problem. As he prepares to render his impressions of this new life to his sister, Henrietta, he discovers that "Even to describe the world outwardly was not an easy task....The world certainly was amusing. Oh yes, it was amusing....Cosmo thought suddenly that one's personal life was a very bizarre thing."³⁹ The sequence of Cosmo's reflections is noteworthy indeed, for it reveals the same movement from attempted explanation to cynicism, to utter solitude which prompts Marlow in Heart of Darkness to thus bitterly resume his analysis of Kurtz: "We live as we dream--alone."⁴⁰ That this indeed is Conrad's sentiment in regard to both mundane experience and to the intenser strivings of the artist is revealed in a post-war letter to Bertrand Russell: "I am sorry for the philosophers...who (like the rest of us) cannot have their cake and eat it. There's no exactitude in the vision or in the words, I have a notion that we are condemned in all things to the à-peu-près."

It is this note, continually sounded in the later novels, which dominates the remaining portion of Suspense, written during Conrad's final days. In the last, incomplete fragment of an episode, as Cosmo attempts to escape to Livorno, he is suddenly beset by the nagging thought "that he was not--perhaps no man was--a free agent."⁴² Again, the note of captivity arises--the captivity so powerfully figured in the labyrinth of Genoa and in the stifling rooms of the Contessa's palace which bespeak the stifling nature of her marriage. In fact, such associations are explicitly drawn by Conrad in the same scene, as Cosmo begins to feel entirely devoid of sensation, "disembodied, as it were": "He was suffering...that sort of mental agony which had taken possession of him while he was descending the great staircase of the palazzo under the eye of the Count de Monteverso."⁴³

Although Suspense remains incomplete, its last utterance forms a conclusive epigraph for the sentiments of the last, "decadent" phase of Conrad's Impressionism. As Attilio and Cosmo discuss the power of stars to control man's fate, Cosmo suddenly turns his attention to the body of the old Genoese boatman, who died attempting to steer the ship into safe waters, and asks, "Where is his star now?" Attilio's response, that the brave old man's star

"should be out...But who will miss it out of the sky?"⁴⁴
 betrays the same profound scepticism already noted at the
 end of The Rover. Like the legends of the courageous
 Peyrol, the strivings of man in Conrad's last novel re-
 main miniscule in comparison with the controlling powers,
 to say the least. In this respect, Conrad abandons the
 Impressionist's tension between clear vision and human
 imperfection for a more deterministic emphasis on human
 obscurity alone which more closely echoes the sentiments
 of Thomas Hardy:

How arrives it joy lies slain
 And why unblooms the best hope ever sown?
 --Crass Casualty obstructs the sun and rain,
 And dicing Time for gladness casts a moan...
 These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown
 Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain.⁴⁵

* * * * *
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This one-dimensional, deterministic flavour of
 the last novels naturally provokes comparisons with the
 earlier Impressionist vision of Conrad, and it is such
 a comparison which this thesis has been designed to reveal.
 Studied in sequence, Conrad's Impressionism--a method
 which reaches far beyond description and rhetoric to
 a deeply held philosophy--undergoes roughly five adumbrations,

ending in the final, nihilistic stage which we have just witnessed. The early experimental period, with the sheer proliferation of techniques such as linked visual and moral images and the recircling of narrative events, is the period of the apprenticeship novels--Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands. With Lord Jim and Heart of Darkness, however, the full adoption of a corresponding philosophy of "knowing" now fuses with the earlier techniques to produce a movement in Conrad's art fully deserving of the title of "moral Impressionism." The third stage hails the actual maturation of the technique which is the subject of this study, for it is in Nostromo and The Secret Agent, in particular, that Conrad's moral Impressionism operates fully on several levels--the international, philosophical and minutely psychological. It is for this reason that I have chosen the madly "coruscating" circles of Stevie in The Secret Agent as the very embodiment of Conrad's Impressionism at its zenith. Like the circles, at first seemingly inscrutable but upon closer examination an eloquent representation of public and private chaos, Conrad's Impressionism is a precise technique for examining the hopeless obscurity of human life in both the public and the private spheres.

Ironically, this expanding of Conrad's canvas, to

include in his mature works the worlds of political and international intrigue, brings with it an insidious note of cynicism. It is at this point, in works such as The Secret Sharer and Victory that we note an increasing awareness that with experience comes not enlightenment and quickened critical judgment but only further obscuration. Finally, this cynicism, together with the hardened belief in outer manipulating powers which arises fully in the last novels, produces the fifth and final stage of Impressionism in decadence. Stated most simply, it became a philosophical and temperamental impossibility for Conrad to reconcile the striving for illumination in his mature Impressionist novels with the "purbblind Doomsters" of his later fiction. If all human destiny is immutably fixed, it matters not whether Jim leaps from the Patna or whether Marlow (or we) discover any means for comprehending such human beings--or ourselves.

In the words of G. K. Chesterton, Conrad in his art did finally plumb the depths to find the essence of Impressionism--"that final scepticism which can find no floor to the universe."⁴⁷ Eventually, this discovery undermined the very techniques which Conrad developed in order to carry on the search. Evidence that this final unmasking of illusion did, in fact, shake the very foundations of his art, is

powerfully revealed in an abject comment which Conrad once made to Edward Garnett:

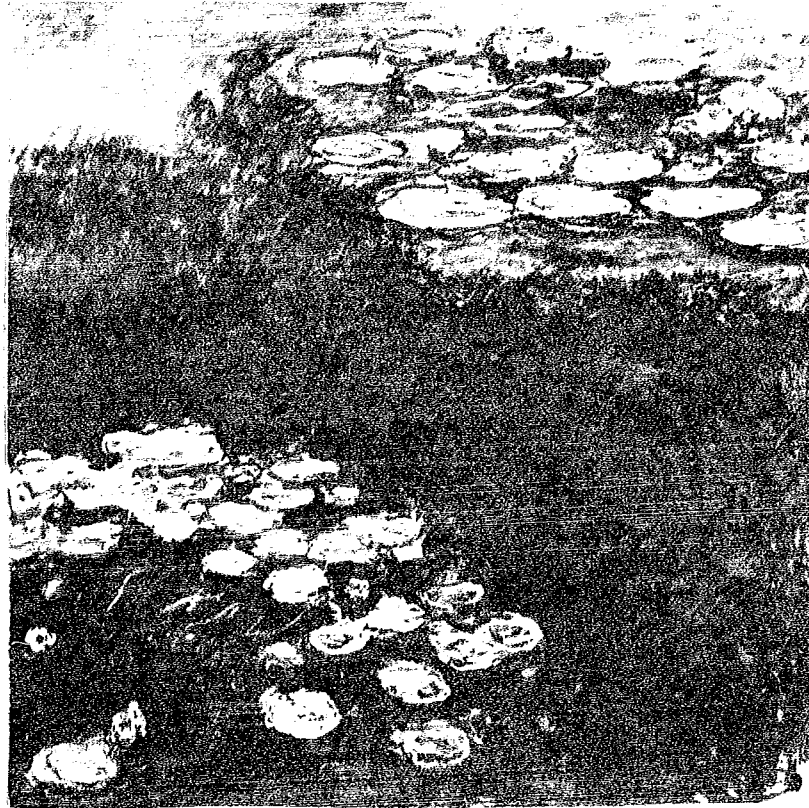
All is illusion--the words written, the mind at which they are aimed, the truth they are intended to express, the hands that will hold the paper, the eyes that will glance at the lines. Every image floats vaguely in a sea of doubt--and the doubt itself is lost in an unexplored universe of incertitudes.⁴⁸

This mind-wrenching consequence of thorough scepticism, wherein even the tools of doubt and the doubt itself are beyond human grasp, is an indication that the madly "coruscating" circles of Conrad's Impressionism have subsided into the chaos which they were once intended to represent.

Nevertheless, the vision attained before the decadence--the vision of Nostromo and The Secret Agent among other works of the period of perfect balance between the search and its expression--must remain the true and representative product of Conrad's Impressionism. This constant striving to plumb beyond the surface, to link vision and judgment, is undoubtedly the aim which Conrad as an artist never forsook, in spite of later lapses in design and expression. It is, therefore, the following message, more than any other, to which Conrad as a moral Impressionist subscribed, and which we as

critical, perceiving human beings must also consider with some deliberation: that "the unwearied self-forgetful attention to every phase of the living universe reflected in our consciousness may be our appointed task on this earth."⁴⁹

APPENDIX

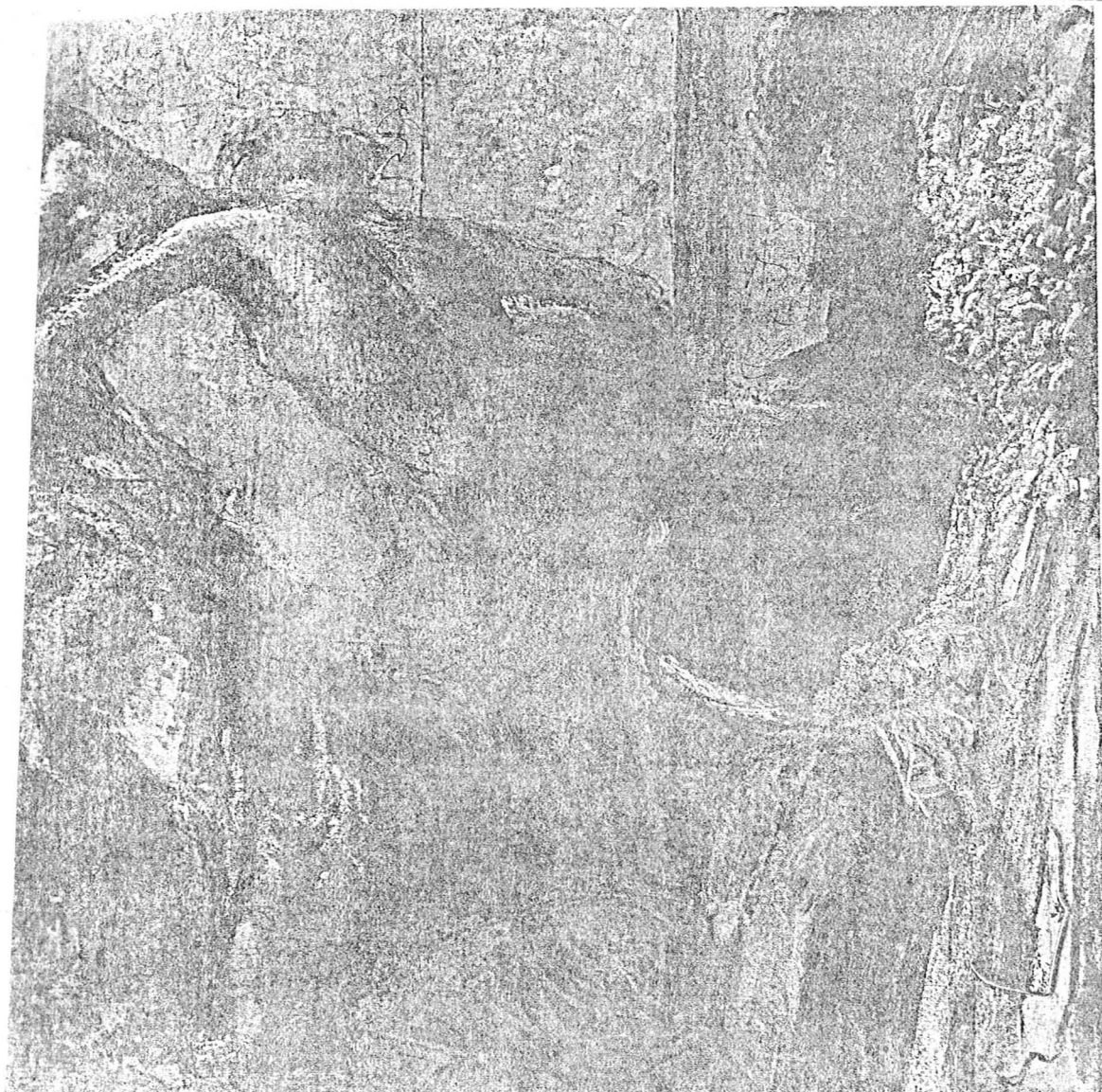


Claude Monet. Nymphéas. ca. 1918-21.
in Michel Hoog, Claude Monet.
(Paris, 1978)
plate 75.



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Edgar Degas.
Two Ballet Dancers
 c1898 Pastel.
 37.05 x 33.9" in
 The Editors of
 Réalités,
Impressionism
 p214.



Edgar Degas, After
the Bath. c1896.
 29.6 x 32.4" in Impressionism
 p204.



Edgar Degas. Singer with a Glove 1878.
in Impressionism p 65.

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Claude Monet
Les Quatre
Peupliers

1891

Hoog, Plate 50.



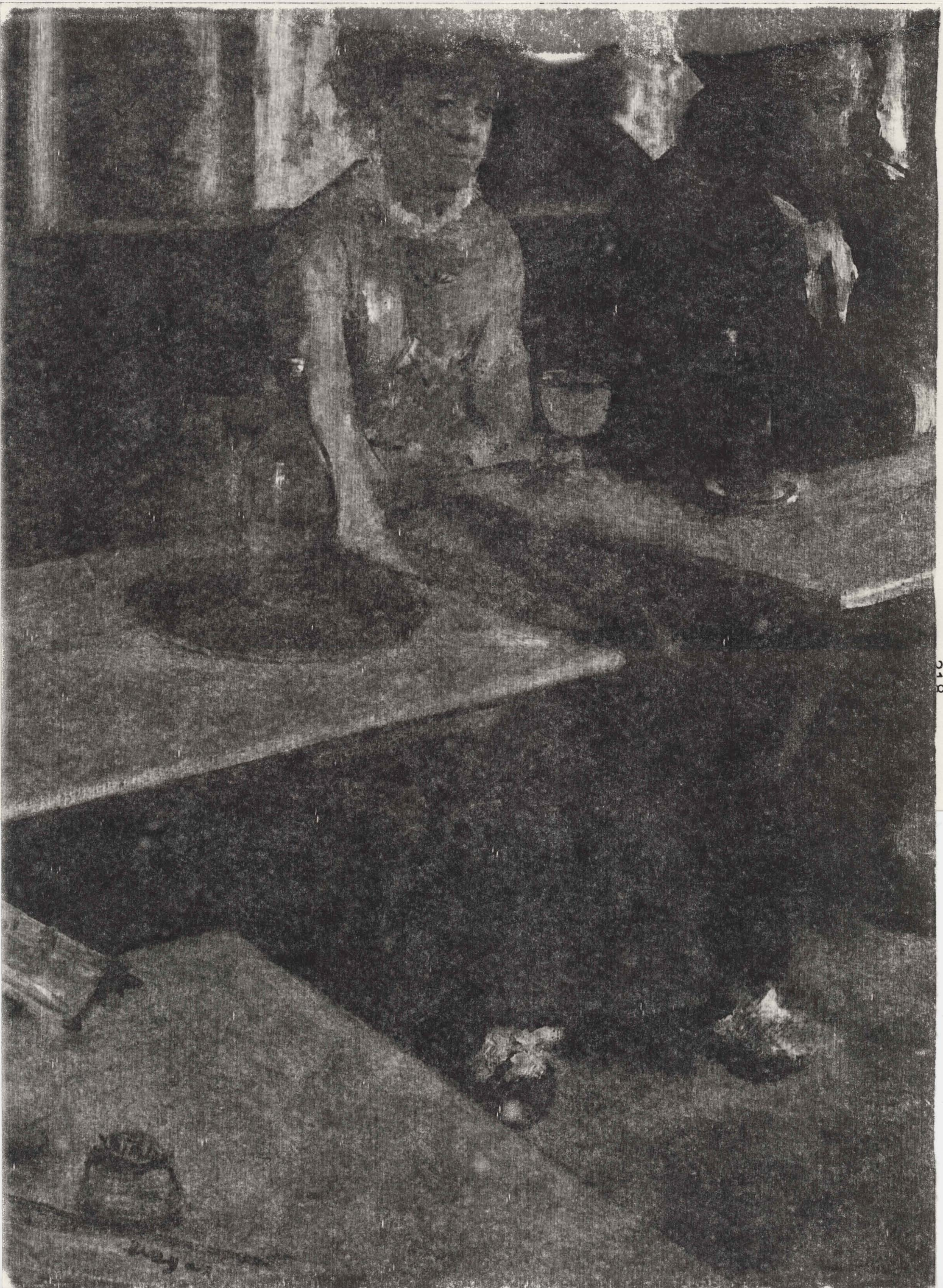
Auguste Rodin
The Sculptor Jules Dalou,
1883

in E. H. Gombrich
The Story of Art
Fig 346.





Claude Monet. The Houses of Parliament;
Effect of Sunlight in the Fog, 1904.
Hoog, Plate 69.



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Edgar Degas. L'Absinthe. 1876. in Impressionist
Painting. Mark Powell-Jones
p8.

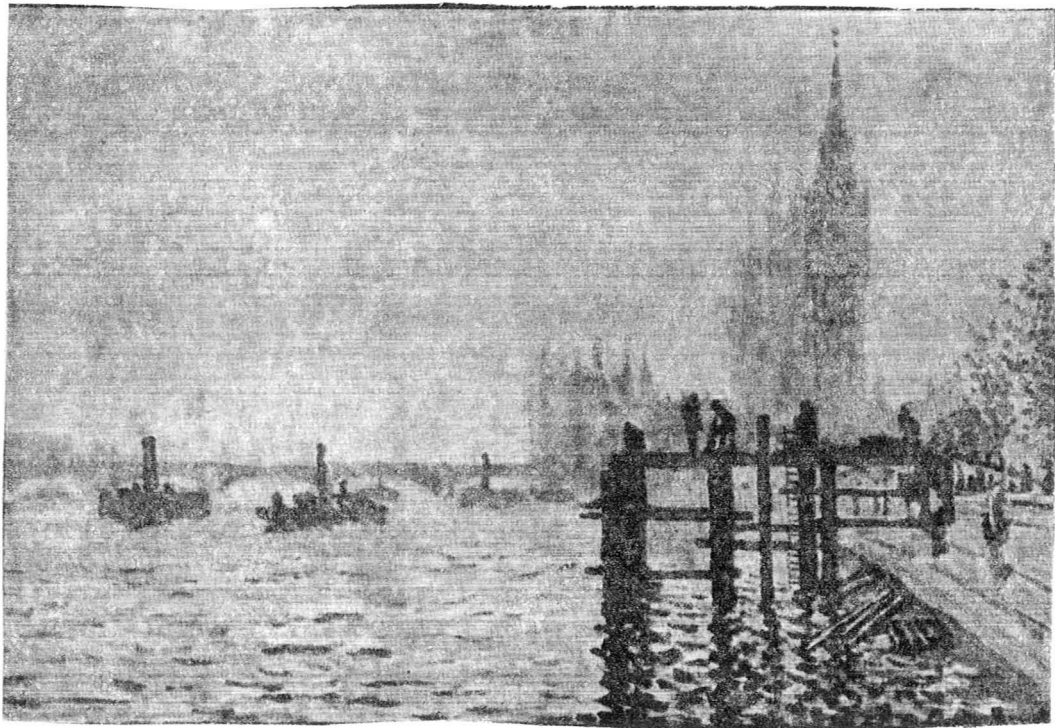


Renoir, On the Terrace,
1879.

100 x 81 cm.
in Mark Powell-Jones,
Impressionist Painting, p17.

Paul Cézanne. Portrait of Madame Cézanne.
in Impressionism p 241.



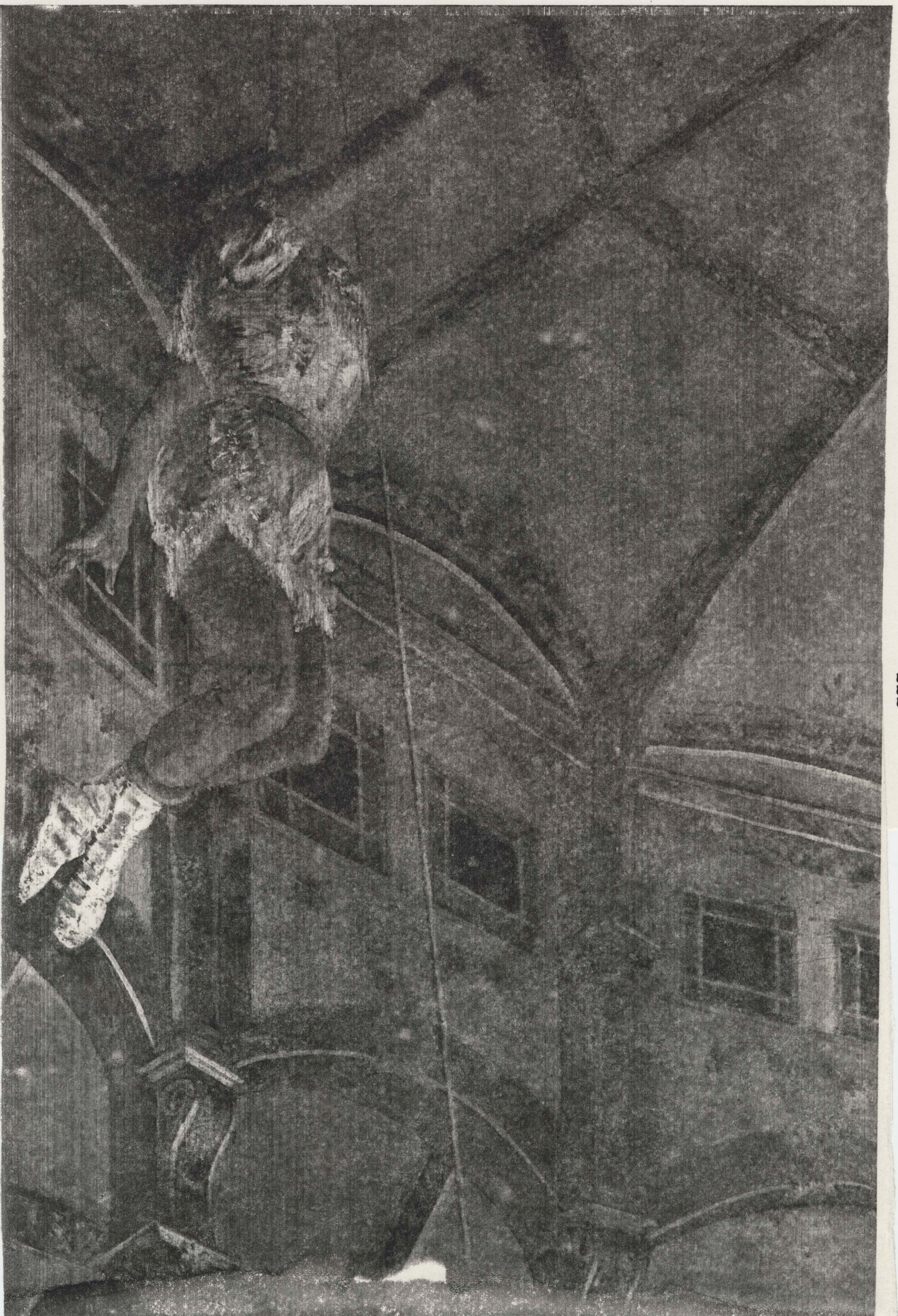


221

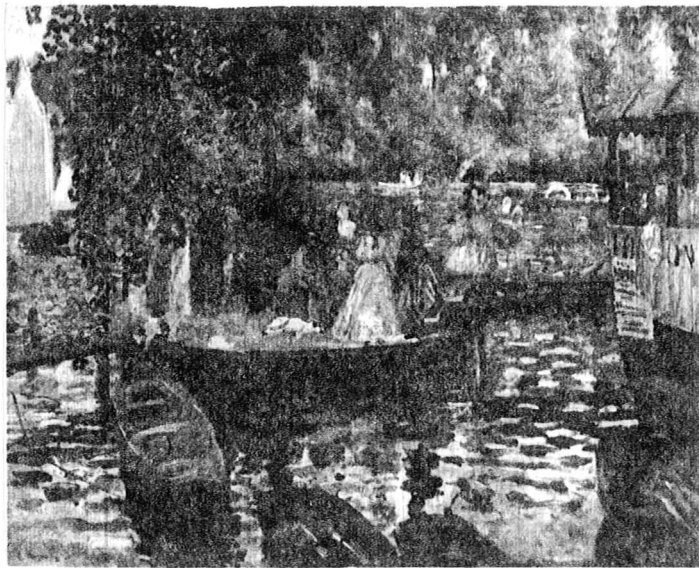
Claude Monet Le pont de Westminster 1871.
Hoog, Plate 41.



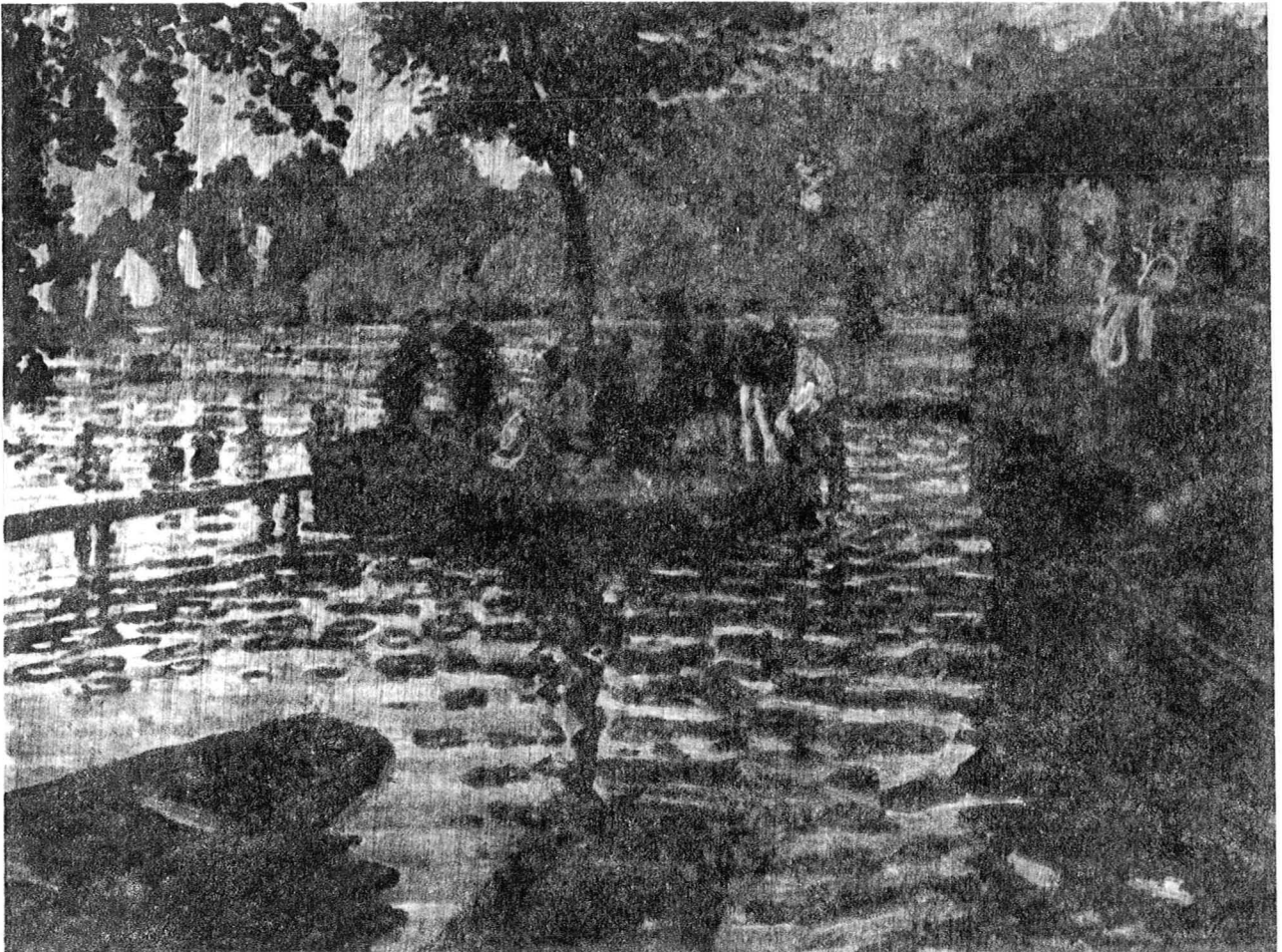
Claude Monet. La Gare St-Lazare. 1877.
Hoog, Plate 38.



Edgar Degas. Miss Lola at the Fernando Circus.
in Impressionism p 63.



Renoir. La Grênouillère. 1868-69.
66 x 81 cm.
in Powell-Jones, p17.



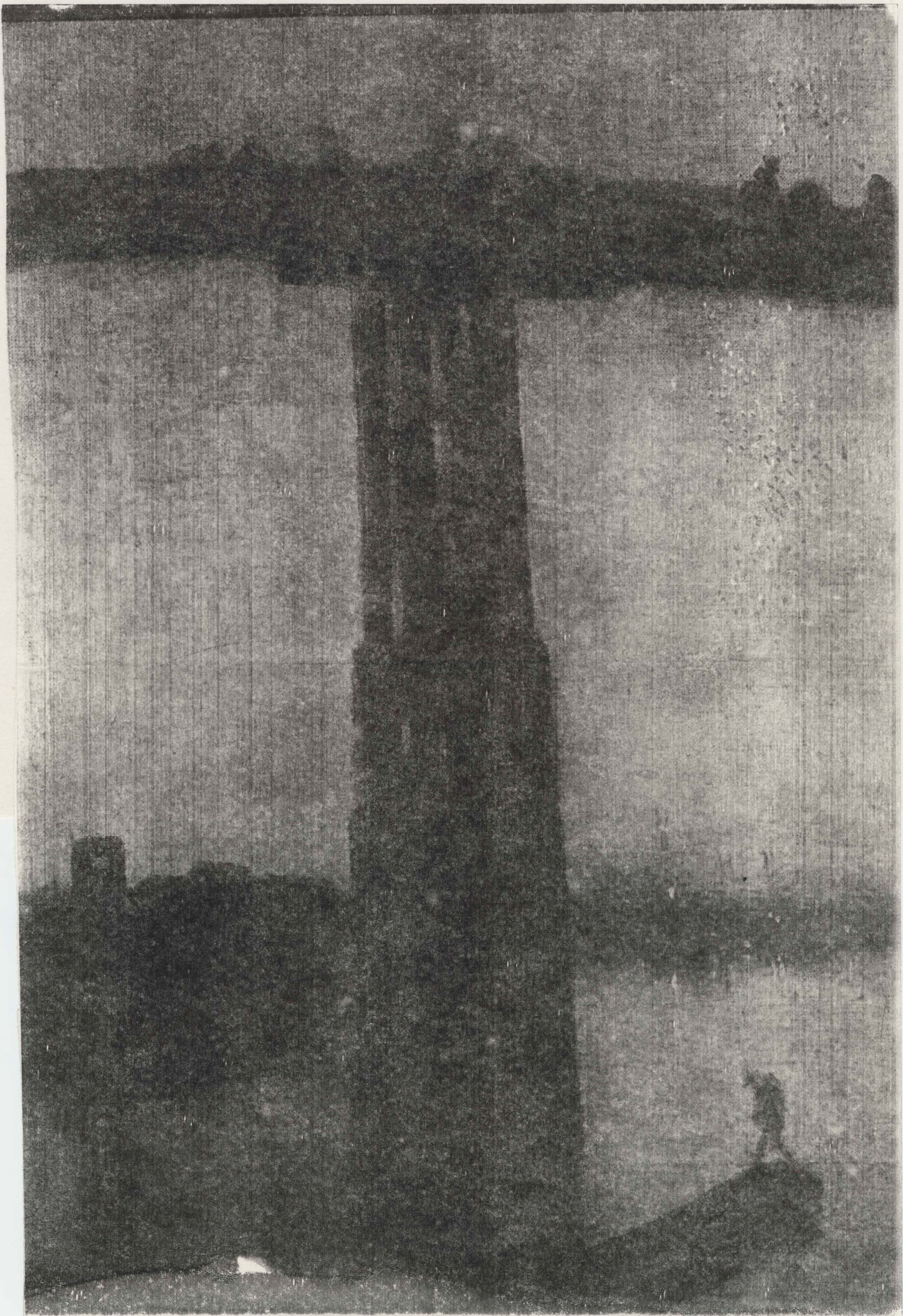
Claude Monet. La Grênouillère 1868-69.
28.9 x 39.8"
in Impressionism, p95.



Claude Monet High Sea at Etretat
In Impressionism, p197.



Vincent Van Gogh The Ravine
October 1889. Oil.
28.5 x 35.9 "
in Impressionism. p132.



James Abbott McNeill Whistler. Nocturne in
Blue and Gold: Old Battersea Bridge.
in Impressionism p59.



James Abbott McNeill Whistler Symphony in White No. 2.1
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