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# **Early Twentieth Century Modernism and the Absence of God**

**Katherine Isobel Baxter**

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Ph.D.  
to the University of Glasgow.

Undertaken in the Department of English Literature and the Centre for the  
Study of Literature, Theology and the Arts.

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## Synopsis: Early Twentieth Century Modernism and the Absence of God

At the beginning of the twentieth century we find novelists using their medium to express doubt in both the Judeo-Christian narrative as archetype and the possibility of purposive narrative in their own work. Often these writers took well-recognized paradigms of purposive narratives, such as 'the quest', or 'historical narrative' and adapted them to show them failing to reach their purposed denouement.

The work of these novelists was paralleled by that of contemporary poets. Although the poets' concerns were less immediately affected by the specific challenges to Judeo-Christian narratives, their concern for the efficacy of language was motivated by a similar sense that language no longer possessed the edenic quality of reaching the thing it aimed at. Furthermore the frameworks of art themselves (perspective, rhyme, formal representation, and so on) were found to be unstable.

Literary responses to the failure of language and narrative were varied. In a radically simplified form they may be located on a continuum between two points: at one end a desire to fill the void left by an absent God; at the other a fascination with the possibilities of the void. My thesis situates the work of Conrad in particular, as well as Forster, Eliot, Woolf, Imagism and Dada, on this continuum, during the period of, roughly, 1899-1925. The works of these individuals and groups are considered individually and comparatively through detailed readings of texts and images. Through such consideration it becomes apparent that the fascination of the void, which attracted all these writers to varying extents, also brought them to realize new aesthetic possibilities that seemed to fill the void.

In particular, the modernist texts under consideration developed an aesthetic of aperture, that is to say an aesthetic of the momentary, more specifically, the moment prior to comprehension, the moment of experience. In fiction this aesthetic grew out of a deconstruction of purposive narrative in favour of imagistic presentation; in poetry and the visual arts the poem or picture abstracted its object from reality and yet equivalenced reality by presenting an inherent internal logic. That logic apparent in the poem or picture was often placed beyond the grasp of the reader or viewers' understanding, representing the sense that the logical operations of the world or the divine machinations of God, were either beyond comprehension, if not non-existent altogether. This aesthetic of aperture is once again illustrated through detailed examination of particular texts and images. In the works considered this reinstatement of the possibility of purposive narrative and language through an aesthetic of aperture is figured mystically, presented in negative-theological terms of absence, silence and the unknowable. The mysticism identified appears at odds with the predominantly practical theological debates in Europe at the time and yet finds philosophical parallels in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*.

The thesis concludes that the return, in modernist works, of attempts to fill the void is the result not only of aesthetic, but also of social and personal (in particular the repercussions of world war), desires for at least the possibility of purposive narrative and language.

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## Abbreviations

The following primary texts are referred to throughout using the given abbreviations.

- AA Forster, E.M. 'Art for Art's Sake' (1949). *Two Cheers for Democracy*, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1965. pp.96-103.
- ET Conrad, Joseph. 'The End of the Tether', *Youth/Heart of Darkness/The End of the Tether*, ed. John Lyon, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1995.
- Fl Ball, Hugo. *Flight out of Time*, trans. Ann Raimés, ed. John Elderfield, Berkeley: University of California Press 1996.
- FT Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Franklin's Prologue and Tale*, ed. A.C. Spearing, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1991.
- HD Conrad, Joseph. 'Heart of Darkness', *Youth/Heart of Darkness/The End of the Tether*, ed. John Lyon, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1995.
- LJC Conrad, Joseph. *Collected Letters*, 8 vols. eds. Karl, Frederick and Laurence Davies, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1983-.
- MD Woolf, Virginia. *Mrs Dalloway*, in *Collected Novels of Virginia Woolf: Mrs Dalloway, To the Lighthouse, The Waves*, ed. Stella McNichol, Basingstoke: MacMillan 1992.
- MS Forster, E.M. 'The Machine Stops', *Collected Short Stories*, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1965.
- N Conrad, Joseph. *Nostromo*, ed. Martin Seymour-Smith, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1990.

- RA Forster, E.M. 'The Raison d'Être of Criticism in the Arts' (1947). *Two Cheers for Democracy*, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1965. pp.114-129.
- RC Forster, E.M. 'The Road from Colonus', *Collected Short Stories*, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1965.
- Re Conrad, Joseph. *The Rescue*, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1950.
- Ro Conrad, Joseph. *The Rover*, London: T. Fisher Unwin 1923.
- SL Conrad, Joseph. *The Shadow-Line*, London: Dent and Sons 1923.
- SS Conrad, Joseph. 'The Secret Sharer', *Twixt Land and Sea*, London: Dent and Sons 1923.
- To Conrad, Joseph. 'To-morrow', *Typhoon and Other Stories*, ed. Paul Kirschner, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1990.
- WB Forster, E.M. 'What I Believe' (1939). *Two Cheers for Democracy*, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1965. pp.75-84.
- WLBD Eliot, T.S. *The Waste Land*: 'Burial of the Dead', *Collected Poems 1909-1962*, London: Faber and Faber 1963.
- WLDW Eliot, T.S. *The Waste Land*: 'Death by Water', *Collected Poems 1909-1962*, London: Faber and Faber 1963.
- WLFS Eliot, T.S. *The Waste Land*: 'The Fire Sermon', *Collected Poems 1909-1962*, London: Faber and Faber 1963.
- WLGC Eliot, T.S. *The Waste Land*: 'A Game of Chess', *Collected Poems 1909-1962*, London: Faber and Faber 1963.

WLWT      Eliot, T.S. *The Waste Land: 'What the Thunder Said', Collected Poems 1909-1962*, London: Faber and Faber 1963.

Y            Conrad, Joseph. 'Youth', *Youth/Heart of Darkness/The End of the Tether*, ed. John Lyon, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1995.

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost thanks go to my parents for their love and support. Many thanks also to my supervisors Bobby Grant and David Jasper for their support, advice and patience. Thanks to Keith Carabine, Susan Castillo, Laurence Davies, Linda Dryden, Hugh Epstein, Joshua Hale, Robert Hampson, Alice Jenkins, Donald Mackenzie, Gene Moore, Hannah Neale, Adam Piette, Benjamin Saunders, The Selby family, Helen Sutherland, and the Western Art Library, Oxford University, who have all assisted in different ways. And thanks to Clark Mile-End Bursary Fund, Faculty of Arts (University of Glasgow), Mount Old Scholars' Association, Sir John Fisher Foundation, and West Lancashire Masonic Educational Trust without whose generosity I could not have undertaken this work. Lastly, special thanks to David Bank and John Keely for their inspiration, help and friendship.

Dedicated to my grandmothers,  
Gwendoline Baxter and Elise Beck.

## Introduction

In early twentieth century modernist literature we can perceive an anxiety about the efficacy of language and narrative that essentially stems from a sense that language and narrative were desacralized. God had called the world forth with language and Adam had named its contents. But if the fall from Eden was a fall from innocence, the fall of Babel was a fall from understanding. After Babel communication lost its immediacy, its ability to reveal directly the object named. Only with the coming of Christ could language once again attain the power of direct revelation. For Christ embodied, and made manifest, the Logos, and thus offered the possibility of complete union between sign and referent through his example.<sup>1</sup> Yet, at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries there was a revived sense of the 'fallen' nature of language, for both theologians and writers. The revolutionary spirit of Enlightenment thought and Romantic poetics was felt to have overthrown the omnipotence and omnipresence of the deity in Western culture. Self-conscious rationalism, epitomised by Hegel's *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), became a means for arrogating powers that had previously been considered divine:

Nature, history, and God were embraced in a rational system, and the whole was seen as an evolving process. Everything was given its appropriate place in the system: law, culture, literature, and art. It was the office of the State to embody and organize those elements, and the Christian State was a realization of the Kingdom of God ... God was no longer on the throne of the universe, but human reason, and God was assigned his place by grace of human reason. The world was regarded as an aesthetic harmony, not a battleground for moral struggle. Sin was but a necessary stage in the self-revelation of Absolute Spirit. Everything was explained in terms of gradual transition.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Cunningham, Valentine. *In the Reading Gaol: Postmodernity, Texts, and History*, Oxford: Blackwell 1994. p.204.

<sup>2</sup> Vidler, Alec R. *The Church in an Age of Revolution: 1789 to the Present Day*, 1962. Vol.5 of *The Pelican History of the Church*, Hodder and Stoughton 1970. 6 vols. p.204.

For theology, new studies of biblical texts, undertaken in the spirit of enlightenment and augmented by developing linguistics (anthropological and philosophical), pointed up verbal inconsistencies in the texture of God's book. By demonstrating the polyglot nature of biblical texts and the haphazard history of their canonization, linguistic exegetes destabilized the notion of a divine, revelatory language that could communicate edenically, that is to say innocent of the need for interpretation, throughout the ages.

Furthermore the Christian (biblical) narrative of revelation and salvation was also crumbling. This was in part due to the problems raised by biblical scholarship mentioned before. Linguistic exegesis not only undermined faith in the words, individually, but displayed the editorial processes within the canon. The presence of these editorial processes called into question the notion of a divinely purposeful linear narrative of history that inevitably led eschatologically to apocalypse and the coming of God's kingdom on earth. Rather they raised suspicions that the Bible's narrative had been shaped by mortal hands, retrospectively, to justify continuing faith in adversity. These suspicions were backed up by developing historical and archaeological study of the ancient Near East.

One subject of the historical and archaeological studies of the ancient Near East was the sources for, and alternatives to, Judaeo-Christian religion and this subject was part of a more general growing interest in non Judaeo-Christian religions, prompted by anthropological studies. The rediscovery of alternative religious narratives and practices inevitably led to the relativization of Judaeo-Christian narratives and practices, as types of universal human culture.

Additionally, the scientific theories and discoveries that emerged from the enlightenment epistemological investigations also produced new historical narratives for the world such as the second law of thermodynamics and Darwinian evolution that challenged the Judaeo-Christian narrative of history. Both these examples caught the popular imagination as well as provoking the rebuke and rebuttal of the Church. Of the former it was the theory of entropy that particularly caught the imagination, provoking fears of the sun's death leading to an ever cooling, ever darkening world, ending in a frozen lightless waste land. The image of the last man appealed to a *fin de*

*siècle* mentality and became prevalent in the visual and verbal arts.<sup>3</sup> The threat of ever increasing chaos implicit in the laws of entropy hardly allayed the fears of social, cultural, moral disintegration that were a more conservative reaction to the same *fin de siècle* mentality.

Darwinism challenged not only the Judaeo-Christian narrative of the past but also its present and, although less so, its future. For the argument most commonly rehearsed as Darwinian, was that the source, development and destiny of all species derived from an amoral necessity of survival. This bypassed all need for divine providence and grace. A second concern that developed out of Darwinian theory was to do with race and was bound up with the developments in anthropology noted earlier. The notion of 'the survival of the fittest' was used by some to bolster arguments for continued imperial activity and was adapted to justify the continuation of Christianity itself. For the imperialist this notion affirmed racial typing that had graded non-Caucasian facial physiognomy in terms of simian qualities as signifiers of tardy mental and cultural development. Christianity adapted the notion of 'the survival of the fittest' to describe its moral aspirations for human betterment, leading to the Kingdom of God on earth. This in turn accommodated Christian mission and philanthropy with the argument that since these increased the Church and bettered the welfare of the species they indicated Christianity's superior fitness. Conversely, Darwin's studies of species relations called into question theories of racial development that assumed the innate superiority of one race over another by foregrounding their equality in their biological relationship. That relationship also gave scientific weight to those anthropologists who argued for the relativity of all religions and the development of religion from bio-psychological needs rather than spiritual revelation.

These scientific developments had a profound influence on philosophical and practical thinking. Nietzsche's 'Superman' borrows from Darwinian thinking as does his proclamation of the death of God. More generally Nietzsche paved the way for several decades of theological cannibalism of non-Judaeo-Christian religions. In particular, he set an example of constructing the future out of an ancient and, more

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Nietzsche, Friedrich, 'Zarathustra's Prologue' 5, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, Harmondsworth: Penguin. pp.45-47.



importantly, lost past.<sup>4</sup> This past, so the argument runs, has been covered over by the prudery of the more recent Judaeo-Christian culture and must be unearthed for mankind to live freely and in fulfilment of his potential again. Moving into the twentieth century the Church found itself pitted not against a decline in spirituality *per se* but against a growing revival of 'pagan' religions in Britain.<sup>5</sup>

In the more practical field of economic and political philosophy the popularised notion of 'the survival of the fittest' gave scientific credence to policies of aggressive imperialism of the sort Conrad critiques in 'An Outpost of Progress' and 'Heart of Darkness'. A result of both these policies was a growing European rivalry and tension that broke out sporadically in the colonies, for longer particularly in the Boer Wars in southern Africa, culminating in the First World War and hardly dissipated by the reparation settlements of the Treaty of Versailles. Although these events were not directly related to the stability of a Judaeo-Christian narrative the endurance of social and economic inequalities indicated the failure of mid-nineteenth century Christian socialism, which in F.D. Maurice's vision, at least, had aimed at the realisation of the Kingdom of God on earth. Whilst Christian socialism survived in name until towards the close of the century with the Christian Socialist Union, the union's activity went little beyond earnest talk.

As for the wars, whilst the Church raised little concerted objection, others saw little divine providence in the losses of the Somme and elsewhere, or in the severe psychological disturbance of many of the men, like Septimus Warren-Smith, in *Mrs Dalloway*, who did return from the fronts. Moreover whilst it might be argued that the wars in the colonies were fought in part for the cultural and spiritual benefit of the indigenous populations, the acquisitive motivations for those wars cannot have helped a situation amongst the missionaries outlined in the presidential address to the Modern Churchmen's Union in 1922:

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<sup>4</sup> In this he and D.H. Lawrence, one of his twentieth century British successors, begin to resemble the very moral nostalgia they profess to abhor in the middle classes.

<sup>5</sup> See for example one Modern Churchman's comment that '[t]here has recently been a revival of paganism amongst us, a revival which seems to have reached its height just before the war.' Hunkin, J.W. 'The Church and the Kingdom', *The Modern Churchman*, 13.7-8 November 1923. p.431. Also the editor's exhortation three years later: [The Modernist's] teaching should be of use to us all, but where it is most needed at the present time is by the educated classes, who have largely abandoned Traditionalism and are becoming paganized.' Major, H.D. 'Editor's Report', *Modern Churchman*, 15.6-8 September 1925. p.273.

We hear from missionaries, alike in more civilized and in less civilized countries, that one of the greatest hindrances to their efforts comes from the lives of the Englishmen settled among them. They seldom make a serious profession of Christianity, and they often show in their lives a more covetous spirit, more of harshness and of frivolity than the nobler of the heathen around them.<sup>6</sup>

At the end of the nineteenth century the Church was marshalling its arguments against the religious doubt that arose from a proliferation of epistemological enquiries. Whilst some appeared to merely shout down the opposition a good deal of academic scholarship went into utilising the tools developed by those whom they sought to refute. Thus the linguistic analysis, the anthropological and archaeological studies, the scientific methods and findings, that had threatened the Judaeo-Christian narrative of history, were adopted by theologians as means to a specific end. In Britain, the publication of *Lux Mundi*, in 1889, crystallized the theological implications of such an adoption, and was the catalyst for debates that reached into the twentieth century. *Lux Mundi* was the product of discussions between young High Church theologians at Oxford. The essays they contributed took into account the implications of the epistemological enquiries noted above and read some biblical texts, particularly those of the Old Testament, as folklore and poetry. The editor Charles Gore's contribution, which claimed that Christ's knowledge was limited by his physical incarnation, caused particular controversy amongst older theologians. However, the volume as a whole was warmly received by the younger generation of churchmen, to whom its rationalism appealed. The overall argument of the volume was that God's revelation of himself was progressive and that 'the historic Christian faith, when reasonably interpreted, would commend itself to reasonable men.'<sup>7</sup> *Lux Mundi* was not only well received by the 'liberal Catholicism' of the High Church, it ushered in a period of theological speculation that went far beyond the original intentions of Gore and the *Lux Mundi* group.

Yet, whilst in the arts there was an exploration of the possibilities inherent in the absence of God from language and narrative, the Church in Britain generally continued in its search for proofs, particularly from the social and physical sciences,

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<sup>6</sup> Gardner, P. 'Introductory Address', *The Modern Churchman*, 12.6-7 October 1922. p.295.

rather than adopting a negative theology, such as that traced in the nineteenth century by Søren Kierkegaard. This British, rationalist pattern of argument barely changed throughout the thirty odd years under examination. Thus at the end of the nineteenth century Edward Caird's Gifford Lectures delivered at the University of St. Andrews between 1890 and 1892 are collected as *The Evolution of Religion*. They are both theological and anthropological in content and significantly the first lecture is entitled 'The Possibility of a Science of Religion'.<sup>8</sup> In 1914 and concurrent with the outbreak of the First World War George Galloway's *The Philosophy of Religion* appeared. The opening chapter to this volume is called 'The Psychical Basis of Religion' and it contains others that concern 'Religious Knowledge and its Validity (Epistemological)', 'A speculative Theory of religion: Its Data and Aim', as well as subchapters on 'Tribal Religion', 'National Religion', 'Historic Conceptions of God', and 'Proofs of the Existence of God'.<sup>9</sup> As a final example, in 1926 T.G. Dunning published his short volume *God and the Absolute: The Philosophic Significance of Religious Experience* whose chapters run 'Introduction', 'The Religious Data', 'Deductions', 'Implicates', 'Conclusion'.<sup>10</sup> The scientific borrowings are evident not only in the content but also, as in Dunning's work, in the way in which the material is presented.

Amongst the Broad Church a new group, The Modern Churchmen, was founded in 1898, with Liberal Protestant rather than Modern Catholic, affinities. The Modern Churchmen advertised their liberalism on the covers of their journal with slogans such as 'A monthly Magazine to maintain the cause of TRUTH, FREEDOM, and COMPREHENSIVENESS In the Church of England', and, 'By identifying the new learning with heresy, you make orthodoxy synonymous with ignorance. Erasmus.'<sup>11</sup> Indeed it was after the First World War that the Modern Churchmen broke most ground, holding their 1922 conference on the topic of world religions and their 1924 conference on the topic of science and religion. Whilst previous conferences had included contributions on world religions and from scientists the designation of a full conference to these topics shows their persistent relevance and concern to the Church. At these conferences both other religions and science were

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<sup>7</sup> Vidler. p.192.

<sup>8</sup> Caird, Edward. *The Evolution of Religion*, Glasgow: James Maclehose and Sons 1893.

<sup>9</sup> Galloway, George. *The Philosophy of Religion*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark 1914.

<sup>10</sup> Dunning, T.G. *God and the Absolute: The Philosophic Significance of Religious Experience*, London: S.C.M. 1926.

recognized not as rivals or threats to Christian faith but as auxiliary to it. Indeed, scientific paradigms were used to explain world religions and Christianity used to explain scientific findings. Evolutionary theory was used to formulate a hierarchy of religion with Christianity the most advanced form. In this way the religious emotion of non-Christians was given a relative value. The Union still maintained a patronizing attitude toward non-Christian worship (considering it less developed or sophisticated than, and therefore inferior to, Christianity); however the religious instinct was respected as essentially the same in all religions.

The 1924 conference contained a number of papers given by scientists although this appears to have been only partially successful since some scientific papers were considered too technically advanced to be comprehensible. However it was a useful exercise for the Modern Churchmen's Union in that it showcased scientific endorsement of belief in God. All the scientists believed that the evidence of evolutionary theory, contemporary physics (particularly concerning time and astronomy) and the newly fashionable psychology indicated a purposeful universe. Following on from this they argued that purpose could only be understood in terms of personality, that is to say a purposeful being. The assumption of a purposeful being thus becomes the proof of God's existence. Furthermore the move from purpose to personality allowed for further attribution to God: purpose necessitates personality and personality allows human equivalence. Thus, if God is human-like in being purposeful it is deduced that He is like humans in other respects, for example, that He is ethical as witnessed by the Passion. God, they concluded, is purposefully and humanely present in the world, a willing God.<sup>12</sup>

Despite this broadening of perspective, which the Modern Churchmen's Union and others attempted to advance, they did little to stem the tide of doubt within and beyond the Church. In 1921 F.J. Foakes-Jackson expressed the problem thus:

There is a growing conviction, not the less dangerous because it now rarely finds a voice, that Christianity can be ignored. Men no longer care about the sort of sermon they once listened to with attention, and are less troubled by religious doubts: not because they have ceased to

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<sup>11</sup> *Modern Churchman*, 1921-1922 and 1923-1925.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Mc Dowell, S.A. 'The Possibility of Purpose', *The Modern Churchman*, 14.5-7 September 1924. pp.245-256.

doubt, but because they are hardly interested at all in the religious problem.<sup>13</sup>

However whilst some felt that the cause of religious apathy or else of pagan spirituality was due to the fact that, 'too often the representatives of the church have treated as aliens under suspicion great natural forces like Beauty and Sex, created by God to be brought, like all powers and dominations whether in heaven or on earth, into subjection to the obedience of Christ.'<sup>14</sup> Others countered that '[g]reat efforts are needed today to counteract the demoralizing influence of erotic novels and the cinema.'<sup>15</sup> That is to say the age-old bones of contention were fought over much the same as ever in a struggle to remain relevant to a radically changing European culture. In 1922, the Church of England went so far as to set up a commission to 'consider the nature and grounds of Christian Doctrine with a view to demonstrating the extent of existing agreement within the Church of England and with a view to investigating how far it is possible to remove or diminish existing differences'.<sup>16</sup> It was in this pragmatic way that the Church contended with the desacralization of language and narrative with which we first started.

Before going on to outline the general literary responses to this perceived crisis it is worth defining briefly the critical framework in which they will be considered and the terms by which they will be discussed. If the thesis itself is concerned with the absence of God and Modernism, it addresses a particular absence of critical debate about Modernism's response to the absence of God. Most commonly, critics assume that after Nietzsche's declaration of the death of God Modernism was no longer concerned with Judaeo-Christian theology.<sup>17</sup> But this is to ignore the second part of Nietzsche's declaration: 'but men, being what they are, perhaps there will for millennia still be caves in which his shadow is pointed out. –

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<sup>13</sup> Foakes-Jackson, F.J. 'Christ and the Creeds', *The Modern Churchman*, 11.5-6 September 1921. p.230.

<sup>14</sup> Hunkin, J.W. 'The Church and the Kingdom', *The Modern Churchman*, 13.7-8 November 1923. p.432.

<sup>15</sup> Royds, T.F. 'The Christian Ideal of Marriage', *The Modern Churchman*, 13.7-8 November 1923. p.361.

<sup>16</sup> Qtd in Vidler. p.200.

<sup>17</sup> Where work has been done on modernists and religion or theology it has often taken the form of cataloguing references, without full consideration of the implications for the artists' ethics and aesthetics. Cf. Lester, John. *Conrad and Religion*, Basingstoke: Macmillan 1988; Purdy, Dwight.

And we – we still have to conquer his shadow too!’<sup>18</sup> Even Hillis Miller turns from ‘The Disappearance of God’ in the nineteenth-century to ‘Realism’ in the twentieth.<sup>19</sup> Instead, modernists are considered in terms of contemporaneous developments in politics, empire and psychology. Where aporia are considered in Modernism they are presented in predominantly postmodern critical terms that borrow from post-war linguistics and philosophy. In other words modernists are contextualized in terms of the critical currency of the present.<sup>20</sup> Whilst this has been useful there is necessary work to be done in considering the less fashionable concerns of the early twentieth century and how these filtered through into modernist artwork.

As a result of this absence of criticism in the field of modernism and the absence of God, the thesis proposed here develops out of close readings of the primary texts. Current critical responses to the texts are considered and taken up where they are useful to these readings. In addition the modernists themselves are used to interpret and illuminate each other. So for example Conrad’s short fiction is considered in the light of Forster’s short fiction and criticism; *Mrs Dalloway* is approached through the influence of ‘Heart of Darkness’, mediated by *The Waste Land*. This approach enables an overall impression of modernism’s response to the absence of God to be developed through focused attention to the texts themselves.

As to the critical terms deployed, the major part of this thesis is concerned with fiction and on the whole the medium of this fiction is termed ‘narrative’. Thus the narrative is the medium by which the books’ content is presented linguistically to the reader.<sup>21</sup> Clearly this term is a loose one but it is supplemented by a second, ‘purposive narrative.’ This second term designates a narrative in which there appears to be a specific conclusion within the novel, toward which the events of the novel are directed, a *dénouement*. A ‘purposive narrative’ may or may not evince a drive

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*Joseph Conrad’s Bible*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press 1984.

<sup>18</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Gay Science* 108. *A Nietzsche Reader*, ed. and trans. R.J. Hollingdale. Harmondsworth: Penguin 1977. pp.206-207.

<sup>19</sup> Miller, J. Hillis. *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth Century Writers*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 1963; *Poets of Reality: Six Twentieth Century Writers*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 1966.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. GoGwilt, Christopher, *The Invention of the West: Joseph Conrad and the Double-Mapping of Europe and Empire*, Stanford: Stanford University Press 1995; Goldman, Jane. *The Feminist Aesthetic of Virginia Woolf: Modernism, Post-Impressionism and the Politics of the Visual*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998; Lackey, Michael. ‘Atheism and Sadism: Nietzsche and Woolf on Post-God Discourse’, *Philosophy and Literature*, 24.2 2000. pp.346-363; Wexler, Joyce. ‘Conrad’s Dream of a Common Language: Lacan and “The Secret Sharer”’, *Psychoanalytic Review*, 78.4 1991 pp.599-606.

toward a conclusion beyond the novel, for example to make the reader more informed about piracy on the Indian Ocean or more sympathetic to gentlemen travellers in Greece; however, this is irrelevant to the definition. The *dénouement* toward which the narrative is purposed is within the novel, for example a resurrection or a wedding of the main protagonists. Generally speaking histories are purposive narratives and in this case the *dénouement* may occur beyond the text, for example where the narrative is purposed toward an explanation of 'the state of the world/the nation/the nursing unions today'. Thus, the Bible as a text which indicates a historical trajectory whose *dénouement* is beyond and yet implicit in its text is edited and interpreted as a purposive narrative, and contains within it a variety of purposive narratives such as Genesis 22 or The Revelation of St John.

The threats posed to Judaeo-Christian religion delineated above are, therefore, threats to the Judaeo-Christian narrative as a purposive narrative. They threaten it because they call into question the purposive trajectory of the narrative. Moreover since the Judaeo-Christian narrative had served as the supreme archetype for narrative in Western culture the doubt that was cast upon it in the second half of the nineteenth century filtered through to create a sense of doubt in the possibility of any purposive narrative. Thus at the beginning of the twentieth century we find writers using their medium to express doubt in both the Judaeo-Christian narrative as archetype and the possibility of purposive narrative in their own work. Often these writers took well-recognized paradigms of purposive narratives, such as 'the quest', or 'historical narrative' and adapted them to show them failing and not reaching their purposed *dénouement*.

These novelists were paralleled in their work by contemporary modernist poets, such as Pound, Eliot, and Hulme, who were concerned for the efficacy of language itself. Although the poets' concerns were less immediately affected by the specific challenges to Judaeo-Christian religion outlined above, but rather by the use of language in the arts and the media, their concern for the efficacy of language was motivated by a similar renewed awareness that language no longer possessed the edenic quality of reaching the thing it aimed at. The sign had been cast adrift from its referent. The hackneyed romanticism of late nineteenth-century poetry, was felt to

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<sup>21</sup> Occasionally there will be discussion of the visual and physical presentation of the fiction but that is treated as a separate matter from what is meant by 'narrative'.

have become problematically solipsistic. This was a result of the early romanticists' revolution of poetics:

[Coleridge and Wordsworth], like a host of others after them, reversed the old divine-human relationship into a human-divine relationship. For being grasped by the deity through its own theophany they substituted grasping the deity through human "autophany" or self-revelation ... In the traditional language, they put the "creator" at the beck and call of the human "creature" and of course in doing so rendered such language obsolete.

Belief gave way to something that sounds like it but is wholly different, the "willing suspension of disbelief for the moment." In other words, religious faith merged into poetic faith. Now nature was perfected not by grace but by the poetic imagination.<sup>22</sup>

If the poet was equal to God *and* his voice remained sacred then all verbal meaning could only be understood on the poet's terms. Taken to their logical conclusion romantic poetics became solipsistic by allowing the poet creative, rather than adamic, language. The poet no longer named the object before his eyes but became its originator. Pater concludes his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* with a description of this enraptured solipsism:

At first sight experience seems to bury us under a flood of external objects ... But when reflection begins to play upon those objects they are dissipated under its influence ... each object is loosed into a group of impressions ... in the mind of the observer ... the whole scope of observation is dwarfed into the narrow chamber of the individual mind. Experience, already reduced to a group of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without. Every one of those impressions

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<sup>22</sup> Clebsch, William A. *Christianity in European History*, New York: Oxford University Press 1979. pp.240-241.



is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world.

... The theory or idea or system which requires of us the sacrifice of any part of this experience, in consideration of some interest into which we cannot enter, or some abstract theory we have not identified with ourselves, or of what is only conventional, has no real claim upon us.<sup>23</sup>

In certain respects Pater's aesthetics are close to those of the Imagists and Dadas, particularly in their exposition of self-referential images. Furthermore, his description of 'the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world', is in keeping with Conrad's vision of man's plight. But, here, too, is one problem the modernists had with the aesthetic Pater describes: whilst Pater accepts solipsism in his 'Conclusion', and even seems to take pleasure in it, the modernists desired to overcome solipsism because they were troubled by it.

What troubled the modernists is evident in the last lines quoted above, and is at least two-part. Firstly, the amorality, which Pater claims as the right of the aesthete, troubled modernists faced with the moral issues raised by war and empire, as the new century unfolded; secondly Pater's aesthetics became 'conventional' themselves, invoked to justify second rate poetry of emotion. Hulme wrote, in 'Romanticism and Classicism', 'verse to them [i.e. late nineteenth century 'romantics'] always means a bringing in of some of the emotions that are grouped around the word infinite'.<sup>24</sup> What Hulme objects to in this poetry is, he explains, a 'sloppiness which doesn't consider that a poem is a poem unless it is moaning or whining about something or other'.<sup>25</sup> According to Hulme this led to a public desire for poetry to 'lead them to a beyond of some kind': 'So much has romanticism debauched us, that, without some form of vagueness, we deny the highest.'<sup>26</sup> Eliot finesses the point in his essay on Swinburne:

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<sup>23</sup> Pater, Walter. 'Conclusion', *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. M.H. Abrams, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. Vol.2. New York: W.W. Norton and Co. 2 vols. pp.1643-1644.

<sup>24</sup> Hulme, T.E. 'Romanticism and Classicism', *Speculations*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1960. p.127.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p.126.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p.127.

Language in a healthy state presents the object, is so close to the object that the two are identified.

They are identified in the verse of Swinburne solely because the object has ceased to exist, because the meaning is merely hallucination of meaning, because language, uprooted, has adapted itself to an independent life of atmospheric nourishment ... The bad poet dwells partly in a world of objects and partly in a world of words, and he can never get them to fit ... [Swinburne's] language is not, like the language of bad poetry, dead. It is very much alive, with a singular life of its own. But the language which is more important to us is that which is struggling to digest and express new objects, new groups of objects, new feelings, new aspects, as, for instance, the prose of Mr. James Joyce or the earlier Conrad.<sup>27</sup>

The problem, as it appeared to the modernists, was that the insistent interest of many late nineteenth-century poets' in emotions and abstractions exacerbated their solipsism because of their subjects' indefinite nature, given their inability to harness language successfully to such indefiniteness.

This state of affairs had already prompted responses in the latter half of the nineteenth-century: in the nonsense poetry of Lear for example where language's inefficacy is taken in itself as a prompt to creativity; and in France, Huysmans's *A Rebours*, played out the *reductio ad absurdum* of *l'art pour l'art*, with devastating effect. The linguistic japes of Lear were taken up again in earnest by some of the Dadas, like Huelsenbeck, in the 1910s. A more melancholic note was struck by Eliot whose *The Waste Land* implies that there is no meaningful utterance left to be made and, in narrative terms that the success of the Fisher King quest narrative is tenuous if possible at all.<sup>28</sup> Hugo Ball's poem, entered in his diary on 16 July, 1915, sums up this loss of meaning, both religious and linguistic:

Das Wort ist preisgegeben; es hat uns gewohnt.

Das Wort ist zur Ware geworden.

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<sup>27</sup> Eliot, T.S. 'Swinburne as Poet', *The Sacred Wood*, London: Methuen 1964, pp.149-150.

Das Wort sie sollen lassen stahn.  
Das Wort hat jede Würde verloren.

[The word has been abandoned; it used to dwell among us.  
The word has become a commodity.  
The word should be left alone.  
The word has lost all dignity.]<sup>29</sup>

The notion of a language 'fallen' through the abuses of late nineteenth-century romanticism was compounded by the avant-garde's age-old contempt for the popular press (Hugo Ball spoke of 'a language that journalism has abused and corrupted'<sup>30</sup>) and by a *fin de siècle* sense that there was no meaningful utterance left to be made:

The obscurity of our utterances is constant. The riddle of meaning should remain in the hands of children... I resent passing through these ill-lighted sentences, receiving these confidences without object, suffering at every moment, through the fault of a chatterbox, a sensation of "I knew that before." The poets who have recognised this lose hope and run away from the intelligible, they know that their work can gain nothing by it.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore the frameworks of art themselves (perspective, rhyme, formal representation, etc) were found to be unstable. Made familiar by repeated use they had come to be hallowed as the only formulae for artistic endeavour. F.S. Flint wrote in January 1917, 'much poetic emotion is strangled and lost in the attempt to thrust it into the strait-jacket of regular metre and rhyme ... there is no intrinsic merit in metre, and ... rhyme is a childish sort of trick.' (footnoting "strait jacket", 'much so-called poetry is merely a more or less clever and successful fitting of this jacket, i.e. the jacket makes the poem').<sup>32</sup> Likewise in the visual arts perspective was perceived as 'a

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<sup>28</sup> In his collage style Eliot resembles the Dadas.

<sup>29</sup> 16 July 1915. *Fl* 26.

<sup>30</sup> 24 June 1916. *Fl* 71.

<sup>31</sup> Breton, A. 'For Dada' (before 1924). *The Dada Painters and Poets: an Anthology*, ed. R. Motherwell, London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 1989. p.200.

<sup>32</sup> F.S. Flint to J.C. Squire 29<sup>th</sup> January 1917. Qtd in *Imagist Poetry* ed. P. Jones, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1972. p.143.



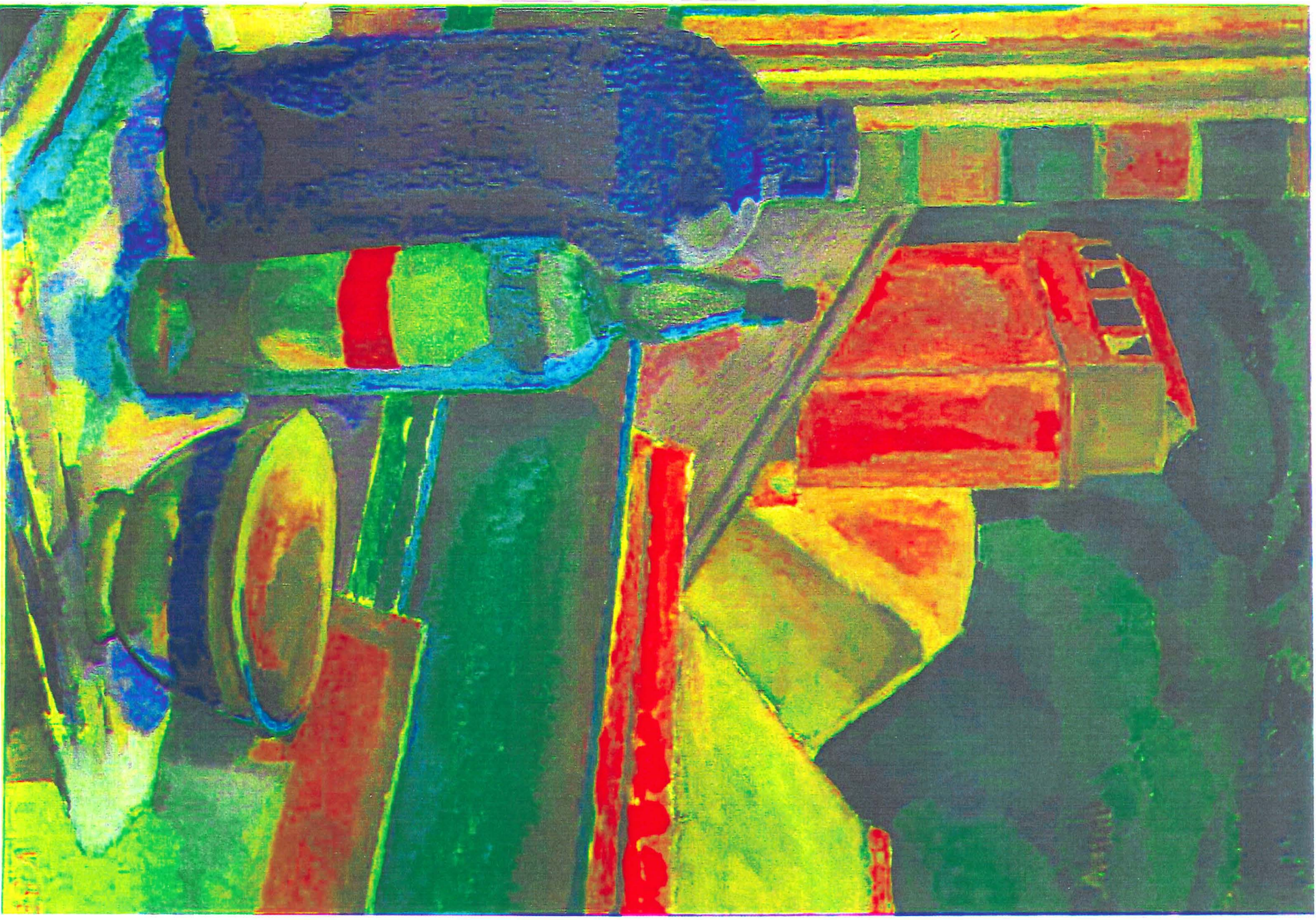


Plate 1



set of rules that had been arbitrarily thrown over “nature”: the parallels which cross on the horizon are a deplorable deception – behind them lies the infinity of space, which can never be measured.’<sup>33</sup> The artistic instinct could no longer fructify in the wasting conventions of the previous centuries. New forms were sought to salvage at least the concept of art if not communication itself.

Literary responses to this view of language and narrative as failing in meaning were varied. We might chart those responses in a radically simplified form by locating them on a continuum between two points. At one end is a desire to fill the void left by an absent God, to shore up narrative structures and in doing so provide a new purposive narrative by which to understand and live (as it were) with life. Close to this end we find the early fictional works of E. M. Forster who by his own admission was still desirous of ‘salvation’ some years after his Christian faith had left him.<sup>34</sup> In short stories such as ‘The Machine Stops’ Forster constructs a satire on religious faith and yet does not himself let go of a faith in a positive alternative purposive narrative to the one he undermines. At the other end of the continuum we find a fascination with the possibilities opened up in this void. This is manifested by attempts to maintain the very instability that arises from God and meaning’s absence through relativizing the narrative voice, enjambling various narrative forms, disrupting chronology, and disallowing the reader to adopt any settled vantage point and moral framework.<sup>35</sup> These two poles relate loosely to Rainer Emig’s ‘magician’ and ‘trickster’, whom he identifies as personified responses to the severance of word from object as it is outlined in Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.<sup>36</sup>

Conrad’s work is frequently to be found at the opposite end of the continuum from that of Forster’s early fiction. Novels like *Lord Jim* and *Nostromo* and novellas like ‘The End of the Tether’ and ‘Heart of Darkness’ provide little hope or respite to

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<sup>33</sup> Huelsenbeck, R. ‘En Avant Dada: A History of Dadaism’. Motherwell. p.36.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Forster, E.M. ‘How I lost my Faith’, *The Princes Tale and Other Uncollected Writings*, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1999. p.318.

<sup>35</sup> L.H. Myers is an interesting case here for within his book *The Near and The Far* he traverses the whole continuum from the ambivalent first sections, ‘The Root and the Flower,’ through to the directly communist, ‘Pool of Vishnu’.

<sup>36</sup> Emig, R. *Modernism in Poetry: Motivations, Structures and Limits*, London: Longman 1995. p.88. Emig’s interpretation pertains specifically to Adorno and Horkheimer’s analysis of Odysseus’s ‘cunning’ (Odysseus as ‘cunning man’ corresponds with Emig’s ‘trickster’) in their chapter ‘Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment’. Cf. Horkheimer, Max and Theodor W. Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. J. Cummings, London: Allen Lane 1973. pp.43-80. Emig cites in particular the

the reader. In *Lord Jim* the varied narrative voices undo each other, we see Jim as we see a cubist still life – from many angles that refuse to converge. Furthermore Jim himself continuously tries (and fails) to leap out of normative existence into a world framed by the narratives of romance. In *Nostromo* the chronology is disrupted in such a way that each discrete event seems to replicate its predecessor and its successor. This disruption is compounded by the insertion of ‘reported texts’ which are quoted and referred to such as Avelenos’s *Fifty Years of Misrule*, Decoud’s letters and Mitchell’s tour around Sulaco. The result is a blurring of causal connections and a narrative inability to reach a satisfactorily resolved conclusion. Nostromo himself absents and denies his relational roles as ‘our man’ and ‘Capataz.’ He is not the man they demand of him but Gian’ Battista, neither saviour nor prophet but ‘the voice of one crying in the wilderness’.<sup>37</sup>

In *The End of the Tether* our moral responses are tested. Whalley, on first reading, invokes sympathy and admiration yet by the end it is apparent that he has gained and maintained his captaincy by deception and in doing so exposed his ship and crew to constant jeopardy. Had we known this we ought not to have been sympathetic. On rereading the novella it is evident that Conrad has not explicitly deceived us: when he tells us, in the opening line of the third paragraph, that Whalley ‘could not hope to see anything new upon this lane of sea’ it is we, not Conrad, who insert a causal “because” between this and the next line, ‘[h]e had been on these coasts for the last three years’ (ET 151). Conrad inflicts blindness on us when we presume Whalley is sighted. We are only granted the vision that is denied Whalley when we realize his blindness. Furthermore, since Conrad has deceived us as Whalley deceived his employers our necessarily ambiguous judgments of Whalley must likewise be transposed to the authorial voice.

In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow may refuse to associate himself with the ‘pilgrims’ who travel with him up the Congo and yet he too makes his own pilgrim’s progress. He must endure trials and tribulations, which in their immediate context are frequently inexplicable. The delayed decoding that the reader experiences often reflects Marlow’s own experience. In certain instances both Marlow and the reader can decode the situation. However the cumulative effect of Marlow’s experience

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following from the Verso reprint: Adorno, T.W. and M. Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. J. Cummings, London: Verso 1979. pp.60-2, 69-72.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. St John’s Gospel 1.19-23.

requires assistance from another. Marlow rapidly comes to depend on the supposition that Kurtz will be able to reveal a conciliatory meaning for all the inexplicable events he has been unable to decode. The reality is shockingly different. Kurtz refuses his pilgrim any framework for understanding. His revelation is meaninglessness itself, swallowing up Marlow's world, like Sheol, until he is left in utter darkness eternally haunted by this anti-revelation (HD 142ff.). Indeed it corrupts Marlow by forcing him to lie to the Intended, something Marlow professes to abhor: 'There is a taint of death, a flavour of mortality in lies, - which is exactly what I hate and detest in the world - what I want to forget. It makes me miserable and sick, like biting into something rotten' (HD 79).

Eliot and Woolf also use the quest motif, by which Conrad structures Marlow's journey, only to undermine its efficacy. But both Eliot and Woolf go one stage further by developing an aesthetic out of fragmentation. Eliot's kaleidoscope of quotations real and imaginary, from well known and obscure texts, in a variety of dictions provides a way of maintaining a sense of linguistic crisis which is itself to be appreciated aesthetically. In *Mrs Dalloway* Woolf operates a similar method through a web of allusions internal and external that force the reader to make unexpected connections. Furthermore her erosion of purposive narrative leads her to an aesthetic of aperture, that is to say an aesthetic of the momentary and in particular the moment prior to comprehension, the moment of experience.

The moment of aperture differs from the epiphanies of other modernists, such as Joyce, in that it is not a moment of understanding, but, as for a camera film, a moment of exposure to something other. The term aperture purposefully invokes the camera for its ability to frame an image arbitrarily, almost autonomously. Woolf's aesthetic of aperture draws on her experience of the visual arts mediated for her as it was by Bloomsbury visual artists, and in particular her sister, Vanessa Bell. Vanessa Bell took inspiration from Post-Impressionist artists, in particular the Fauves, some of whom she knew personally, and who were exhibited by Fry in the First and Second Post-Impressionist Exhibitions of 1910 and 1912. The paintings of both the Fauves and Bell seem to frame their images arbitrarily so that their apparent object is obscured and often seen from an unusual and awkward angle. In Fauve paintings we frequently feel our view to be obscured by flags, trees, and bodies. In the paintings of Bell window frames regularly and abruptly intersect the canvas obstructing the view of whatever is depicted outside (Cf. Plates 1,). Woolf adapts this technique in her

writing by reducing the narrative to imagistic elements. These elements present themselves without interpretative clues, like the flickering cinematography of Jean Vigo, whose meaning develops cumulatively. These elements are the moments of aperture that expose the reader to experience rather than understanding.

Imagism, prior to the war, and Dada, during it, discovers an equivalent aesthetic of aperture in poetry and the visual arts. In the works of these artists the aim is to present an object uncluttered by interpretative aids. The object is abstracted from reality and yet equivalences it by proposing an incomprehensible logic that tempts interpretation. That logic is often beyond the grasp of the reader or viewer and in this the work of art represents both reality and the sense that if a logic operates within the world or if God still exists, they are absent, at least from comprehension.

The need to find an aesthetic that could revive language and narrative took on an ethical urgency during the First World War, a period when divine purpose seemed particularly incomprehensible if not absent completely. In *The Shadow-Line* Conrad frames a response to Marlow's dictum 'we live as we dream – alone' whereby the very fact that we are all alone gives us common grounds. The way in which this commonality is realised resembles the moment of aperture in *Mrs Dalloway* and the works of Dadas and Imagists. For Conrad the moment of aperture in social terms is a moment of boundless response, where the other is revealed as absolutely other and responded to as such.

However, Conrad's late fiction did not easily adopt this moment of boundless response in aesthetic terms. In *The Rescue* Conrad returns to those narrative ambiguities and deconstructive techniques that characterized his earlier fiction. This is due in part to the novel's having been started in 1896, however, even the latter half of the novel maintains a coruscating ambivalence in terms of purposive narrative. This is made evident by Conrad's play on the narrative paradigms of romance and his use of theatrical tropes, which are used against the novel's drive toward meaning and dénouement. Only in his final finished novel, *The Rover*, does Conrad synthesise the possibility of boundless response and a renewed possibility for purposive narrative, through an extended realisation of aperture.



## *Nostromo*: Not The Man

Joseph Conrad's *Nostromo: A Tale of the Seaboard* is the first of the so-called 'political novels', and was published in Britain on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1904 by Harper only a week after its serialization was completed in *T.P.'s Weekly*. Begun in December 1902 he originally intended it to be a short story, something 'silly and saleable'.<sup>38</sup> However, it soon enveloped him to such an extent that he would write in his 1917 'Author's Note':

It took the best part of the years 1903-4 to do; with many intervals of renewed hesitation, lest I should lose myself in the ever-enlarging vistas opening before me as I progressed deeper in my knowledge of the country. Often, also, when I had thought myself to a standstill over the tangled-up affairs of the Republic, I would, figuratively speaking, pack my bag, rush away from Sulaco for a change of air, and write a few pages of *The Mirror of the Sea*. (N 31)

This rushing off 'for a change of air' was a common Conradian habit. What is notable about this form of escape during the composition of *Nostromo* is how limited it was. Only in January 1904 did Conrad start to work on *The Mirror of the Sea* and at the same time the stage adaptation of 'To-morrow' into *One Day More*. These other literary ventures are also noteworthy for the fact that the former is a piece of non-fiction and the latter an adaptation of a previous composition, that is to say, neither required the same imaginative exertion necessary to a new fictional composition.

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<sup>38</sup>Joseph Conrad to Ford Madox Ford, 2 January 1903. *LJC*:3 4.  
Carissimo Ford.

I've been very much so-so (like Kip[ling]'s stories really are since my return. -A start has been made with *Nostromo*. I believe it will end in something silly and saleable. -As Youth seems to be in measure. -A letter from M[eld]um contains the words "selling very well" and contains congrat's and proph's of mat'l pro'p'rity for the N[ew] Y[ear].

Imp! Note (And in this connection I would wish to inscribe on the portal of your Palazzo "Lasciate ogni dolore" etc, with clamorous Felicità! For the Ill'ssimo Signore, the Ill'ssima Signora and the Ill'ssime Signorine Donna Cristina and Donna Caterina Del Fordo - together with many osculations for the latter two members of the Ill'ssima Famiglia.)

Evviva! Evviva!!

Hat in the air.

(Intermezzo ends.)

By the same post the Rescue is dispatched into your friendly hands for the only real work of Rescue that will ever be found in its text. Our love

Now this may well be a sensible writing discipline, yet it was uncommon in Conrad's writing practice: having started *The Sisters* in 1895 Conrad dropped it in favour of *The Rescue* the following year only to compose 'The Idiots', 'An Outpost of Progress', and 'The Lagoon' during the summer of 1896. Conrad continued writing *The Rescue* from time to time until the end of the decade and references to his desire to return to it appear all through the 1900s and early 1910s before he returned to it with full force towards the end of the war. More extremely, *The Sisters*, had to wait over twenty years before being rehabilitated as *The Arrow of Gold* in 1917, (published 1919). Famously 'The Secret Sharer' was composed on a break from *Under Western Eyes*, and 'Heart of Darkness' on a break from *Lord Jim* (itself a break from *The Rescue*). The lack of an equivalent break in writing for another fictional piece indicates Conrad's intense imaginative commitment to *Nostromo* during its composition. Thus Conrad continues in his 'Note':

On my return I found (speaking somewhat in the style of Captain Gulliver) my family all well, my wife heartily glad to learn that all the fuss was over, and our small boy considerably grown during my absence. (N 31)

Should we desire a reason for such commitment we need look no further than the 'Note' itself for one at least, where Conrad admits:

*Nostromo* is the most anxiously meditated of the longer novels which belong to the period following upon the publication of the *Typhoon* volume of short stories.

... What ... did cause me some concern was that after finishing the last story of the *Typhoon* volume it seemed somehow that there was nothing more in the world to write about. (N 29)

Such concern is reinforced by hesitance, 'as if warned by the instinct of self-preservation from venturing on a distant and toilsome journey into a land full of intrigues and revolutions' (31). This hesitance no doubt stems from his earlier

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Ever yours Conrad

problems with *The Rescue*, similarly set in 'a land full of intrigues and revolutions'. The following is typical of Conrad's anxiety about *The Rescue*:

Here I have used up 103 pages of manuscript to relate the events of 12 hours. I have done it in pursuance of a plan. But is the plan utterly wrong? Is the writing utter bosh? I had some hazy idea ... But I doubt having conveyed anything but the picture of my own folly. – I doubt the sincerity of my own impressions.

... Meantime I live with some hazy notions of scenes of passion and battle - and don't know how to get there. I dream for hours, hours! Over a sentence and even then can't put it together so as to satisfy the cravings of my soul.<sup>39</sup>

Thus *Nostromo*, originally intended as a short story, develops out of an anxiety about the possibilities of composition itself. It becomes tempting to argue that the very length of the novel indicates how much Conrad needed to prove to himself his own creative ability.<sup>40</sup> No wonder then that even as late as 1912 he considered the many less than sympathetic reviews of *Nostromo* as 'the blackest possible frost'.<sup>41</sup> These reviews had criticised both the content and the form: *The Times Literary Supplement* complained that

Mr. Conrad has written and written his five hundred pages, only to discover that it was in essence a short story after all. In the result the book is rather like one of those modern scenic plays where the drama is overwhelmed by the machinery ... we think that the publication of this book as it stands is an artistic mistake.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Conrad to Edward Garnett, 10 June 1896. *LJC*:1 286-287.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. 'for twenty months, neglecting the common joys of life that fall to the lot of the humblest of this earth, I had, like the prophet of old, 'wrestled with the Lord' for my creation....' Conrad, Joseph. *A Personal Record/A Mirror of the Sea*, ed. Mara Kalnin, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1998. p.95.

<sup>41</sup> Conrad to Arnold Bennett, 25 November 1912. *LJC*:5 139.

<sup>42</sup> Unsigned review, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 21 October 1904, 320. *Conrad: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Norman Sherry, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1973. p.164.

The moderate praise for Conrad's writing style that follows does little to ameliorate this sharp criticism. Elsewhere, as for example in the *Daily Telegraph*, the complaints are about the style:

Not for the first time do we regret the inability to see the wood for the trees. True, each tree stands distinct and strong ... but the beauty of the scene as a whole is lost, the sense of proportion is absent ... It has longueurs of a wearisome nature; vital situations hang fire while the author indulges in characteristic digressions; detail absorbs the position of the outline, which becomes impossibly blurred....

Had Mr. Conrad the selective gift which has been denied him, his book might well have proved a master-piece.<sup>43</sup>

There were, however, one or two more sympathetic reviews, notably from the consistently insightful Edward Garnett (writing in the *Speaker*, 12 November 1904), and also from C.D.O. Barrie, in *The British Weekly*:

Judged as an ordinary story ... *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....

It is as though he had chosen a new way to impart reality. The story reaches us by all manner of accidental natural ways – hearsay, narrative, conversation, letter. Lists of facts worked out in sequence do not come to give pause for humdrum satisfaction. Instead, we capture information and are fascinated; we appease curiosity. The method of thus holding up the mirror is so well managed as to leave an effect of extraordinary vividness. We have no feeling that an actual life would require touching up to be thus logical. *Nostromo* is so excellent a novel that it demands judgment of the highest standard, originality.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Unsigned review, *Daily Telegraph*, 9 November 1904, 4. Sherry. p.167.

<sup>44</sup> Barrie, C.D.O. Review, *The British Weekly*, 10 November 1904, 149. Sherry. p.170. It is worth noting that *The British Weekly* was a non-conformist literary paper.

Barrie's reading is useful in pinpointing exactly the cause of problems for some readers of *Nostromo* and the reason for Conrad's choice of narrative method. Moreover, Barrie indicates unwittingly the changing *Zeitgeist* of the time, when he comments that we 'have no feeling that an actual life would require touching up to be thus logical.' The experience of existence has always been a confusing one and in the past recourse was made to religion and science to make sense of, and thus make safe, that experience of confusion. Barrie's comments suggest that, for whatever reason, 'actual life' no longer makes that recourse. In part his comments stem from the high esteem in which late nineteenth-century realist literature was held. Conrad's methods give us a sense of direct access to the 'real' events of his fiction. Yet Barrie implies more than this, for a 'new way to impart reality' indicates a new dimension to reality itself, or, at least, a newly discovered, or newly valued dimension of reality. And it is clear that for Barrie this newly valued dimension of reality is its lack of logic.

Barrie recognizes the danger inherent in matching this lack of logic in reality with a lack of logical structure in a work of fiction: judged 'as an ordinary story ... *Nostromo* is not well told.' And indeed his insights into *Nostromo* indicate the insecurity felt by those more critical reviewers, with a mirroring of this new reality in fiction, preferring a stricter and clearer structure than the novel could give. Yet Barrie himself fails to recognize the radical irony of the text's own reality, indicated to us in the 'Author's Note' (although unavailable of course to Barrie) by Conrad's comparison of himself to Gulliver.

This comparison to Gulliver should put us on our guard, for Gulliver is a fictional construct, manipulated by and frequently distanced through irony from his author, Swift. We are then to be wary of Conrad's easy 'I'. The 'I' that claims,

If anything could induce me to revisit Sulaco (I should hate to see all these changes) it would be Antonia. And the true reason for that – why not be frank about it? – the true reason is that I have modelled her on my first love....

That's why I long sometimes for another glimpse of the 'beautiful Antonia' (or can it be the Other?) moving in the dimness....

But this is the idlest of dreams; for I did understand perfectly well at the time that the moment the breath left the body of the Magnificent Capataz, the Man of the People, freed at last from the toils

of love and wealth, there was nothing more for me to do in Sulaco. (N  
34-35)

Here Conrad constructs a humorous ambiguity of authorial self, the subjective 'I' vacillating within these sentences between creator and boulevardier. Conrad at once indicates his power of life and death over his characters, he is one who can 'model' Antonia and who has no use after Nostromo's death, and at the same time characterizes himself as a visitor, one like Mitchell's 'privileged passenger' who is powerless against the tyranny of Mitchell's and Sulaco's narrative. Conrad's question, 'why not be frank about it?' in fact undermines our faith in his 'true reason' with its air of self-consciousness. His second question, 'or can it be the Other?' in indicating the confusion of the author between Antonia and his first love, likewise casts doubt on the veracity of the story he tells of his first love. Finally, the author's desire, embodied by the fictional Antonia as his first love, is complicated by his claim that, 'I should hate to see all these changes'. For the one thing he may be sure of is that with 'the moment the breath left the body of the Magnificent Capataz' and the author's leave taking of Sulaco, nothing can have changed. Indeed, 'there was nothing more for me to do in Sulaco.' Any changes that occur when Sulaco is revisited can only have taken place in the author himself. The author's desire for Antonia like the recollection of his first love is a desire for the possibility of a Dorian Gray-like preservation in fiction, a possibility always as out of reach as the reality of fiction and memory itself.

To what extent this nostalgic expression of desire is a sincere reflection of Conrad's later feeling is unclear. Certainly it is in part the topic of later work such as *The Rescue* and *The Arrow of Gold* (a novel about another object of Conrad's doomed adoration). Furthermore, writing the 'Note' as he did during the war the desire for Antonia and the 'Other' represents a desire to remember both Poland and Sulaco as places of romance and aspiration rather than as places of cyclical violence and revolt. For just as the changes in Poland and the 'Other' would indeed be upsetting if not hateful to Conrad so the actual text of *Nostromo* undermines the desire for stability in fiction as Barrie's review obliquely pointed up.

There is another way to read these passages in the 'Author's Note', however, which avoids the problems inherent in psychologizing desire. The voice of the 'Note' can be read as that of the narrator who, as will be shown later, is undermined by Conrad in a way similar to that used by Swift to undermine Gulliver. Thus the

comparison to Gulliver becomes earnestly spoken and humorously composed.<sup>45</sup> In addition, the problems of coherence examined above become evidence of the narrator's more general unreliability. This unreliability is not at once evident. Intent, as initially the reader is, on capturing information, as Barrie puts it, we feel so at the mercy of the omniscient narrator that we do not think to question his method. Yet it is his method itself that quietly undermines the narrator's omniscience.

However in order to see how the narrative undoes itself we must start with the general structure of the book. In *Nostromo* Conrad takes to greater extremes those narrative techniques he put to good use in 'Heart of Darkness' and *Lord Jim*. As in *Lord Jim* the sequence of temporal events is disrupted, often for psychological and aesthetic emphasis, and, as in both *Lord Jim* and 'Heart of Darkness', 'delayed decoding' is used to similar effect.<sup>46</sup> These obstacles to our immediate comprehension of events are in part the cause of the novel's original hostile reception and continue to frustrate the reader today.

For his original audience Conrad's techniques went against the grain not only of moralizing romantic fiction but also of the more recent vogue for realist fiction, which stemmed in part from the upsurge of interest in evolutionary science.<sup>47</sup> Both these forms of fiction relied upon a linear narrative which reinforced the inevitability of their design. By the end of *Nostromo* we have a parallel sense of inevitability however it stems from quite a different patterning. The cyclical nature of political and geographical history depicted in *Nostromo*, which brings about the difficulty in saying 'when or where we are', reinforces our sense of inevitability whilst refusing any point

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<sup>45</sup> There are further useful parallels to be made with *Gulliver's Travels* when first looking at *Nostromo*. Their similarities of content (far off lands bordering the edges of the known world, self involved warring casts of characters, landscapes and personalities that seem disproportionate) are matched by similarities of theme (the general folly of governments and politics, the vanity and greed of man, the problem of morality and idealism).

<sup>46</sup> For an explanation of delayed decoding and its use in *Lord Jim* cf. Watt, Ian. 'Pink Toads and Yellow Curs: An Impressionistic Device in *Lord Jim*', *Joseph Conrad Conference in Poland, Contributions, 5-12 September 1972: First Series*, ed. Róża Jabłkowska, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw 1975. pp.11-31; and for its use in 'Heart of Darkness' cf. Watt, Ian. *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, London: Chatto and Windus 1980. Cedric Watts goes on to show, in *The Deceptive Text: An Introduction to Covert Plots*, that we can extend the term 'delayed decoding' to include the larger sequential disruption of narrative events noted above. Watts, Cedric. 'Conrad and Delayed Decoding', *The Deceptive Text: An Introduction to Covert Plots*, Brighton: Harvester 1984. pp.43-46.

<sup>47</sup> Part of evolutionary science's argument was that living things were shaped by and adapted to their circumstances and that detailed, objective observation would provide evidence for this argument. This argument validated realism's interest in the character shaping interaction of people and their surroundings, and also its aesthetic mode of detailed and apparently objective presentation as observation.

of escape or change such as sentimental and realist fiction had allowed.<sup>48</sup> Even where these previous fictions had ended without a happy ending they had usually done so to stimulate change in the real world outside fiction. Realism and sentimentalism were on the whole socially and morally motivated.

The pattern for such fiction in western literature comes from the Bible and a religious faith in the purposefulness of the universe. Even with the development of enlightenment rationalism and scepticism western culture was loath to give up teleological purposefulness. The theory of evolution, for example, threatened Christian theology in its theory of origins far more than in its theory of endings. And even where evolutionary theory may imply the replacement of the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount with a Nietzschean individualism there remains a teleological force underpinning those popularly disseminated ideas, such as 'survival of the fittest.'

*Nostramo* challenges the desire for teleology not only in its construction but through the experiences of the protagonists themselves. Characters witness the dissolution of ethical purposefulness on personal and social levels and, at the same time, are frequently doubled up by the narrative to indicate the futility of their attempts to avert such dissolution. This pairing off of characters appears to reduce the characters' freedom of action and thought by implying their (normally failed) results through the results of others' similar actions and thoughts. Thus where one character fails, if another is made to double the former's characteristics in some way, then failure is implicated for the latter too. For example, Emilia Gould begins her life in Costaguana, an instant success:

She could converse charmingly, but she was not talkative. The wisdom of the heart having no concern with the erection or demolition of theories any more than with the defence of prejudices, has no random words at its command. The words it pronounces have the value of acts of integrity, tolerance and compassion. (N 87)

And yet Emilia's very integrity, her devotion to her husband and his designs for the mine, lead to her abandonment by her husband and the realization of the corrupting

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<sup>48</sup> Barrie, C.D.O. Review, *The British Weekly*, 10 November 1904, 149. Sherry. p.170.



force the mine embodies. Originally Charles Gould's desire for thorough disobedience to his father's command to get rid of the mine stirs Emilia's admiration:

The very prohibition imposed the necessity of success. It was as if they had been morally bound to make good their vigorous view of life against the unnatural error of weariness and despair. If the idea of wealth was present to them it was only so far as it was bound with that other of success ... Nothing else would do to keep their prosperity without a stain on its only real, on its immaterial side! (N 92-93)

And on visiting the mine she is able 'by her imaginative estimate of its power' to endow a 'lump of metal with a justificative conception, as though it were not a mere fact, but something far-reaching and impalpable, like the true expression of an emotion or the emergence of a principle' (N 117). This propensity to transform 'mere facts' into moral ideals leaves her prey to Gould's passionate, if not eloquent, rhetoric (N 93).<sup>49</sup> Swept along she realizes too late that 'the sort of future we desire for the country' cannot stave off the 'utter change' that commitment to the mine, as well spring of that future, must bring (N 127).

In fact it is clear that once Emilia has given her consent to Gould and has returned with him to Costaguana she is powerless to stop the interminable pattern of events that unfolds. Her comment to Sir John at dinner aboard the *Juno* that 'even here there are simple and picturesque things that one would like to preserve', recalls her painting of the San Tomé gorge (N 127). Transformed by the industrial development of the mine only 'the memory of the waterfall' is 'preserved' in Mrs Gould's 'water-colour sketch' that hangs alongside weaponry on the whitewashed walls of her husband's room (N 116, 89). And yet when Mrs Gould first encounters the gorge it has been introduced to her as 'the very paradise of snakes' (N 116). Emilia is blind to the fact that even 'simple and picturesque things' contain the possibility of their own destruction: every paradise has a snake or two. Her acts of compassion in caring for the needy do little to stem the changes she fears because she is unable to see the 'mere facts' alone of those changes. In contrast Gould's response that it 'is no longer a Paradise of snakes. We have brought mankind into it' is in some

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<sup>49</sup> It is notable that Gould disdains 'the art of declamation' in others and yet he himself is able to carry

ways a proper one (*N* 195). Gould is able to embrace change and the possibilities it betokens, even as he acknowledges the costs. However, Gould's response comes from an equivalent idealism to Emilia's. He continues, 'we cannot turn our backs upon them and go to begin a new life elsewhere.' And only a few pages later Decoud points out to Emilia that 'he cannot act or exist without idealizing every simple feeling, desire, or achievement' (*N* 199). Gould's response then can only ever be that of a personal idealism conflicting with the philanthropic idealism of his wife. Both claim the moral high ground and both are blind to the metaphoric snakes that lurk there.

Emilia's character is doubled in Antonia Avellenos and Dr Monygham. Antonia and Emilia are clearly paralleled within Sulaco society: both are beautiful, intelligent, and admired for those gifts; both move within the circles of power in Sulaco. Even their childhoods are roughly paralleled: Emilia orphaned and staying with her Aunt, a widowed Marchesa; Antonia living motherless, tending her invalid father. Antonia, as does Emilia with Gould, gives moral significance to the activities and motivations of her suitor, Martin Decoud. Both have an unstinting faith in the possibility of change for the moral good that can also 'preserve' the 'simple and picturesque things' of Sulaco life. However, when the parallels are extended the suicide of Decoud, indicating the lack of sustenance his love for Antonia can give him, damns by comparison the power of love in the Gould marriage. The fact that Antonia is unaware of his suicide points up Emilia's ignorance of the root of her marriage's disintegration.

Emilia's doubling with Monygham is as much one of opposites as her doubling with Antonia is one of similarities. Whilst both tend the sick Emilia is admired for her beauty and gentle speech whilst Monygham is 'feared' for 'the open scornfulness of his tongue' (*N* 69); 'he was old, ugly, learned – and a little *loco* – mad, if not a bit of a sorcerer' (*N* 70). Monygham's devotion to Emilia, indicated by the substitution of a 'little white jacket' for his normal apparel parallels Emilia's own concessions to her husband (*N* 70). In fact, even Monygham's sartorial eccentricities, 'an established defiance to the conventionalities of Sulaco' and social incongruity matches the amazement that 'the tireless activity of [Emilia's] body' draws from the 'Spanish-American ladies' (*N* 69, 87). Emilia herself claims, 'They still look upon me as something of a monster' (*N* 87).

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others with his own fervour (cf. *N* 99).

Whilst these similarities help to make Monygham slightly more endearing and Emilia a richer character they also highlight fault lines in the ideals and motivations of this pair. Monygham's deeply cynical attitude to life seems quite at odds with Emilia's aspirations, and with good reason. Having betrayed compatriots at the violent hands of Father Béron, Monygham, who had hoped for death, is punished with life (*N* 318). He is 'haunted' by the memory of Father Béron 'against all the force of his will striving its utmost to forget' (*N* 316). Taking 'possession of his liberty', crippled and starved,

these conditions seemed to bind him indissolubly to the land of Costaguana like an awful procedure of naturalization, involving him deep in the national life, far deeper than any amount of success and honour could have done. They did away with his Europeanism; for Dr Monygham had made himself an ideal conception of his disgrace. (*N* 319)

This last phrase indicates the similarity of mind between Emilia and Monygham. The description continues, 'it was an ideal view, in so much that it was the imaginative exaggeration of a correct feeling. It was also, in its force, influence, and persistency, the view of an eminently loyal nature' (*N* 319-320). Emilia's loyalty to her husband and her ability to transform 'mere facts' into 'the emergence of a principle' are indeed the 'exaggeration' of 'correct feelings' and yet we have seen that such 'exaggeration' blinds her to the metaphorical snakes inherent in any 'ideal view'. Her fault lies in her inability to recognize and accept why the silver is the inevitable corrupter of all who involve themselves with it:

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

‘How can you say that, Dr. Monygham?’ she cried out as if hurt in the most sensitive place of her soul. (N 423)

After his seemingly redemptive activity in Sulaco history we find Monygham dressed with what ‘seemed an immoderate cult of personal appearance’ and rarely dreaming of Father Béron (N 420). And yet his devotion to Emilia is such that he comes to ‘dislike heartily everybody who approached Mrs Gould with any intimacy’ (N 421). Furthermore his very affection for Emilia in its intensity shows itself almost violently:

‘Thank you ...’ said Mrs Gould ... ‘People do not know how really good you are. You will not let them know, as if on purpose to annoy me, who have put my faith in your good heart long ago.’

The doctor, with a lifting up of his upper lip, as though he were longing to bite, bowed stiffly in his chair. (N 424)

His exaggerated feelings have simply been transferred from his ‘ideal conception of disgrace’ to his ‘cult of personal appearance’ and his violently jealous affection for Emilia. Moreover, neither his patriotic activities nor his fanaticism are able to assuage the political conspiracies that continue within the grounds of the Casa Gould (N 422-423). And finally, at the end of the novel he is ‘defeated by the magnificent Capataz de Cargadores’, before Emilia, a defeat concerning the knowledge of silver (N 461).

Emilia is no fool and she learns eventually to hate the silver of the mine, as she confesses to Nostromo on his deathbed (N 460). But this confession is not on her own deathbed and even the most terrible confessions, as Monygham discovered, are no guarantee of death. Emilia may confess but it cannot end the tyranny of ‘mere facts’ over her desire for a ‘justifactive conception’. That she must resign herself to this brings about ‘the first and only moments of bitterness in her life. It was worthy of Dr Monygham himself’ (N 461). Thus despite their differences Emilia and Monygham double each other to complicate through comparison the pattern of their motivations. Monygham’s misanthropy and Emilia’s philanthropy each cause us to doubt the efficacy of the other.

The example of Emilia demonstrates the way in which Conrad undermines his characters’ ethical purpose in their own experience and in the experience of the

reader. Other characters suffer a similar fate. We have already seen how Monygham recovers his sense of honour in the political life of Sulaco (after his betrayal of friends to Father Béron) only to suffer in his obsessive devotion to Emilia. His particularity in dress demonstrates his obsessive nature as much in his early 'established defiance to the conventionalities of Sulaco' as in his later 'immoderate cult of personal appearance' (*N* 69, 420). Indeed Conrad stresses the relationship between Monygham's dress and his mentality in the religious terms he uses to categorize both: 'the sight of that woman ... suggested ideas of adoration, of kissing the hem of her robe' (*N* 424). Yet he undercuts Monygham's 'immoderate cult' by noting his continuing limp and 'the unchanged crabbed character of his face', and his ideas of adoration by noting that 'this excess of feeling translated itself naturally into an augmented grimness of speech' (*N* 421, 424).

Ironically Monygham comes to embody the characteristics of Béron, the source of his mental anguish. Monygham's debased religious devotion to Emilia copies unwittingly that of the impious Béron to his job. And just as Béron's violently parodies his role as confessor, Monygham's devotion leads to unbridled emotion, 'grimness' of expression, and a cannibalistic visage: 'lifting up of his upper lip, as though he were longing to bite' (*N* 424). Furthermore, Monygham's elaborate dress in the latter part of the novel recalls Decoud's 'frenchified' couture and we remember that these attempts of Decoud at 'cosmopolitanism' are condemned as 'mere barren indifferentism posing as intellectual superiority' (*N* 152). If Decoud's dress is symbolic of that barrenness which eventually leads to his suicide, this can only reinforce the sense that Monygham's dress is symbolic of a corresponding seething infertility. Thus Monygham's attempts to overcome his own history become corrupted replications of that history.

Charles Gould fares no better. Conrad gives him a string of parallels that do him few favours. He is 'The other Carlos' to the statue of Charles IV (*N* 72). This statue, at the entrance of the Alameda, is known as 'The Horse of Stone' and acts as a shelter to the poor (*N* 72). The weatherworn state of the statue, and the disappearance of human reference in its common title, image this king as a centaur, much as the Indians of South America are reputed to have seen that same king's first emissaries. As a centaur the statue presides over the civic conflagrations that regularly ignite in the Alameda. Gould's appearance on horseback interrupts this description of 'The Horse of Stone' and the narrative draws explicit parallels between the two. What

remains implicit is that Gould may suffer the same fate as his namesake. And indeed Gould too watches stonily over the political and intellectual conflagrations that erupt in his own *Casa*. More than this, as figurehead for the new colonialism, as extractor of raw wealth from the new world, the 'paradise of snakes', Gould becomes a centaur (and centre) of rapacity and violence.<sup>50</sup> Gould's appearance here comes at the end of an introduction to Monygham, and Conrad's comment about Gould's 'incongruous' 'English clothes' echoes swiftly the 'established defiance' of Monygham's dress (*N* 72, 69). Having already examined at some length the implications of Monygham's apparel it should be evident that the clear parallel with Gould does not flatter the latter.<sup>51</sup>

Gould also parallels Nostromo, in that both men eventually allow their lives to be dictated by an omnipresent concern for silver. Moreover both are betrayed at the same time by Decoud's political manoeuvres, also motivated by concern for silver. The hatching of the plot to remove the silver from Sulaco, and in particular from the predatory and maverick invader, Sotillo, so that it may become physically responsible for apparent positive change and civic development there, is kept a secret from Gould by his wife and Decoud (*N* 198). This incident eventually leads in the second half of the novel to Nostromo's purloining of the silver for his own uses, betraying the trust put in him as 'the incorruptible' by Gould. However, Nostromo's treachery is an act of revenge for his own sense of betrayal at the hands of the Sulaco patricians. Both Gould and Nostromo are initially motivated to industriousness by a belief that through such industry their desires for unstained morality and reputation will be fulfilled. Both eventually become slaves to the medium of their industry at the expense of their original goals.

These examples show how Conrad undermines his protagonists and in doing so creates a sense that any activity, however consolatory, is liable and likely to fall victim to its actor's own best intentions. This sensation of individual futility augments the novel's structure, designed as it is to underscore the cyclical aspect of revolutionary political history through the juxtaposition of temporally separate fragments of a historical narrative. The reader comes to realize that the relationships between these fragments correspond to the relationships between the novel's

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<sup>50</sup> Gould's threat to blow the mine to pieces later on in the novel foreshadows that other, more freebooting terrorist, the Professor, in *The Secret Agent*.

<sup>51</sup> In fact, Gould's devotion to the mine (as much a part of his heritage as his dress sense), at the

characters: at first each may seem different and yet they chime with each other to such a degree that the failure of one historical event cannot but indicate the failure of any other. Change becomes a return to the same and, as Eliot notes at the beginning of 'Burnt Norton', 'If all time is eternally present/All time is unredeemable.'<sup>52</sup>

However, as has already been hinted, Conrad does not limit his dissolution of historical narrative to his protagonists' characteristics and his structural innovation. Through reference to other texts and narratives within and without the novel Conrad begins to undermine the work of the novel itself. Once again these methods are best illuminated through his protagonists.

We may turn firstly to Decoud, the most prolific writer in Sulaco, excepting perhaps Don José Avellanosa and his *Fifty Years of Misrule*. Decoud's writing generally identifies him as a figure of modernity. He is the 'special correspondent' from Paris for the Sta Marta's *Semenario* and alternatively writes special articles on Costaguana for the *Parisian Review*, before taking up his post at the head of the *Porvenir* (N 151, 155, 157). His letter to his sister from the Casa Viola reports that he sends cablegrams via San Francisco and New York, and receives telegrams from Cayta, from the railhead, in the foothills of Higuerota, and from the Cable Company in Esmeralda (N 206, 212, 217). In the same letter he makes reference to Reuters (N 206). All this reinforces Decoud's apparent cosmopolitanism, but as Conrad comments Decoud blinds himself with this pose 'to the genuine impulses of his own nature' (N 152). In fact, far from signalling an inherent indifferent modernity, Decoud's public textual activities are motivated by his chivalric love for Antonia. Notably it is a letter, in her hand, that recalls him to Sulaco from Paris, to take the helm of the *Porvenir*.

Only his letters to his sister rival in prodigality the volume of his textual commitment to Antonia. And just as the supercilious tone of his journalism masks its romantic motivation so the letters, which at first seem to be written for the entertainment of his sister, are in fact motivated by a desire to maintain a stable sense of self. Decoud's letters recall those of Scott's eponymous Redgauntlet.<sup>53</sup> Both written to the companions of their youth, they start in jocular satiric fashion becoming

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expense of his marriage, is in part the cause of Monygham's own fanatical devotion to Gould's wife.

<sup>52</sup> Eliot, T.S. 'Burnt Norton', *Four Quartets, Collected Poems 1909-1962*, London: Faber and Faber 1963, p.189.

<sup>53</sup> I refer throughout, here, to the youngest Redgauntlet first known to his readers and himself as Darsie Latimer.

gradually more serious as the protagonists find themselves more seriously involved in the antics they had originally dramatized as bathetic. Eventually the young Redgauntlet is unable to send letters but continues to record his experiences in a secret diary. For both Decoud and the young Redgauntlet writing becomes that action by which is found 'the sense of mastery over the Fates' (N 86). Decoud, at the table in the Casa Viola, is able to put into fictional form, in his letter to his sister, the chaotic events he has become embroiled in. The need to give a narrative structure to these events is significant of Decoud's fear of their chaos. Moreover, through his written narration Decoud is able to inscribe himself as a crucial point of reference for his structure of events. Like Redgauntlet, Decoud must write himself into existence when faced with the reality of that '*farce macabre*' he had once existentially recorded (N 52).

Redgauntlet must lose his identity (he is bound, gagged and dressed as a woman), before he is saved by his correspondent (and soon to be brother-in-law), Alan Fairford. Decoud is given no such reprieve. Left alone on the Great Isabel Decoud dies 'from solitude' (N 412). Conrad comments that,

In our activity alone do we find the sustaining illusion of an independent existence as against the whole scheme of things of which we form a helpless part. Decoud lost all belief in the reality of his action past and to come. (N 413)

For Decoud that sustaining activity had been writing, and that writing had always assumed an audience, a female audience, and more specifically still the audience of Antonia (even as he writes to his sister he constructs an image of himself that fulfils his notion of Antonia's expectations). His audience now disappears as completely as his writing tools. Without an audience Decoud's 'affectations of irony and scepticism have no place' (N 413). This is because irony and scepticism require three elements, ironist/sceptic, audience, and situation: the ironist/sceptic points out to his audience the irony, or his scepticism, of a given situation. Alone, without an audience, on the Great Isabel the only material available to which he can apply his 'irony and scepticism' is his own state of solitude. Fulfilling the role of all three elements leaves Decoud in a void, 'not fit to grapple with himself single-handed' (N 413).



Even the activity of sleep is denied him, his visions are waking visions even as he wears the 'aspect' of a 'sommambulist' (N 414). He is haunted at night by a parody of his own journalism and telegraphy:

the silence, remaining unbroken in the shape of a cord to which he hung with both hands, vibrated with senseless phrases, always the same but utterly incomprehensible, about Nostromo, Antonia, Barrios, and proclamations mingled into an ironical and senseless buzzing. (N 414)

The universe itself becomes 'a succession of incomprehensible images' that mock Decoud, divorced as he is from the writing materials by which he might order them (N 414).

Aaron Fogel has described Decoud's suicide as 'forced dialogue with nothing' and comments that,

The likeness between the punishment and the lifelong sin of detachment from community is almost Dantean. The man who despised the noise of history is being punished by finding out, on the Golfo Placido, that silence is the worst.<sup>54</sup>

This is true; however the justificatory aspect of retribution that Fogel points out is undermined by the echoing of Hirsch's torture and murder in Decoud's suicide. Decoud's first desire for death comes 'towards the evening, in the comparative relief of coolness', whilst Hirsch's silent response to Sotillo's blank threat of death: "Confess or –" occurs as the 'inflow of the night air ... spread gradually a delicious freshness through the close heat of the room' (N 414, 375). Decoud's imaginary vibrating cord from which he hangs by the hands closely parallels the 'slight quiver' on the 'taut rope' from which Hirsch is hung by the 'wrists' (N 375, 374).<sup>55</sup> Likewise the threatening void of silence and solitude that eventually 'swallowed up' Decoud, paradoxically recalls Hirsch's scream: 'a wide-open mouth – incredibly wide, black,

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<sup>54</sup> Fogel, Aaron. *Coercion To Speak: Conrad's Poetics of Dialogue*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 1985. p.118, 128-129.

<sup>55</sup> Compare, '... the silence appeared again before him, stretched taut like a dark, thin string' (N 415).

enormous, full of teeth – comical’ (N 416, 375). The addition of these last two incongruous epithets to Hirsch’s scream only heightens its violence. Hirsch’s torture and murder is a scene of gothic grotesque totally lacking in a justificatory aspect, so that when read forward onto Decoud’s suicide it creates an uneasiness: Decoud’s sojourn on the Great Isabel may indeed be an apt hell, as Fogel claims, yet his suicide remains meaningless and he is swallowed up ‘in the immense indifference of things’ (N 416). Hirsch’s oral responses of screaming, silence, and finally spitting, are as impotent as Decoud’s intellectual acrobatics when interrogated by the brutality of indifference.

Thus, through Decoud Conrad shows that writing is a consolatory activity and that however consolatory all action, including writing, is but a ‘sustaining illusion’ without which we are powerless against the merciless glitter of reality (N 415). This notion can be seen to reflect Conrad’s anxieties about writing when he engaged himself in the composition of *Nostromo*. Furthermore, it is itself a consoling notion for it implies that the writer so long as he can write is protected from a merciless reality.<sup>56</sup>

However, this consolation is not left unchallenged. Decoud’s writing, as mentioned before, required an audience and Conrad, as he develops his narrative, problematizes the text so as to distance his reader from it. We have already noted his use of delayed decoding in his overall structuring of the narrative but Conrad also uses devices to problematize the reading of specific passages, which are closer to Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekte* than to the original small-scale delayed decoding that Watt’s identified in *Lord Jim*. By introducing references to events, people, organizations, texts, and other ‘facts’ outside the fictional world of Costaguana Conrad stretches the mode and matter of nineteenth-century realism to breaking point. This is not a new technique: Swift satirized the popular taste for ‘true’ records of exploration in *Gulliver’s Travels* using similar methods. The effect in Conrad is not so much satirical as one that undermines realism existentially.

References such as Decoud’s to Reuters, or the introduction of the statue of Charles IV, are very much in keeping with realist aesthetics. Even Mitchell’s references to ‘*The Times*’s special correspondent, who wrote *that* striking series of

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<sup>56</sup> One could go so far as to say that Decoud’s disappearance in the immense indifference of things reflects Conrad’s fear of public indifference to his own work during those periods of publication limbo when the author is severed from his text.

letters' (second italics mine), and "'Treasure House of the World", as *The Times* man calls Sulaco in his book' are kept within the world of the novel by reported speech (N 399, 402). However, when the narrator claims that the 'flourishing and stable condition' of the 'new Occidental State ... is a matter of common knowledge now' the world of the novel starts to impinge on that of the reader (N 303). Tacitly the narrator implies that the reader should know about this state and its condition.

There are other attacks on the reader some subtler than others. For example, Pedrito Montero devours 'the lighter sort of historical works' about the French Revolution, which do nothing for him 'but fill his head with absurd visions' (N 328). Given that *Nostromo* too purports to be a 'lighter sort of historical work' concerning revolution the reader is not flattered by an implicit comparison with the violent and imbecile Pedrito. Gould's comment that the 'words one knows so well have a nightmarish meaning in this country' is not so much an attack on the reader but a warning, particularly when we recall his earlier 'pity for those men, putting all their trust into words of some sort' (N 344, 313). More overtly when the reported speech of Decoud is followed by the comment that 'Decoud had dropped easily into English, which he spoke with ... too many z sounds', the reader is forced to reread the passage (N 201). This comment, like the earlier reference to current 'common knowledge', underlines the reader's sense of inadequacy before the text: we do not know Decoud, and he is not ours to know because he speaks with an accent that differentiates him from us.<sup>57</sup>

The latter example demonstrates how Conrad demands the involvement of the reader at the reader's expense. This takes on an ethical aspect in a passage resonant with Swiftian tones:

At no time of the world's history have men been at a loss how to inflict mental and bodily anguish upon their fellow-creatures. This aptitude came to them in the growing complexity of their passions and the early refinement of their ingenuity ... The stupidest mind may invent a rankling phrase or brand the innocent with a cruel aspersion. A piece

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<sup>57</sup> There is more than a hint at self-irony here since Conrad himself spoke with a marked accent. Thus Conrad appropriates on the page a 'proper' accent through which he criticizes the spoken English of another, who in fact *speaks* English much as he himself does. For those aware of Conrad's background (his East European roots were more publicized and discussed in critical circles during the 1910s) the reader might go back a third time to read in Conrad's accented spoken voice the criticism of Decoud's

of string and a ramrod; a few muskets in combination with a length of hide rope; or even a simple mallet of heavy, hard wood applied with a swing to human fingers or to the joints of a human body is enough for the infliction of the most exquisite torture. (N 317)

All is at the reader's expense: firstly, the charge that greater sophistication is commensurate with greater aptitude to violence aims itself at the literary elite, which was still at that time Conrad's main audience (despite his desire for wider popularity). This elite remains, as inventors of phrases, the butt of the next charge, which combines stupidity with cruelty.<sup>58</sup> Finally due to the Livian structure of the final sentence the reader is tempted to work out the active verb, by which these series of objects will be animated, before it is given to us. Thus we prove the charges of cruel ingenuity already made.

Conrad uses the tricolon of the last sentence to its full effect: the second phrase contains more detail and more sophisticated objects than the first (muskets and hide rope rather than simple ramrod and string), and yet for the purpose of torture their (mis)use is practically the same; the last phrase extends in length beyond the first two, combining the simplicity of objects from the first with the detailed description of the second; moreover, Conrad releases the climactic phrasing of 'heavy, hard wood' in such a way as to mimic the swing he describes. The inevitability of the release means that we are carried helpless by the phrase's momentum onto the specifics of the human body, so that at the very moment we had mentally become implicit in the torture, by seeking out the verb, we are rushed into the excruciating experience of the torture by the structural power of the text.

Such passages reinforce the strength of the narrator at the expense of the reader and therefore a general sense that the narrative voice is an omniscient one. On the whole it is and yet even the narrator is susceptible to comparisons that undermine his impartial omniscience. The first comparison that can be drawn is with Avellanos's lengthy *Fifty Years of Misrule*.<sup>59</sup> *Nostromo* itself covers much the same period briefly only its main focus is the period following the end of Avellanos's history. In other words, *Nostromo* acts as a sequel to *Fifty Years of Misrule* and Avellanos himself. We

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'too many z sounds'.

<sup>58</sup> Conrad's hostile or indifferent critics may well be aimed at in particular here.

<sup>59</sup> Conrad quotes from *Fifty Years of Misrule* on several occasions and claims to be the sole possessor

are not given much insight into the detail of Avellanos's history. However, it is apparent that for Avellanos, as for Decoud, the ability to narrate events has given him the illusion of having been able to control them. Having finished the text Avellanos slowly dies, seemingly blighted by the events he can no longer order through writing.<sup>60</sup> The absence of his manuscript is yet another example of the indifference of the world to the conjuring of the writer. In suppressing his text Avellanos counters this reality of indifference with a forced silence.<sup>61</sup> Conrad claims to use *Fifty Years of Misrule* as his 'principal authority' in his 'Note', and yet this apparent rehabilitation of the text is rather a cannibalization, one which confirms the suppression of the original text. Moreover, the implications for the present narrator are clear: narrative can only be a consoling activity, one that, when it comes to an end, is not immune to silence and silencing by the reality of an indifferent public.

The second damning comparison, for the narrator, is with Captain Mitchell. Captain Mitchell's guided tour of Sulaco, put on for the benefit of 'distinguished strangers', mirrors in many ways the narrative of *Nostromo* itself (N 394). Neither is narrated in chronological fashion but takes its prompts from whatever material is closest to hand;<sup>62</sup> the result for both the 'privileged passenger' and the reader is the sensation of having been 'stunned and as it were annihilated mentally by a sudden surfeit of sights, sounds, names, facts, and complicated information imperfectly apprehended' (N 404-405);<sup>63</sup> Mitchell's 'programme' is relentless, 'like a law of Nature', where *Nostromo*, too, seems inexorably boundless (N 400); indeed Mitchell's tour is exhaustingly long as is the text of *Nostromo*.

Given the satiric humour with which Mitchell's tour is portrayed these comparisons are not particularly favourable to the narrator of *Nostromo*. Whilst I hesitate to imply that Conrad intends us to dismiss the narrative voice of *Nostromo* as a buffoon, something of a cross between Mitchell and the Teacher of Languages in

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of its manuscript in his 'Author's Note' (cf. N 143, 144, 31).

<sup>60</sup> Note that his request for the presence of Decoud, his literary successor, is written in the hand of his daughter. This is no doubt a calculated move by the Sulaco patricians to tempt Decoud with a lady but it also indicates the physical failing of Avellanos's writing powers (N 153).

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Fogel on Decoud's forced dialogue with silence. Fogel. p.118.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. pp.128-129.

<sup>63</sup> Thus when the narrator opens Chapter Ten of 'The Lighthouse' with a description of the faint sound of gun fire, to which Mitchell listens 'anxiously', rather than continuing to relate the disturbances alluded to he begins his digression detailing Mitchell's tour (N 394). Mitchell takes his prompts from the physical buildings they pass in similar manner.

<sup>64</sup> Compare the complaints of contemporary reviews such as those in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 21 October 1904; *Daily Telegraph*, 9 November 1904; John Buchan in the *Spectator*, 19 November

*Under Western Eyes*, my point is that the correspondences noted complement the various techniques for destabilizing the narrative which Conrad directs against the text.

There is a further correspondence between Mitchell and the narrator: both put a seemingly secondary character close to the centre of their versions of Sulaco's history, Nostromo. Nostromo is the embodiment of many of the destabilizing techniques we have already discovered and is crucial to understanding the range of narrative implications in the novel. Nostromo's real name is Gian' Battista Fidanza and it is not without significance. He experiences two baptisms in Sulaco: the first time, he steps ashore and is named by Mitchell, Nostromo, an anglicized corruption of the Italian, *nostr' uomo* (N 68); the second time, he swims ashore and chooses for himself another oxymoronic name, Captain Fidanza, which translates into English his former Spanish title, Capataz, whilst introducing his true Italian surname.

The irony of adopting Fidanza, at the moment that he takes his revenge on those to whom he had originally 'belonged' by stealing the silver, is to the point. In the first half of the novel Nostromo had relied upon the tales of others for his prestige. This had involved making himself indispensable up to and including his engagement to steal the silver away from Sulaco with Decoud to secure support from Holroyd for devolution. In the second half of the novel Nostromo relies upon the silver to maintain his appearance according to those tales formerly told of him. Thus Nostromo gives back to the patricians a parody of the very stories that they had once controlled him by and does so by means of the commodity for which they had betrayed him, silver.

Nostromo is the focus for further narrative ironies against Mitchell and the narrator. During his tour Mitchell exclaims to his 'guest' that the 'history' of Nostromo's ride to Cayta, 'would make a most exciting book' (N 400, 401-402). However, we find that this, and Mitchell's many other stories, appear to 'the distinguished bird of passage' as 'a fairy tale' (N 405). *Nostromo* itself is clearly a version of that 'exciting book,' thus the weary passenger's response undermines the surface narrative's pretensions. All the more so when we recall Decoud's references to the genre: firstly he condemns Gould for not being able to 'believe his own motives if he did not make them first a part of some fairy tale' (N 199); and secondly, a little later, he says that for him life is not 'a moral romance derived from the tradition of a

pretty fairy tale' (N 202). Decoud's own letters show how close in fact he is to Gould in needing to construct for himself some fiction by which to justify his motives, even if that fiction is an existentialist one. Decoud is more immune to the latter charge until we recognize the amorous causes inherent in Decoud's political activities; he may attempt to extricate himself from morality yet he still maintains that desire for purposeful narrative noted earlier.

In relation to *Nostromo* these references to fairy tale and romance prepare us for the end of his story as it coincides with the end of the novel. From the time of its publication the apparent generic shift at the end of *Nostromo* has drawn criticism and comment.<sup>64</sup> It is my contention that this shift is meant to be awkward for it re-enacts all the other failures of narrative that the book catalogues. Conrad's techniques in the novel have indicated that events continue inexorably, indifferent to the narratives by which individuals may record them. Both the author and the reader, then, are faced with the problem of an ending. Both desire one and yet any ending is bound to be arbitrary, unsatisfactory and above all impotent. By writing an ending that is clearly 'a moral romance derived from the tradition of a pretty fairy tale' Conrad shows it for what it is. Moreover, we as readers are complicit: the insatiable reader forcing meaning from the author drives him to kill off his hero; *Nostromo's* death punishes the reader, presenting him with the reality of a meaningless ending. The pattern is a more expansive version of that by which the reader had earlier become complicit in and subject to the facts of torture (N 317).

The result is a double parody of romance and realist literature. Romance is shown to be a feeble and sentimental panacea when juxtaposed with the realistic presentation of social history. Realism, even Conrad's 'new way to impart reality,' is shown to impose an arbitrary structure on the subject materials and, in particular, the imposition of an ending indicates its inability to resist the desire for final meaning, and thus its equivalence to romance.

*Nostromo's* assault on the desire for an ending is not however limited to nineteenth century literature. More broadly it threatens those that sought morality in theories of evolution or of politics, and most pointedly it threatens theological narrative. Not only does the disrupted structure of the book challenge biblical and

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<sup>64</sup>Exemplary of these is an unsigned review in *Black and White*: 'Here is the stuff either of romance or of fierce realism, according as the artist chooses. Mr. Conrad, however, has hidden what grain of romance or of realism was in him.' Sherry. p.166.

theological narrative linearity as a presentation of how the world is in reality, but Conrad also provides a variety of biblical echoes that undermine any notion of redemption. These biblical echoes focus on Nostromo himself, and his real name.

Gian' Battista Fianza shares with his namesake the characteristic of *not* being The Man.<sup>65</sup> Characteristic of the ways in which Nostromo is mistaken as the saviour of Sulaco is Monygham's apprehension of him as 'unique. He was not "one in a thousand". He was absolutely the only one. The doctor surrendered. There was something in the genius of that Genoese seaman which dominated in the destinies of great enterprises and of many people' (N 378). This revelation comes during a long conversation in which two of the three men who had gone out in the lighter full of silver are reunited for the first time. Only Hirsch is not alive. The body of Hirsch, although not crucified recalls a crucifix with 'the shoulders projecting forward, the head sunk low upon the breast' seen 'against the light of two flaring and guttering candles, through a blue, pungent, thin haze' (N 359). The torture and murder of 'the treacherous Jew' because he told the truth we have already seen to be pointless. Even though his death incidentally gives Monygham the prompt he needs to plan the rescue of Sulaco, that rescue is hardly the guarantee of eternal salvation for Sulaco, as the continued conspiracies at the end of the novel indicate.<sup>66</sup>

If Nostromo bears witness to Hirsch it is unwittingly, by not being the Man, not being Monygham's 'only one'. Nostromo even confesses to the absence of the man who Monygham takes him for, echoing John 1:20, but whereas John's confession continues, to bear witness to the coming of Christ, Nostromo's confession refuses the possibility of another: 'The Capataz is undone, destroyed. There is no Capataz. Oh, no! You will find the Capataz no more' (N 365). The Jew, the dealer in hides, has been murdered already: both he and Nostromo are reduced to secular parodies of their biblical types.

Not only is Nostromo not The Man, so to speak, he is not John the Baptist either, for he bears witness to the darkness of death rather than to the Light. Beckett's claim in *Waiting for Godot* that mankind gives 'birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more' is also apt for *Nostromo* in which even as Nostromo awakes from his second baptism, 'with the lost air of a man just born to the world,' he sees a '*rey zamuro*' watching 'for signs of death and corruption' (N 347,

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<sup>65</sup> 'And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ'. John 1:20.



348).<sup>67</sup> As the Capataz de Cargadores in Chapter Eight of 'The Silver of the Mine' he appears like the Fourth Horseman of Revelation: a 'phantom' mounted on a 'silver-grey mare', knocking on the doors for men with the butt of a revolver (*N* 108-109).<sup>68</sup> At Teresa's deathbed his refusal to fetch a priest causes her despair and incurs her dying curse. His impiety is, for Teresa, a failure of the 'supreme test' (*N* 226).

Finally, in Nostromo's death Conrad undoes the typology of the □□□, which Christianity applies through Christ back onto Abraham and Isaac.<sup>69</sup> For Viola, Nostromo originally replaces the first son he lost who was close to Nostromo in age (*N* 58). At his death Nostromo replaces the unwanted son Ramirez. Nostromo dies for the other, guilty of those sins charged against Ramirez. But he does not die out of piety, nor because the sins really are his (although they are), but out of devotion to the false light of silver. Thus throughout the second half of the novel Nostromo absents those roles given to him by those who had claimed him as theirs, as 'Nostr' Uomo': he betrays Teresa's faith in his ability to give her the man by whom she can be saved; he betrays the patricians' faith in Captain Fidanza; he betrays his betrothed Linda and adoptive father; and dies neither son, nor lover, but slave to 'material interests.' Nostromo's death is not a meaningful sacrifice of the son by the father; there is no redemptive aspect. This is underlined by Viola's almost immediate death reading the Bible. It is not clear which passage Viola reads but his earlier claim that 'Ramirez the vagabond' had cried out in 'son Gian' Battista's voice', and his 'stern expression ... as if in response to some gloomy thought or unpleasant sensation', invite us to consider either Mark 15:34 or Matthew 27:46 as candidates (*N* 463, 464).<sup>70</sup> Just as the man, whose patron is witness to the Light, appears as an emissary of death early in the novel so the Living Word becomes fatal at the end of the novel. Viola dies before reaching the end of The Book so that the one ending that claims to guarantee salvation and complete satisfaction of the need for an ending can no longer serve its purpose.

<sup>66</sup> For a slightly more positive reading of Hirsch's replication of the crucifixion cf. Purdy, pp.107-108.

<sup>67</sup> Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot*, London: Faber and Faber 1956. Act 2. p.89. Conrad uses a chapter break here to emphasize the break in tone used to describe a continuous instant in time.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Revelation 6:7-8. This mounted figure is also another centaur reinforcing the association of destruction and chaos.

<sup>69</sup> I.e. the narrative of God's proposal that Abraham sacrifice Isaac, and of Abraham's rewarded obedience. Cf. Genesis 22.

<sup>70</sup> 'And in the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' Mark 15:34; And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' Matthew 27:46.

If, at the end, Gian' Battista's 'genius' still dominates the 'dark gulf' it does so as the absence of a presence that forever absented its role, that haunted and was haunted by fictions created to shore up belief against reality. Even after his death both Monygham and Linda begin to create new fictions around the departed Nostromo (N 465). The characters and the narrative itself enact the agon, which Conrad recalls as his own experience of writing *Nostromo*, where 'the prophet of old, 'wrestled with the Lord'.<sup>71</sup> Jacob wrestles for a blessing and is given a new name in recognition of his prevailing 'power with God and with men'.<sup>72</sup> He wrestles for recognition from, and significance in the face of, that which will not give its name. In the world of *Nostromo* that face is no longer □□□□□ (i.e. the face of God) but the 'immense indifference of things' against which no end of textual production can prevail. The world of *Nostromo* is finally a world of failed texts.

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<sup>71</sup> Conrad, Joseph. *A Personal Record/Mirror of the Sea*. p.95.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Genesis 32:24-28.

## Deus Abest ex Machina

[W]ho is to settle what is bad? ... I recall in this connexion an argument I had with an acquaintance during the first war. He was for prohibiting bad books, and when I asked him which books he answered 'Conrad's novels.' He did not care for them. He was an able public-spirited fellow, and later became an M.P.<sup>73</sup>

'The Road from Colonus', which dates from 1903 was E.M. Forster's second short story, the first being 'The Story of a Panic', composed a year earlier. Both were published in 1904, in the *Independent Review*, 'The Road from Colonus' in June, 'The Story of a Panic' in November.<sup>74</sup> They appeared together in Forster's first collection of short stories, of 1911, *The Celestial Omnibus*. This collection brought to an end a period of prolific publication for Forster, that had begun with *Where Angel Fear to Tread* in 1906, soon followed by *The Longest Journey* in 1907, *A Room with a View* in 1908, and *Howard's End* in 1910. Despite completing *Maurice* in 1913 Forster did not publish a work of fiction again until 1924 when *A Passage to India* appeared, following *Alexandria: A History and Guide*, which had been published two years earlier.

If Forster's fiction does not seem to manifest the powerful suspicion of narrative, and fiction itself, that is evident in *Nostromo*, the near cessation of Forster's fictional writing, following the outbreak of war and his abandonment of long fiction publication after *A Passage to India* indicates a more personal crisis of faith in the power and ethics of narrative than even the most anguished of Conradian correspondence can display. Forster's abandonment of fictional composition is illuminated by an examination of the content of his other prose, after the First World War, represented in *Abinger Harvest* and *Two Cheers for Democracy*. The content of these essays evinces a need to speak out for art through a non-artistic medium. The threat of war and the pressures of its actualities demanded personal as well as social responses and Forster's emphasis on the value of personal response is reflected in the voice of the individual essayist or broadcaster speaking to an individual reader or

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<sup>73</sup> Forster, E.M. 'The Tercentenary of the 'Areopagatica', *Two Cheers for Democracy*, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1965. p.62.

<sup>74</sup> 'The Road from Colonus' was republished on 16<sup>th</sup> July 1904, in *Living Age*.

listener. '[L]ittle lights, reassuring one another, signaling: "Well, at all events, I'm still here. I don't like it very much, but how are you?"' (WB 82).

There are other hints, though, in Forster's creative work itself. If these on occasion seem bleaker than the reasoning of *Abinger Harvest* and *Two Cheers for Democracy* this is because there was space and time to be self-consciously bleak before the war. There is, indeed, an attendant whimsy to Forster's pre-war bleakness, which is absent from his later essays. Here there is still humour but of a necessary kind, the humour necessary in the face of unforeseen, unimaginable bleakness: 'It is a humiliating outlook - though the greater the darkness, the brighter shine the little lights ... "Come along - anyway, let's have a good time while we can." I think they signal that too' (WB 82). How Forster reaches this point is best illustrated by an examination of his early short fiction, such as 'The Road from Colonus', singularly and in conjunction with contemporary short stories by Conrad, these latter providing a foil to Forster's own.

In his introduction to the Penguin *Collected Short Stories* Forster describes the moment of inspiration for his first two stories, and his failed attempt to reiterate that moment a third time which lost him a sovereign into the bargain. The first two instances recall the conception of 'Kubla Khan' (although the third attempt failed without the excuse of a Porlockian interloper):

I travelled abroad for a year, and I think it was in the May of 1902 that I took a walk near Ravello. I sat down in a valley, a few miles above the town, and suddenly the first chapter of the story rushed into my mind as if it had waited for me there. I received it as an entity and wrote it out as soon as I returned to the hotel ... Of these two processes, the first - that of sitting down on the theme as if it were an anthill - has been rare. I did it again next year in Greece, where the whole of *The Road from Colonus* hung ready for me in a hollow tree not far from Olympia.<sup>75</sup>

Both stories relate incidents that mirror in some way the author's moment of conception: moments of transfiguration of person and place. Up above Ravello, out

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<sup>75</sup>Forster, E.M. 'Introduction', *Collected Short Stories*, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1965. p.5.

from Olympia, the landscape is filled with people worthy of having their story told by the writer blessed with their imaginary presence. One recalls the curate of 'The Curate's Friend', who himself is inspired to relate his experience, albeit grudgingly, in the form of a short story:

Therefore in the place of the lyrical and rhetorical treatment, so suitable to the subject, so congenial to my profession, I have been forced to use the unworthy medium of a narrative, and to delude you by declaring that this is a short story, suitable for reading in the train.<sup>76</sup>

It is no mere coincidence that the primary incident of 'The Road from Colonus' is described in terms similar to those Forster uses to describe the effect of a work of art as comparison between a passage from the story and one from his essay 'The Raison d'Être of Criticism in the Arts' makes clear:

So he lay motionless, conscious only of the stream below his feet, and that all things were a stream, in which he was moving.

He was aroused at last by a shock – the shock of an arrival perhaps, for when he opened his eyes, something unimagined, indefinable, had passed over all things, and made them intelligible and good. (RC 98)

We – we the beholders or listeners or whatever we are – undergo a change analogous to creation. We are rapt into a region near to that where the artist worked, and like him when we return to earth we feel surprised ... Something has passed. I have been transformed towards his condition, he has called me out of myself, he has thrown me into a subsidiary dream.... (RA 124)

Indeed in his very description, 'hung ready for me in a hollow tree', Forster deliberately sets himself up to mirror Mr Lucas who had hoped to hang a model of a whole man amongst the other model body parts. Mr Lucas failed to leave his own

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<sup>76</sup> Forster, E.M. 'The Curate's Friend', *Collected Short Stories*. p.94.

token and indeed his 'recovery' is temporary. Had it been complete, though, Forster may not have seen the absence of a whole man amongst the limbs in the hollow tree near Olympia, the gap - where a little body should have been but where a story was instead.

There are further connections between Forster's writing about art and the incidents related in this story. In his essay 'Art for Art's Sake' Forster asserts that in 'the entire universe there seem to be only two possibilities for [order]' (AA 99). The first of these is a 'divine order', which, 'though it cannot be tested, has never been disproved' (AA 99). The second is art. The work of art is 'unique ... because it is the only material object in the universe which may possess internal harmony. All the others have been pressed into shape from outside, and when their mould is removed they collapse' (AA 99). Forster does little to elaborate upon the first possibility of order but its pairing with art is in itself important. Forster did not view himself as a mystic and he did not view his moments of inspiration mystically, yet in his descriptions of artistic creativity he emphasizes the artist's lack of self-consciousness:

What about the creative state? In it a man is taken out of himself. He lets down as it were a bucket into his subconscious, and draws up something which is normally beyond his reach. He mixes this thing with his normal experiences, and out of the mixture he makes a work of art ... And when the process is over ... the artist looking, back on it, will wonder how on earth he did it. And indeed he did not do it on earth. (RA 121)

It is evident then that if Forster did not take divine and artistic order to be one and the same he at least used a language akin to mysticism's to describe the creative process:

I would not suggest that our comprehension of the fine arts is or should be of a nature of a mystic union. But, as in mysticism, we enter an unusual state, and we can only enter it through love. (RA 124)

That linguistic kinship is all the more apparent if we remember the mirroring of Forster with Mr Lucas. For Mr Lucas steps not into a mere tree but into a shrine, a shrine in which Christianity and more primitive religiosity converge. Furthermore Mr

Lucas does not simply *step* into the tree but, having

hesitated to violate the shrine ... he remembered with a smile his own thought – ‘the place shall be mine; I will enter it and possess it’ – and leapt almost aggressively on to a stone within. (RC 97)

Mr Lucas and Forster both appropriate religious spaces, physical and linguistic, for themselves. Their results are similar too. Forster describes ‘order’ as ‘something evolved from within, not something imposed from without; it is an internal stability, a vital harmony’ (AA 97). When Mr Lucas is jolted from his reverie,

[t]here was meaning in the stoop of the old woman over her work, and in the quick motions of the little pig, and in her diminishing globe of wool. A young man came singing over the stream on a mule, and there was beauty in his pose and sincerity in his greeting. The sun made no accidental patterns upon the spreading roots of the trees, and there was intention in the nodding clumps of asphodels, and in the music of the water. To Mr Lucas, who, in a brief space of time, had discovered not only Greece, but England and all the world and life, there seemed nothing ludicrous in the desire to hang within the tree another votive offering – a little model of an entire man. (RC 98-99)

Thus both men are forced to acknowledge, by the result of their appropriations, the power inherent in the original space.

But neither Forster nor Mr Lucas maintain this ‘unusual state’. Mr Lucas is interrupted in the following line: ‘Why, here’s papa, playing at being Merlin.’ The interruption sets the tone for the ensuing scene. Earlier in the story we are told that his companions have cast Mr Lucas as Oedipus, Ethel as Antigone. But, as Forster wryly points out, what Mr Lucas has in common with Oedipus is that he is growing old. Something, of course, we all have in common, even Methuselah grew old. In applying the role of a tragic hero to Mr Lucas on the basis that he is old and has a caring daughter his companions dilute Sophocles to the point of bathos. The Oedipus and Merlin tropes demean both Mr Lucas and mythology in that these mythologies are made ‘superficial, commonplace, and spasmodic’, (the criticism Mr Lucas makes of

his companion's enthusiasm for their surroundings), (RC 79). It is in fact they, not Mr Lucas, who are 'playing'. Mr Lucas is not a tragic hero despite his desire to die fighting, nor do the gods take him up in a bolt from out of the tree. His gift is restored sight but, as with all fabled gifts, at a cost. For his sight only makes more intolerable the 'playing' of his companions.

This ensuing scene, in which the companions discuss their surroundings, borrows much from *King Lear*, I.i. Whilst the companions go into ecstasies, Mr Lucas does justice to the place in muted terms. Mrs Forman upbraids him for his 'tepid praise' (RC 99). The place reminds her, she says 'of the Colonus of Sophocles' (RC 99). When they speak of staying Mr Lucas's suggestion of one night is trumped by Ethel's, '[y]ou mean a week, papa! It would be sacrilege to put in less' (RC 100). Note here Ethel's use of 'sacrilege': whereas Mr Lucas has experienced the power of 'sacrilege' when he 'hesitated to violate the shrine', Ethel's application, being 'superficial, commonplace' emasculates the word through a sacrilege of her own.

No longer Ethel but Mr Lucas now takes on the role of a long suffering daughter, in this case Cordelia. Mr Lucas, like Cordelia, refuses to buy into the 'superficial' enthusiasm of his companions and retreats into silence. The others do not perceive 'the coherent beauty that was flowering around them' (RC 99). He sees and feels with that love which Forster spoke of in 'The Raison d'Être of Criticism in the Arts' and which Cordelia embodies in *King Lear*. In that essay Forster tells us that whilst the critic can bring us close to the text, as Virgil with Dante, 'With the coming of love, we have to rely on Beatrice, whom we have loved all along, and if we have never loved Beatrice we are lost' (RA 124). We recall Cordelia whose 'love's more ponderous than my tongue' and who resolves to '[l]ove, and be silent.'<sup>77</sup> To speak of such a love is impossible since such speech requires a degree of self-consciousness, and with self-consciousness comes separation, we are no longer bound in 'coherent beauty'. As is to be expected this concept of debilitating self-consciousness has its correlative in Forster's ideas about artistic creation:

If we glance at one or two writers who are not first class this point will be illustrated. Charles Lamb and R. L. Stevenson will serve. Here are two gifted, sensitive, fanciful, tolerant, humorous fellows, but they



always write with their surface-personalities and never let down their buckets into their underworld ... He and Lamb append their names in full to every sentence they write. They pursue us page after page, always to the exclusion of higher joy.<sup>78</sup>

Like Stevenson, like Goneril and Reagan, Mr Lucas's companions cannot shed their self-consciousness, cannot 'let down their buckets into their underworld', their speech is always for effect. Mr Lucas, on the other hand, is almost stuck in that 'underworld', that 'lower personality' which Forster says, 'in many ways ... is a perfect fool' ('but without it', he continues, 'there is no literature').<sup>79</sup> To his companions, indeed, Mr Lucas appears a fool (a Lear, perhaps, who would dress himself 'fantastically ... with weeds'<sup>80</sup>): when Mr Lucas exclaims that it will be 'inconvenient, indeed, impossible,' to leave 'Mrs Forman and Mr Graham had to turn away to hide their smiles' (RC 101).

But Mr Lucas is aware of that communality 'with all other deeper personalities', which Forster asserts is present in the subconscious;<sup>81</sup> he rests

on the strength of his mighty unrevealed allies: silent men, murmuring water, and whispering trees. For the whole place called with one voice, articulate to him, and his garrulous opponents became every minute more meaningless and absurd. (RC 103)<sup>82</sup>

For Mr Lucas has attained to the state of tragic hero in his momentary isolation, which is also at a deeper level a connection: 'the issue assume[s] gigantic proportions', he believes 'a supreme event was awaiting him which would transfigure the face of the world', he desires 'destiny', and as if in confirmation of his inner vision 'the old woman ... stopped her almost completed spinning, and fixed him with mysterious appealing eyes.' His fate hangs, with her spinning, 'almost completed'

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<sup>77</sup> Shakespeare, William. *King Lear* I.i.77, 61. *Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. Peter Alexander, London and Glasgow: Collins 1965. p.1074.

<sup>78</sup> Forster, E.M. 'Anonymity: An Inquiry', *Two Cheers for Democracy*. p.92.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. p.91.

<sup>80</sup> Shakespeare, William. *King Lear*, IV.vi.80. *Complete Works*. p.1103.

<sup>81</sup> Forster, E.M. 'Anonymity: An Inquiry'. p.91.

<sup>82</sup> Note, here, the anthropomorphism – whilst men are 'silent' or 'meaningless', nature alone has the power of language.

(RC 103).

Mr Lucas's fate, however, is decided by a force less dramatic than the snip of scissors. The anti-Socratic Mr Graham ("I'm no good at arguing – but if I could help you in any other way –" and he looked down complacently at his well-made figure' (RC 103-104)) bears him off with brute force, back to a world of letters, opera, and engagements. Likewise this incident has its own reflection in Forster's other writings:

While we are trying to be sensitive and advanced and affectionate and tolerant, an unpleasant question pops up: does not all society rest upon force? ... all society rests upon force. But all the great creative actions, all the decent human relations, occur during the intervals when force has not managed to come to the front. These intervals are what matter ... Some people idealize force ... I think they make a mistake, and I think their opposites, the mystics, err even more when they declare that force does not exist. I believe that it exists, and that one of our jobs is to prevent it from getting out of its box. It gets out sooner or later, and then it destroys us and all the lovely things which we have made. But it is not out all the time, for the fortunate reason that the strong are so stupid. (WB 78)

To Mr Graham ('I only hope you didn't think me brutal' (RC 105)), and the world of force he represents, Mr Lucas has been rescued from 'brigands' who 'might knife' him, and to whom he only 'meant money' (RC 102, 103, 104). It is only to be expected that the forceful Mr Graham reads force into the actions of his adversaries. He assumes them governed by the force that governs him. Yet we must not allow this to blind us to the fact that Mr Lucas, too, may have read into the Greeks that benevolent force which he felt so strongly – his vision may have given him faith but faith, like love, can be blind. Since the Greeks are never permitted speech in the narrative (except for a faint indecipherable cry in the distance as they leave the valley for good) we do not know their true motives.

Mr Lucas must, perforce, return to his former habitat. He must give up his spiritual affinity with the tragic heroes, his new youth, and return to the mundane affinity of old age: 'You seemed so different, dear father, and you quite frightened me. Now I feel that you are your *old* self again', says Ethel, as they leave the valley

for good (RC 105 my italics). Mr Lucas has not been transformed for the better by his experience: He suffers in particular from the disturbing sound of running water. Force has, indeed, destroyed him and 'all the lovely things'. But neither can we deny that a transformation occurred, albeit temporarily, and that transformation, and its possibilities inherent in the story's appendix, have their own value. Forster acknowledges that life cannot be wholly spent in the creative moment, in the fusion of sub- and self-consciousness, what Pound refers to as 'the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, darts into a thing inward and subjective'.<sup>83</sup> But the intervals, which allow those moments, are important, 'I want them to be as frequent and as lengthy as possible, and I call them "civilisation"' (WB 78).

A much bleaker view of the possibilities for transformation is given in the short story, 'The Machine Stops'.<sup>84</sup> Forster's adoption of the science fiction genre ('The Machine Stops' is his only published use of it), indicates a move away from Edwardian social observation toward keener, allegorical critique. Yet even here Forster clings on to the possibility of transformation very much in spite of the mechanical, inhuman setting of his story. In order to make clear the extent of Forster's pre-war faith in the possibility of purposive narrative it is worth comparing 'The Machine Stops' with two Conrad short stories dating from a few years earlier that, even prior to *Nostromo*, evince a thorough suspicion of purposive narrative form.

'The End of the Tether', originally appeared in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* between July and December, 1902. Blackwood's then published it with 'Youth' and 'Heart of Darkness' in the volume *Youth: A Narrative; and Two Other Stories*, in the same year. The collection as a whole appears as a kind of answer to the riddle of the Sphinx with 'The End of the Tether' making up the last three-legged third, old age. 'To-morrow' appeared in *Pall Mall Magazine* in August 1902, before it was published with 'Typhoon', 'Amy Foster' and 'Falk - A Reminiscence' in *Typhoon and Other Stories* in 1903. The play, *One Day More*, adapted from the story was first completed in 1904. The play ran for 5 performances in 1905 and was described by Max Beerbohm as "terrible and haunting" and a "powerful tragedy",

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<sup>83</sup> Pound, Ezra. *Fortnightly Review*, September 1914. p.103. Qtd in *Imagist Poetry*. p.40.

<sup>84</sup> 'The Machine Stops' first appeared in *The Oxford and Cambridge Review* in 1909. It was then republished in Forster's second collection of short stories, *The Eternal Moment and Other Stories* in 1928. This collection was later merged with *The Celestial Omnibus* to make up *Collected Tales* in 1947.

although he confessed it had moved him less than the story.<sup>85</sup> Conrad did not consider it a success and although it has had international airings since it did make Conrad money.

Each of these stories addresses problems of faith: In this context faith may be defined as a kind of belief in the efficacy of something that does not rely on intellectual proof. This sufficiency of faith implies that it fulfils a slightly different function from belief. In the context of these three stories faith functions to make life bearable or possible. The objects of faith are transformed through faith into powerful agents, which in turn provide a framework through which the faithful structure the experiences of life and expect some kind of salvation.

The title of this chapter is literally, 'The God who is absent from the machinery' but in 'The Machine Stops' it is the Machine itself which is the God. Kuno falls short of the mark when he exclaims to his mother, '[y]ou talk as if a god had made the Machine ... Men made it, do not forget that. Great men, but men' (MS 110). Indeed the Machine, to which humanity learns to adapt itself ('the human tissues in that latter day had become so subservient that they readily adapted themselves to every caprice of the Machine' (MS 140)), in its power to create mechanically responsive people, more closely resembles the Judeo-Christian God who makes man in his own image than the gods to whom Forster refers at the end of the story, who are made by man in his image (MS 145).

One of the faiths examined in 'The Machine Stops' is thus faith in the Machine itself, even as a *deus ex machina*: 'If Eternity was stopping it would of course be set going shortly', so Vashti comforts herself as the Machine disintegrates (MS 143). The Machine inspires a reverence, religious in tone. Forster supplies this god with a sacred book: 'In it were instructions against every possible contingency ... The Central Committee published it. In accordance with a growing habit, it was richly bound' (MS 114). Furthermore, in reverencing the Machine, Vashti and others use ritual repetition: '[t]hrice she kissed [the book], thrice inclined her head, thrice she felt the delirium of acquiescence' (MS 114); 'How we have advanced, thanks to the Machine!' chimes the air stewardess, echoed by Vashti and then by another passenger (MS 121).

Rivalling this faith is Kuno's faith in the value of human interaction. He resents the impersonality to which humanity has been reduced by the Machine:

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<sup>85</sup> Qtd in Kirschner, P. 'Introduction', *Typhoon and Other Stories*, by Joseph Conrad, Harmondsworth:

"I see something like you in this plate, but I do not see you. I hear something like you through this telephone, but I do not hear you" ... she fancied that he looked sad. She could not be sure, for the Machine did not transmit *nuances* of expression. It only gave a general idea of people - an idea that was good enough for all practical purposes, Vashti thought. The imponderable bloom, declared by a discredited philosophy to be the actual essence of intercourse, was rightly ignored by the Machine ... Something 'good enough' had long since been accepted by our race. (MS 110-112)

Kuno has faith in man: 'Man is the measure. That was my first lesson' (MS 125). All the more so since he has experienced the selflessness of one who died in trying to save him.

In 'The End of the Tether' several faiths are examined. There is the faith of Mr Massy in his ability to find the 'logic lurking somewhere in the results of chance' (ET 236). He paws over lists of numbers, previous winning combinations, which he keeps under lock and key:

There was in them, as in the experience of life, the fascination of hope, the excitement of a half-penetrated mystery, the longing of a half-satiated desire. (ET 236)

Massy's life, which is otherwise made utterly miserable by his resentment of crew and boat alike, attains its thrill, is made worthwhile, by the expectation of that lurking logic. His faith attains to a kind of mysticism in the ecstasy of 'half-penetrated mystery, the longing of a half-satiated desire'.<sup>86</sup> Later he even has a vision, attained through sleep deprivation, 'a row of flaming and gigantic figures - three nought seven one two - making up a number such as you may see on a lottery ticket' (ET 277).

Whalley's faith is in God:

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Penguin 1992. p.269.

Surely God would not rob his child of his power to help, and cast him naked into a night without end. He had caught at every hope; and when the evidence of his misfortune was stronger than hope, he tried not to believe the manifest thing. (ET 286)

His faith in God is a belief that God will protect him from declining vigour. His faith is, in fact, in an edenic existence. Although we know that from childhood Whalley had prayed the Lord's Prayer it is significant that it is with his wife's prayer book that he buries her at sea and it is from her prayer book that he prays in this narrative. Indeed, when contemplating his own past he thinks in terms of luck not blessings (ET 159). His faith, it seems, is strengthened in correspondence to a waning of evidence for God's provision. Whalley also has if not faith then an unquestioning trust in the *Sofola* herself:

She could always be depended upon to make her courses. Her compasses were never out. She was no trouble at all to take about, as if her great age had given her knowledge, wisdom and steadiness. (ET 152)

Of course, this trust, too, is all the more necessary to Whalley when trust in his own steadiness is diminished.

Sterne's faith is in himself. His character is like Edmund's in *King Lear*. He is the bastard, always the mate and never the captain despite a firm belief in his own ability. Like Edmund he acts only in accordance with his own ambition whether or not it is of benefit to others:

It was his belief that no skipper in the world would keep his command for a day if only the owners could be 'made to know.' ... and his character was so instinctively disloyal that whenever he joined a ship the intention of ousting his commander out of the berth and taking his

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<sup>86</sup> Note the unfulfilled eroticism of these lines, which imply the sterility of Massy's passion, find their counterpart in Whalley's blindness: Blindness was used a symbol of impotence in the late nineteenth century and in this narrative it is through Whalley's waning vigour that suspicions are aroused.

place was always present at the back of his head, as a matter of course.  
(ET 213)

Thus Sterne also becomes a Lucifer figure - elsewhere he is described as appearing 'as though he had possessed the secret of some universal joke cheating all creation and impenetrable to other mortals' (ET 211).<sup>87</sup>

In 'To-morrow' Hagberd's faith is contrasted with Bessie's despair: 'His hopeful craze seemed to mock her own want of hope with so bitter an aptness that in her nervous irritation she could have screamed at him outright' (To 249-250). All of Hagberd's life is composed around a faith in an ever deferred 'tomorrow' which will bring an end to the temporary arrangements of 'the present': He wears his number one sailcloth suit, 'for the present' (To 242); despite his hordes of seeds he does not plant anything 'just at present' (To 244). Meanwhile Bessie is stuck between Hagberd's resemblance of 'a deposed sea-god who had exchanged the trident for the spade', and the image of 'an idol of some remarkably monstrous superstition' (that is to say her father), who thanks God 'in a fiendish tone as though he were cursing' (To 246, 247, 246). These two gods, one blinded by hope the other by misfortune, inspire despair rather than faith. Bessie's only glimmer of hope is in the real event of 'tomorrow'. But here, she, too, falls back on a deferred moment of resolution when she asks young Hagberd to wait a week for her to work on his father.

Young Hagberd threatens the stability of his father's faith by disrupting the structure that old Hagberd has formed through his faith. The presentness of the son is an anomaly that cannot be resolved into Hagberd's framework of deferral. In fact, young Hagberd resembles his father in his affinity with the *gambusinos*, their pleasure in the search rather than the find, the endless deferral of satisfaction (To 260). For young Hagberd, too, the realisation of the present, represented in the physical stasis required to remain in Colebrook, threatens the framework in which he conducts his life. For Bessie this realization of the present, which both Hagberds despair of, is her only hope of motion - for her it signals the end of stasis, caught as she is between two lifeless images of impotent gods.

If Hagberd's faith is self defeating the faith of the three sailors in 'the End of the Tether' is misplaced. Massy does not make his money from lottery tickets, he makes

it from wrecking the very boat that he had meant to symbolize what it is to be wealthy. Sterne, in his solipsism, fails to grasp events in time and he fails 'to get on' after the *Sofola*'s loss.

As for Whalley, Van Wyk considers that 'as if, being deceived in the trust of his faith, he were beyond all the good and evil that can be wrought by the hands of men' (ET 278). But he is not. Wyk, unlike Sterne, is not a shrewd judge of character.<sup>87</sup> Whalley is subject to the malice of Massy who loses Whalley his ship. When Whalley goes down with the *Sofola* he may well be taking the only option he feels is left open to him, he feels himself 'at the end of his tether', and in this sense one might say he is beyond good and evil. But he is wracked with human emotion: He goes down because of his sense of honour, and '[i]n that old heart, in that vigorous body, there was, that nothing should be wanting, a horror of death that apparently could not be overcome by the horror of blindness' (ET 293). He realizes, here, at the end of his tether, that 'God had not listened to his prayers' (ET 293). His cry that '[t]here's a justice...' tails off and in any case refers to the penal system ('you shall get fifteen years for this!') rather than any divine intervention (ET 292). Furthermore, whereas once '[t]he idea of suicide was revolting to the vigour of his manhood. He had prayed for death ...' at the end he is determined to die and weighs himself down so that he should not be 'beguiled by chance' (ET 286, 294). Whalley is not saved by his faith and he is not beyond humanity.

In 'The Machine Stops' Vashti's faith is obviously misplaced. It is so strong that she cannot even comprehend what her son means when he calls her to say ominously 'The Machine stops.' She is like Whalley, in this respect, who cannot believe that the *Sofola*'s compasses are out. When the Machine becomes dilapidated and malfunctions the response of Vashti, and others like her, is that someone is 'meddling': 'Someone is trying to make himself king, to reintroduce the personal element' (MS 141). They fail to recognize that in making these accusations it is exactly *their* personal element that they are asserting. When people accept light deprivation on the basis that to the Machine 'the darkness and the light are one' they are mistaken in their animation of the Machine (MS 142). Light and darkness are not one to the Machine they are nothing to the Machine in that being a machine light and

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<sup>87</sup> In fact, both Whalley and Massy also recall the form of Lucifer. Cf. ET 239-240 and 239 respectively.

<sup>88</sup> Van Wyk's misjudgement is evident in the drippy wife he imagines for Whalley, cf. p.254.



darkness have no effect upon it. However light and darkness *are* functions of the Machine and the Machine is evidently malfunctioning in its failure to provide distinctive light and darkness.

'The Machine Stops' is easily read as an allegory that satirizes any number of social groups. Obviously it satirizes the Church by its ritual trinities, its sacred book and the Machine's associations with divinity. We have noted before the way in which the Machine moulds humanity to respond mechanically, that is to say in its own image, as does the God of Genesis.

It also satirizes a society so clammed up that one is expected to leave someone to fall over rather than steady them and thereby come into contact with them; where no one will stop to help someone pick something up, as when a man drops his book and dares not pick it up. Not only will no one help, Vashti treads on it as she boards the ship (MS 118). The Book is only sacred in relationship to its owner. This self-reflexiveness finds a brief echo in an incident in *The Root and the Flower* where Prince Daniyal, figurehead of a self-reflexive philosophy and aesthetic, crushes a cat's head.

'The Machine Stops' satirizes a society that rejects statements or questions that do not fit into its frame of reference. When Vashti, lodging a complaint about the quality of the music, asks '[h]ave others complained?' she is refused an answer on the basis that the question is 'unmechanical' (MS 140). Here, of course, we find a parallel to the nightmarish bureaucracy of Kafka.

Yet Forster does offer us some kind of escape in the person of Kuno and his belief in man as the measure. Kuno refuses to be bound in the framework of faith in the Machine. If he is to visit the earth's surface he will find a way of his own rather than rely upon the Machine. If he is to speak to his mother he will do it face to face rather than rely upon the Machine.

Kuno affects a reunification of spirit and body by making man the measure (remember the alternative gods are made in the image of man). Furthermore, in doing so, he rehabilitates an awareness of space, of near and far, that had been lost in the sense of immediacy which the Machine had affected. Finally Kuno validates the importance of human interaction in all its nuances, physical and spiritual. Kuno and Vashti weep for the death of 'beautiful naked man ... strangled in the garments that he had woven' (MS 145). But at the last gasp Kuno assures his mother that there are others outside the grasp of the Machine who will survive:

We have come back to our own. We die, but we have recaptured life, as it was in Wessex ... We know what they know outside ... I have seen them, spoken to them, loved them ... Humanity has learnt its lesson. (MS 146)

This validation finds its spiritual counterpart in Buber's *I and Thou*:

the state is no longer led; the stokers still pile in the coal, but the leaders have now only the semblance of control over the madly racing machines ... the masters smile at you with superior assurance, but death is in their hearts. They tell you they suited the apparatus to the circumstances, but you notice that from now on they can only suit themselves to the apparatus - so long, that is to say, as it permits them. Their speakers teach you that economics is entering on the State's inheritance but you know that there is nothing to inherit except the tyranny of the exuberantly growing *It*, under which the *I*, less and less able to master, dreams on that it is the ruler....<sup>89</sup>

Only the man who makes freedom real to himself meets destiny ... He who forgets all that is caused and makes his decision out of the depths, who rids himself of property and raiment and naked approaches the Face, is a free man, and destiny confronts him as the counterpart of his freedom. It is not his boundary, but his fulfilment.<sup>90</sup>

Buber's theology, as expressed in *I and Thou*, in 1923, claims for humanity the divinity of interaction. His work builds on Bergson's *Time and Free Will*. Bergson had distinguished between thoughts which, once conscious and reflected upon, become individualised objects, and thoughts which remain unconscious and as such are inseparable, flowing into each other, colouring and modifying each other. Bergson uses this distinction in his argument for free will. Were we causally predestined to act in a particular way, Bergson argues, we would have no call for deliberation. However

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<sup>89</sup> Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*, trans. R.G. Smith, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark 1958. p.48.

we do deliberate and this deliberation is the ebb and flow of considerations commingling with each other until a point of decision is reached. Not that a 'point' of decision is ever reached, in fact, for the ebb and flow is unceasing. However, when we look back, we divide up into recognizable portions the conditions of our deliberation and distinguish a 'point' of decision. This is a kind of 'yoke-strap of necessity' argument - looking back we create a determinism: "In that situation I was bound to do that", but that determinism can only be retrospective. In the duration of deliberation there is only free will moving toward destiny.

Buber translates this into the sphere of relationships. Relationships which are self-conscious and objectify the 'other' of interaction, are relationships with an *It*, those which we enter into unthinkingly are with *Thou*. The former relationship relies on distinction and appropriates the 'other' to the *I*. The latter relies upon 'solidarity', the *I-Thou* relationship has relationship as its end. Buber locates divinity in the *I-Thou* relationship.

In his 1959 presidential address to the Cambridge Humanists, 'How I Lost My Faith', Forster recalls that:

I used to be very keen on [salvation] and it figures in most of my early short stories, and a little in my novels up to *A Passage to India*, from which it has almost disappeared. It has now disappeared from my thoughts, like other absolutes. I no longer wish to save or be saved, and here is another barrier that has interposed between myself and revealed religion whether Christian or Pagan.<sup>91</sup>

This is certainly true of 'The Machine Stops' and it casts an interesting light on that argument with his acquaintance, recorded in 'The Tercentenary of the 'Areopagatica', when considered along side Forster's own criticism of Conrad, 'Joseph Conrad: A Note', of 1920. In that essay Forster greets Conrad's *A Note on Life and Letters* with certain misgivings, which he carries over from his readings of Conrad's fiction:

Behind the smoke screen of his reticence there may be another obscurity, connected with the foreground by wisps of vapour, yet

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid. p.53.

proceeding from another source, from the central chasm of his tremendous genius ... What is so elusive about him is that he is always promising to make some general philosophic statement about the universe, and then refraining with a gruff disclaimer ... These essays do suggest that he is misty in the middle as well as at the edges, that the secret casket of his genius contains a vapour rather than a jewel; and that we need not try to write him down philosophically, because there is, in this particular direction, nothing to write. No creed, in fact. Only opinions, and the right to throw them overboard when facts make them look absurd.<sup>92</sup>

Forster at this time was still 'keen' on salvation. And so he looks to Conrad, who writes with such accomplishment about the human condition, for signposts out of the mists. He is right, Conrad offers no creed, and were we to read Conrad as Forster did in 1920, 'keen' on salvation, we, too, might well feel cheated by this allusive genius. Conrad does not get us out of the hole of the human condition, rather he explores it. Faith, Conrad suggests again in these two short stories, damages both oneself and others. Furthermore, lack of it is no guarantee of happiness, as Bessie's life all too clearly indicates. Conrad points up man's contradictions, explores them without indicting.

Emig's paradigm of the 'trickster' and 'magician' is useful for getting at the crux of the matter, here. We remember that the magician's response to the severance of word from object attempts reconciliation between the word and the object, whilst the trickster's response exploits the possibilities that arise from the severance.<sup>93</sup> In 'The End of the Tether' Whalley is overcome, at the end, by the failure of language:

He had prayed for death till the prayers had stuck in his throat. All the days of his life he had prayed for daily bread, and not to be led into temptation, in a child like humility of spirit. Did words mean anything? Whence did the gift of speech come? (ET 286)

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<sup>91</sup> Forster, E.M. 'How I Lost My Faith'. p.318.

<sup>92</sup> Forster, E.M. 'Joseph Conrad: A Note', *Abinger Harvest*, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1967. pp.151-153.

I noted earlier that Whalley desired a kind of edenic existence in eternal vigour. His 'child like humility' brings us back to the innocence of Eden again. And in Eden, of course, Adam is given the gift of the power of language. Edenic language has the power to reach the object of its meaning, untrammelled. God creates through the power of language, he speaks and it is, but Adam, in the act of naming, creates meaning: he imbues the object with the power of the word and he imbues the word with the power of the object. At the end of his tether Whalley recognizes the powerlessness of his own language. He prayed not to be led into temptation but he has walked in of his own accord by deceiving the crew of the *Sofola*. Unable to bring himself to commit suicide he attempts suicide through the edenic power of language, in prayer. He forgets that only God's language is creative of event and furthermore that language fell with Adam and Eve only to be desecrated further at Babel. Whalley is 'seized with a sudden vertigo and an overwhelming terror' in the face of the chasm between word and its object (ET 286). Whalley's attempt to bridge the chasm, the magician's response, has failed him, and his faith has blinded him to the possibility of the trickster's response. Unable either to bridge or accommodate the abyss he must be subsumed by it.

Emig's paradigm need not apply solely to language. If faith provides a framework for making sense of life, this framework is a kind of narrative, organizing life into a comprehensible story, that is to say a purposive narrative. Even if the narrative is not immediately evident to the faithful, certainly it must be to the object of faith from which it emanates. This is part of the object's efficacy, that it imbues the narrative with purpose. Thus when the purposive narrative is unable to accommodate aspects of our experience there is a severance between the meaning supplied by the narrative and the thing it attempts to purposefully frame. If we apply the trickster-magician paradigm to this narrative severance we find that Forster's fiction corresponds to the magician's response. He tells us as much in the passage quoted previously concerning his keenness on salvation. Earlier in that essay he describes how he lost faith in the purposive narrative of Christianity:

I thought first about the Trinity and found it very odd. I tried to defend it in accordance with my inherited tenets, but it kept falling apart like

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<sup>93</sup>Emig, p.88.

an unmanageable toy, and I decided to scrap it, and to retain the main edifice. I did not realize that it was a question of all or none, and that the removal of the Trinity had jeopardized the stability of the Incarnation. I began to think about that. The idea of a god becoming a man to help men is overwhelming to anyone possessed of a heart ... I was aware that this world needs help. But I never had much sense of sin and when I realized that the main aim of the Incarnation was not to stop war or pain or poverty, but to free us from sin I became less interested and ended by scrapping it too.<sup>94</sup>

Forster here describes his youthful experiences at Cambridge however, the failure of the Christian narrative-framework did not, at that time, lead him to abandon his interest in salvation. In stories like 'The Machine Stops' Forster tries to point out the failings of faith when it builds its purposive narrative upon an inappropriate object of faith. But he also posits an alternative.

Conrad, on the other hand, takes the role of the trickster. He explores and plays in and upon the failings of the purposive narrative construed from the Author. Earlier we saw how Conrad refused Whalley any remittance: his prayers go unheard, if God is there he is not the God Whalley had assumed him to be. In 'To-morrow', Hagberd's faith becomes so tied up with the language of his faith that he is stuck in an eternal present that has no room for the fulfilment of 'tomorrow'. Bessie fares no better through being alive to the moment.

In 'The End of the Tether' Conrad goes further, though, and plays upon the reader's faith. When we are told that Captain Whalley 'could not hope to see anything new upon this lane of the sea' (the opening line of the story's third paragraph) we presume that the juxtaposition of the next sentence, '[h]e had been on these coasts for the last three years', indicates a dropped causal conjunction 'because' (ET 151). When we reach the end of the book we realize otherwise. When we are told that Whalley 'had never lost a ship or consented to a shady transaction' we do not doubt Whalley, nor do we see the dropped causal conjunction here, which we had misplaced in the first sentence (ET 154). Conrad inflicts blindness on us when we assume Whalley is sighted. We are only granted the vision that is denied Whalley when we

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<sup>94</sup> Forster, E.M. 'How I Lost My Faith'. p.313.

realize his blindness. Conrad creates a narrative at odds with its subject. He misleads us that we might call into question the faith we put in the Author through the narrative he gives us. He absents his role as *deus ex machina*.<sup>95</sup>

Forster's criticism of Conrad for not offering a 'creed' is not reconsidered in his later writings but in his W.P. Ker Lecture, 'English Prose between 1918 and 1939', delivered to the University of Glasgow in 1944, he does comment that

There has been a psychological movement, about which I am ... enthusiastic. Man is beginning to understand himself better and to explore his own contradictions ... It has brought a great enrichment to the art of fiction. It has given subtleties and depths to the portrayal of human nature. The presence in all of us of a subconscious, the occasional existence of the split personality, the persistence of the irrational especially in people who pride themselves on their reasonableness ... here are some of the points which novelists have seized on ....<sup>96</sup>

Conrad certainly fits here. However, whilst the Forster of 1944 might more readily accept ambivalent fictions that do not offer a 'creed', it unclear whether his attitude to art, even then, could accommodate the fragility and ambiguity of Conrad's narrative form itself.

We recall that in 'Art for Art's Sake' Forster defended the work of art as one of only two possibilities for order, the other being divine order: 'The work of art stands up by itself, as nothing else does. It achieves something which has often been promised by society, but always delusively' (AA 99). This essay appeared in 1949. He did not give his humanist address until some fourteen years later but the implication of that address is that he had no great shift of opinion in the intervening years. That is to say his rejection of 'absolutes' does not affect his belief in the internal order possible in the work of art. Forster values the order of the work of art and he values form as 'the surface crust of the internal harmony, it is the outward evidence of order' (AA 102).

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<sup>95</sup> Conrad despaired over a reading public 'which, as a body, has never laid upon a story-teller the command to be an artist, should demand from him this sham of Divine Omnipotence'. Conrad, Joseph. 'Henry James: An Appreciation', *Notes on Life and Letters*, London: J.M. Dent & Sons. 1921. p.23.

In another essay, Forster says of literature that it desires 'not to be signed' that it asserts its existence and denies the existence of its author.<sup>97</sup> This is how the work of art appears internally ordered - once created the creator is abandoned. But this cannot apply to the work of art whose form is unstable. The creation speaks of its absent author, the *deus abest ex machina*. Furthermore, the Author being absent, we are left on our own to make sense of this fragile work of art. We involve ourselves in it and in doing so realize ourselves in it. We realize our 'precarious hold on life'.<sup>98</sup> This is why Forster's friend might wish Conrad's novels destroyed because not only their content but also their form itself offers no salvific signpost. They do not attempt to bridge the gap between meaning and the narrative-frameworks of faith on the one hand and the thing itself, the reality, on the other. They explore that gap, explode the bridges that might be laid across it.

It may be suspected that it is exactly this indeterminacy that worried Forster about his own work. Despite his critical faith in the work of art as a self-sufficient whole, Conrad and others worked to demonstrate the arbitrary, unfinished nature of fiction that required a hermeneutic response even if any such hermeneutic remained inadequate. Like the faith of the characters in these stories Forster's faith in the sufficiency of the work of art masks a fear of its inadequacy, indeed of its immorality. Precisely because fiction denies its author it may be embraced by its reader in whatever way he may chose and Forster cannot trust the reader as his critical writing makes clear.

*A Passage to India* had moved away from the playful pre-war examinations of absence into a more serious analysis of its consequences, the fictions that emerge from the Marabar Caves and the echoing sounds of Mrs Moore's name in the courtroom. However, Forster's very subject in *A Passage to India* inescapably undermines the novel as fiction itself. Whilst Conrad struggled to counter this deconstructive element in his fiction Forster retreated from the fray. His motivation was undoubtedly related to his sexuality in part. If, in fact, fiction requires an interpretative reader that reader is free to read and censor the book in the light of its

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<sup>96</sup> Forster, E.M. 'English Prose Between 1918 and 1939', *Two Cheers for Democracy*. p.279.

<sup>97</sup> Forster, E.M. 'Anonymity: An Inquiry'. p.90.

<sup>98</sup> Conrad, Joseph. 'Books', *Notes on Life and Letters*. p.5.



author's sexuality. A desire to avoid such interpretation no doubt motivated the suppression of *Maurice*.<sup>99</sup>

Forster's essays in *Two Cheers for Democracy* tend to focus on the threat of physical violence and state force to those civilized 'intervals' and this is to be expected since they were all composed between 1936 and 1951. War and totalitarianism threatened Britain in a way that they have never done since. In an earlier sketch, 'Mrs Grundy at the Parkers', in *Abinger Harvest*, Forster locates the threat to the individual spark in another context, that of the 'Nosey Parkers'. In years gone by Mrs Grundy had been a 'pioneer', 'suppress[ing] people's pleasures' (one recalls Mrs Forman's crushing retort to Mr Lucas's determination 'Ah! if we could only do what we wished!' (RC 101)). Now it is Mrs Parker who leads the way with a more subtle approach:

I try to spoil their pleasure. It's much more effective. I don't say, "you shan't bathe." I say, "You shall bathe in an atmosphere of self-consciousness and fear," and I think I am succeeding. I certainly have at Worthing.<sup>100</sup>

Towards the end of this sketch Mr and Mrs Parker are troubled by news from the continent: 'The idea is that we, who have helped others, ought now to be helped, and it is proposed to help us by pulling us to pieces.... They desire to examine your intimate fabric, Mrs Grundy: they suspect it of being diseased. My wife's and my own they assert to be even fouler than yours.'<sup>101</sup> Mr Parker's plan of counter action is to infiltrate the committees necessary to any effective attack by the psychologists for '[e]ach member of any committee has, of course, broken the law at some time or other, and desires to prove to his colleagues that he hasn't ... all [are] afraid of being found out'.<sup>102</sup>

Forster felt that he had his own homosexuality to hide and he did not consider 'pulling us to pieces' as helpful. Nor could he approve of the deadening 'atmosphere of self-consciousness and fear'. The individual had a right to be private and a right,

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<sup>99</sup> Although *Maurice* could well have been published in Forster's later life without censor, it only appeared posthumously indicating that privacy was as much a motivation for its suppression as fear of the censor.

<sup>100</sup> Forster, E.M. 'Mrs Grundy at the Parkers', *Abinger Harvest*. p.27.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. p.30.

like Mr Lucas, to be whole (a wholeness precipitated from within rather than without). Force and interference threaten those rights even when the threat is made in ignorance: Forster comments, in 'Art for Art's Sake', that politicians and statesmen tend 'to confuse order with orders, just as they confuse creation with regulations' (AA 97).<sup>103</sup> Coupled with his desire for privacy Forster's desire to emancipate fiction, to allow it self-sufficiency, led to his abandonment of fictional narrative altogether.

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid. p.30

<sup>103</sup> We recall Mr Graham who read the world's motives in accordance with his own.

## ‘Heart of Darkness’ and the Modernist Quest

If the volume that contains ‘The End of the Tether’ is meant to represent the three ages of man it does so not only through the literal ages of its chief protagonists but also through the progressive deterioration of faith that each protagonist embodies. We have seen how the scales fall from Whalley’s eyes and he loses his blind faith in response to his physical blindness. The first story in the volume, ‘Youth’, whilst not wholly unambiguous celebrates the piquant pleasures of youthful anticipation. It is the autobiographical reminiscence of Marlow, a now middle aged man, over the table amongst friends.<sup>104</sup> Marlow’s enjoyment of recalling his youthful experience aboard the *Judea* is almost Trahernian: the joy of innocence is felt all the more in recollection than in the original moment because in recollection that joy is felt through comparison with the sadness of experience. Purdy reads ‘Youth’ as a ‘parody, its *Judea* and *Celestial* grotesque symbols of the Old Testament and the New.’<sup>105</sup> However, whether or not Marlow undercuts the objects of his youthful faith, as indeed he does, his feeling of nostalgia for that age in which such faith was possible is nonetheless heartfelt: ‘Ah! The good old time – the good old time. Youth and the sea’ (Y 43).

‘Youth’ presents an age in which faith is lost but can still be remembered, ‘The End of the Tether’ presents an age in which faith is lost because it is shown to be meaningless. In the latter there is no room, not even any motive, for nostalgia. Bridging these two positions is ‘Heart of Darkness’. In this story Marlow again narrates previous experiences but with an ambivalence and agnosticism that is lacking in both the other two. This is a story of a desire for faith that is not clearly fulfilled. As his own protagonist Marlow has neither the juvenile faith of his earlier self in ‘Youth’ nor the blind faith of Whalley but is already uneasy and suffering from ennui when the main action begins. His quest for knowledge has none of the inevitability about it of the coming-of-age, baptism of fire and water we find in ‘Youth’. Nor does he merely stumble over knowledge as Whalley literally does. Marlow’s quest is undertaken in existential angst and he is forever torn by the knowledge that he needs

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<sup>104</sup> In terms of composition and serial history this is Marlow’s first appearance (*Blackwood’s Magazine*, September 1898). However, *Lord Jim* (*Blackwood’s Magazine* from October 1899, Blackwood: October 1900), was published before the *Youth* volume (Blackwood: November 1902) so that for some at least their introduction to Marlow was as a far more sophisticated raconteur than he appears in ‘Youth’ and even ‘Heart of Darkness’ (*Blackwood’s Magazine* from February 1899).

<sup>105</sup> Purdy. p.48.

to give his activities a meaning but that whatever it is, that meaning is at best arbitrary and at worst immoral.

In all this Marlow the narrator is far closer to himself as protagonist than he is in 'Youth' or than the anonymous narrator is to Whalley. This closeness between narrator and protagonist is emphasized through the contrasting distance between Marlow and the frame narrator: Marlow's opinionated and urgent narrative voice is quite separate from the passivity of the nameless frame narrator.<sup>106</sup> Conrad utilises the possibilities of mediated narrative to nuance its implications. We can see in Conrad's handling of narrative form in 'Heart of Darkness' a refining of the frame narrator introduced in 'Youth', combined with the ambiguities of first person narrative that *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* exercised.

This places it at some distance from his earlier Malay fiction despite apparent similarities of topic: how westerners fare in cultures other than their own, more specifically how westerners cannot cope in cultures other than their own. These earlier novels had followed their protagonists about the Far East with an air of knowing scepticism that was light enough that the reader still involved himself in the protagonists' fate but clear enough for the reader to exonerate himself from the protagonists' shortcomings. In 'Heart of Darkness' the initial sympathy of the frame narrator, and the earnestness of Marlow, encourage an unironic reading of Marlow's experiences. Marlow the protagonist seems singularly brighter than an Almayer or a Willems and this is corroborated by the apparent intelligence of his narration. The importance of Marlow as his own narrator is apparent if we imagine his story told by the narrator of 'An Outpost of Progress' instead. 'An Outpost of Progress' deals with much the same material as Conrad himself indicates in his 1917 'Author's Note' to the *Youth* volume (Y/HD/ET 4). However, his theme is elsewhere. 'An Outpost of Progress' belongs to the early long Malay fiction in terms of its topic and to the political novels in terms of its tone. 'Heart of Darkness' is closer to 'Karain', of the Malay fiction, in its subtlety and subject. Both stories create a matrix of imperial references that show more about the individuals who construct them than about the historical-political facts of imperialism itself.<sup>107</sup> But more importantly, and this is

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<sup>106</sup> The development in sophistication and participation of the frame narrator corresponds to the sophisticated framed narrative of Marlow, through 'Youth', 'Heart of Darkness' and *Lord Jim*. *Chance* is a somewhat different matter.

<sup>107</sup> Although The Congo of 'Heart of Darkness' was in fact the private property of King Leopold II of Belgium, and therefore neither a colony nor comparable with any other imperial territories belonging to

where 'Karain' and 'Heart of Darkness' differ significantly from the early long Malay fiction, inherent in their matrices is an interest in narration itself and its relationship to imperialism. For this reason the practical politicking of the indigenous inhabitants that we find in *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands*, and indeed of 'Karain' to a certain extent, is airbrushed so that the focus is kept on the intellectual and more abstract elements of imperialism.

Conrad himself thought of 'Heart of Darkness' in terms of its similarities with and differences from his other fiction. In a letter offering it to William Blackwood for the thousandth number of *Maga* Conrad compares and contrasts it firstly with 'Youth', 'It is a narrative after the manner of *youth* told by the same man dealing with his experiences on a river in Central Africa. The *idea* in it is not as obvious as in *youth* – or at least not so obviously presented' and then with 'An Outpost of Progress', 'It is a story much as my *Outpost of Progress* was but, so to speak 'takes in' more – is a little wider – is less concentrated upon individuals.'<sup>108</sup> These references come before and after the following outline of his subject:

The title I am thinking of is "*The Heart of Darkness*" but the narrative is not gloomy The criminality of inefficiency and pure selfishness when tackling the civilizing work in Africa is a justifiable idea. The subject is of our time distinc[t]ly – though not topically treated.<sup>109</sup>

Taken together these comments build up a picture of Conrad developing and refining his method and subject matter: he broadens the scope of a topical subject, previously treated in a narrow vein ('An Outpost of Progress') by using a tried and tested narrative voice that had already proved its capacity for addressing abstract notions, in 'Youth'.

Some years later in another letter to Blackwood he explains his writing method with comparisons of technique:

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Europe, Marlow's charge against empire is levelled at 'all Europe' (HD 109). Historically, this is because the Congo became Leopold's private property through a conference in Berlin, in 1885, when European powers granted Leopold's rights in return for free trade, neutrality and a guarantee against slavery. The ethical implication of Marlow's charge is that Leopold's Congo is only one example of equally damnable practises throughout the European empires.

<sup>108</sup> Joseph Conrad to William Blackwood, 31 December 1898. *LJC*:2 139, 140.

<sup>109</sup> Joseph Conrad to William Blackwood, 31 December 1898. *LJC*:2 139, 140.

In the light of the final incident, the whole story in all its descriptive detail shall fall into its place. – acquire its value and its significance. This is my method based on deliberate conviction. I've never departed from it. I call your own kind self to witness and I beg to instance Karain – Lord Jim (where the method is fully developed) – the last pages of *Heart of Darkness* where the interview of the man and the girl locks in – as it were – the whole 30000 words of narrative description into one suggestive view of a whole phase of life and makes of that story something quite on another plane than an anecdote of a man who went mad in the Centre of Africa. And *Youth* itself ... exists only in virtue of my fidelity to the idea and the method.<sup>110</sup>

This once again supports the view of Conrad developing his technique through tried and tested methods. What is also of interest here is his extended description of 'Heart of Darkness.' As with much of what Conrad considered his best work, which was frequently his most easily written work (cf. 'The Secret Sharer'), he did not write a lot about the text, its composition, and meaning in his letters. This little description for Blackwood is particularly useful then: It indicates the unity of vision he aspired to so that the catalogue of events would become readable as a whole. Conrad's desire for the narrative to rise above 'anecdote' returns us to our previous consideration of narrative in the novella and brings us back to the aforementioned desire to move beyond incident to the intellectual and abstract aspects of imperialism. One way in which the narrative is able to unify itself, by the end, is through the use of Marlow as narrator: the sympathy between Marlow as protagonist, Marlow as narrator, and the frame narrator, noted earlier, allows for a certain convergence. The shared knowledge of the three additionally allows Marlow to concentrate on the more elusive aspects of the incident because he doesn't need to explain too much, and where he does need to explain he has an apparently sympathetic audience, in the frame narrator at least.<sup>111</sup>

There is for Marlow, as for Lucas and Kuno in the Forster short stories, a fascination with what is beyond the limits of knowledge. What is known offers grounds for belief but they want to know what is beyond the bounds of knowledge. Of

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<sup>110</sup> Joseph Conrad to William Blackwood, 31 May 1902. *LJC*:2 417.

<sup>111</sup> The occasional growls and sighs from the rest of his audience make clear that Marlow is not wholly indulged (*MD* 89,107).

course to know the unknowable is to reduce the object of faith to an object of belief and in doing so undermines its symbolic value. In this sense it is a fault of Forster's that he cannot allow 'The Machine Stops' a negative ending but requires that there be some affirmative way out of, or alternative to, the Machine. Lucas's return to London is much closer to Marlow's in that the revelations Lucas and Marlow are given remain inapplicable, incongruous, even fatal, in the realm of social reality. But whereas Lucas's revelation is to a certain extent unlooked for, everything that precedes Marlow's revelation has been a part of his active desire for that revelation: if Lucas's revelation belongs to a kind of pastoral, Marlow's belongs to a kind of quest narrative.

The quest elements in 'Heart of Darkness' become obvious if we compare it with a text such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Like Gawain, Marlow is drawn into his adventure by something enigmatic: Gawain accepts the challenge of a round of mutual decapitation from a monstrous green giant (Gawain succeeds in beheading his opponent only to see him blithely retrieve the same head which proceeds to remind Gawain to return the favour the following year); Marlow is originally drawn by the white space on a political map which since his childhood has become 'a place of darkness' (HD 53). Slithering through this once blank space is the tempting snake of the Congo (HD 53-54). Both men are drawn away from home by a sense of chivalrous adventure and a fascination with something whose presentation is notably ominous and not a little suspect. The journey both must take is physically and mentally arduous. Those people they do meet, in the otherwise inhospitable and uninhabited regions that they traverse, present further tests to their integrity and understanding. Furthermore it becomes apparent only later that these people have not been all that they seemed. Both men expect to gain some kind of understanding in the encounter with the mysterious man for whom they quest (Marlow's quest quickly transforms itself from a quest to know a geography into a quest to know a similarly enigmatic man). Both gain understanding but not that which they had imagined. This encounter with the mysterious and horrifying other man marks the questers. On their return it is not clear that their story is understood. The bands that Gawain wears as a reminder of his cowardice are taken up by Arthur's court to signify joy at having survived such an encounter. Likewise the darkness that subsumes Marlow at the end of his tale is far more than the coincidence of meteorology and time, although it may not be recognized as such by any but the frame narrator and Marlow.

J. Hillis Miller describes the structure of 'Heart of Darkness' as,

a passing of portals, a traveling through states which leads the reader ever deeper into the darkness. The method of presentation is to put into question whatever Marlow reaches, to show it as a misleading illusion, something which must be rejected for the sake of the truth behind it.<sup>112</sup>

This is to lend to the quest motif an element of negative theology: Marlow searches deeper into the Congo only to find what is not the truth and in doing so hopes to come closer to the truth that eludes him. The negation Miller refers to is not brought about through evidential proof, for the truth Marlow seeks is not something that can be proved with factual evidence. Or at least any evidential proof would have to be absurd, as if Marlow could travel down the Congo and find that there was nothing there but blank white space as there was on the map of his childhood (HD 53). Rather the negation is presented through relativity. The matrix of imperial references, mentioned earlier, is constructed in such a way that ideas cancel each other out leaving Marlow and his audience all at sea, so to speak.

There are four major, and related, areas in which this relativity comes in to play: History, Geography, Race and Sanity. The first example we come across involves all four. Marlow's opening gambit, 'And this also ... has been one of the dark places of the earth' is followed by a surmised story concerning a young Roman stationed in colonized Britain (HD 49ff.). Although Marlow has not yet mentioned his experiences in Africa the frame narrator has already introduced the theme of imperialism with his recollection of those who had set out down the Thames as 'messengers of the might within the land' (HD 49). Marlow has obviously been thinking along similar lines, not only in that his Roman story is a precursor to his story of more recent European imperialism, but also that it continues the reversed historical trajectory of the frame narrator's musings, moving from Renaissance and medieval to ancient history. Incidentally, this indicates immediately the sympathy of thought between Marlow and the frame narrator and so softens the frame narrator's mild criticism of Marlow and his stories (HD 50).

Marlow's Roman story and his brief commentary on it acts like an overture, highlighting all the themes to come up in the main story, just as the story of the

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<sup>112</sup> Miller, J Hillis. *Poets of Reality*. p.23.



gringos that haunt the Azuera does in *Nostromo*.<sup>113</sup> We may not see that this is its purpose at the time but it already challenges assumptions by positing the location of Marlow's (and Conrad's initial) audience as one in need of 'civilizing'. Furthermore in his comments he strikes an ambiguous note between praise and criticism for Roman 'conquerors' and British 'colonialists'. The 'brute force' of the Romans implies both the noble savage and the ignorant beast; the idealism of the British implies both enlightenment and idolatry. The balance Conrad maintains here was not his original intention and the omission of more frankly pro-Roman statements indicates the indeterminacy he was working to achieve.<sup>114</sup>

It is up to Marlow's audience to work out his scepticism about idealism as his narrative continues and we retrace the echoes to illuminate the original. When Marlow describes the 'ideal' as 'something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to' we no doubt sense a certain criticism and yet the frame narrator has already likened Marlow to an idol and a Buddha (HD 52, 48, 51). John Lester points out that,

it is clearly appropriate for [the frame narrator's] casual likening of Marlow to a Buddha to be thrown back at him in this way, illustrating that idols, which have negative theistic connotations in the west, are usually regarded as the deities of others.<sup>115</sup>

This is true but Lester's term 'unease' is appropriate here: Marlow's audience feels unease at the definition of 'ideal' yet its full force only becomes evident in retrospect. What lends Marlow's definition strength is his previous comment that the 'conquest of the earth ... mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves' (HD 52).<sup>116</sup> Marlow turns on the

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<sup>113</sup> E.C. Bufkin suggests such a reading of *Nostromo* in 'Conrad, Grand Opera, and *Nostromo*', *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 30 1975-76. p.210.

<sup>114</sup> Jeremy Hawthorn notes a passage from the holograph of 'Heart of Darkness' held in Yale University Library: 'The best of them [the Roman invaders of Britain] is they didn't get up pretty fictions about it. Was there I wonder, an association on a philanthropic basis to develop Britain, with some third rate thing for a president', *Joseph Conrad: Language and Fictional Self-Consciousness*, London: Edward Arnold 1979. p.8.

<sup>115</sup> Lester. p.61.

<sup>116</sup> I do not intend this as an absolute refutation of Chinua Achebe's, now famous charge against Conrad as 'a thoroughgoing racist' and indeed it confirms aspects of Achebe's argument, for example, 'the desire ... the need - in Western psychology to set Africa up as the foil to Europe, as a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar.' Cf. Achebe, Chinua. 'An Image of Africa: Racism in

pinhead of physical difference here by starting with conquerors (i.e. Romans) and ending with 'ourselves'. This avoids the unsettling identification of 'us' with the colonized, which the later implications of idolatry make if we follow Lester in understanding idolatry as a marker of otherness and more specifically, here, colonized otherness. But Marlow only gets away with this exchange of Roman for British identity through rhetoric: Marlow's 'mostly' gives just enough room for the hard-nosed Roman conquest of Britain to become British 'taking [earth] away from those who have ... slightly flatter noses than *ourselves*'. This transmutation of classical and modern imperialism is also replicated on an individual level here. In terms of sanity, Marlow's 'decent young citizen' is clearly enough a model for Kurtz but must be a model for Marlow too (HD 51). Although this troping of character is not apparent to the reader at this stage of the narrative it exemplifies the relativity inherent in the novella.

In this first passage then the four key areas that make up the matrix of relativity are introduced and utilized for the purpose of unsettling judgment. In this case they primarily unsettle the judgment of Marlow's audience however they are also presented as unsettling him. This lends his story veracity through narrator-audience identification. For example Marlow recalls the environment of the Congo as 'prehistoric' and his journey as being 'like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings' (HD 90, 88). These descriptions are in excess of a simple desire to 'primitivize' the landscape according to a similar picture of its inhabitants. They recall and go beyond Marlow's Roman story, too. According to the narrative of imperialism Marlow's journey is undertaken as a 'messenger of the might' of another land, as a bearer 'of a spark from the sacred fire' of progress and civilization (HD 49). His experience is of regression, however, of being taken out of history, to a time and place beyond history

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Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad ed. Robert Kimbrough New York: W.W. Norton and Company 1988. pp. 251-262, specifically 257, 251-252. (Achebe original article claimed the Conrad was 'a bloody racist'. Cf. *Massachusetts Review* 17.4 1977. pp. 782-794). Nor do I find Achebe's charge ungrounded, however I think it unhelpful in terms of the significance of the novel's content and canonical context. By the same token Conrad is at least as unpleasant about Russians, Germans and Jews, all of whom are also used as 'foils' and 'negations at once remote and vaguely familiar.' Achebe's charge is equivalent to charging Shakespeare for racism on the basis of *The Merchant of Venice* whilst disregarding the frequently violent and insulting Welsh, Scottish, and insulting French characterizations. These do not negate the charge but they show that in fact Shakespeare's characterization of Shylock is nuanced and at least partially sympathetic. Likewise Conrad's African's appear more clearly defined when we compare them to other different racial stereotypes in his fiction.

(‘prehistoric’), or to a place whose history is alien to the anthropocentric narrative he knows (the big trees were kings).

What, in fact, this landscape does is to challenge the historical narrative of western culture, and imperialism in particular, with an alternative narrative that is as ‘implacable’ as it is ‘inscrutable’ and that shows no need of man (HD 88). Not only does it challenge western imperialism with an inhuman imperialism of its own it challenges the religious beliefs that underpin western imperialism. A landscape in which vegetation riots and the trees are kings is not a paradisaal one but a Darwinian. And this is Darwinism set free from the moral overtones given it by those scientists who kept their faith and those churchmen who embraced science. Marlow’s reference to ‘taking possession of an accursed inheritance, to be subdued at the cost of profound anguish and of excessive toil’ underscores the lack of paradise at the moment it introduces the allusion (HD 90).

Marlow protects himself from this alternative narrative with his work. However, his work itself must engage with the landscape; he is after all steering a boat up a river so that the very thing which takes his mind off the threat posed by the landscape brings him right back to it. Marlow’s engagement with the landscape is contrasted with that of the pilgrims and the Africans aboard ship, and in particular their responses to the white fog incident. The white fog incident has two precursors: Marlow’s fascination with blank spaces and the French gunship firing into the forest from the sea ‘and nothing happened. Nothing could happen’ (HD 61). The incident is the closest Marlow comes to finding himself literally in one of the ‘blank spaces on the earth’ (HD 53).<sup>117</sup> The response of the pilgrims is fear of attack and immediate recourse to their cabins for their Winchesters (HD 96). The response of the chief African aboard is that the people ashore, invisible but heard, should be caught as food (HD 97). Marlow’s response by contrast is to speculate, ‘[w]ere we to let go our hold of the bottom, we would be absolutely in the air – in space’ (HD 100). The Africans are contrasted here with the Pilgrims in terms of their practical responses to the incident: the desire to catch someone for food is not presented as barbaric but as the prompt for a consideration of their ‘restraint’ in not consuming the Pilgrims and Marlow; in contrast the Pilgrims, despite assurances that they are unlikely to be attacked, are ‘ready’ for blind destruction, which they are eventually granted when the

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<sup>117</sup> Note the sonorous chiming of this phrase with Marlow’s earlier, ‘dark places of the earth’ (HD 49).

fog lifts (they are still shooting blind, unable to see into the undergrowth). Marlow differs from both in that quite practical considerations lead rapidly to abstract notions.

These incidents pave the way for Marlow's meeting with Kurtz. Quite early on Marlow admits that his journey up the river was 'towards Kurtz – exclusively' and, due to the predominance of his first person narrative and the episodic nature of that narrative, we too await their rendezvous in the hope of explanations (HD 90). Moreover the closer we get to that meeting the more Marlow emphasizes the significance of Kurtz's voice and at the same time we come to rely more completely on Marlow's voice. The anticipation of Kurtz's voice is only heightened by Marlow's preparatory meeting with Kurtz's disciple, who himself talks at length about Kurtz's eloquence (HD 121). This anticipation is confused and humiliated with Kurtz's appearance:

I saw him open his mouth wide – it gave him a weirdly voracious aspect, as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him. A deep voice reached me faintly. He must have been shouting. (HD 123)

Kurtz's faint shout speaks volumes in the visual aspect it lends him although it remains itself indecipherable.

Marlow's sojourn with Kurtz is the culmination of his journey and also the culmination of the four elements mentioned earlier. With his cosmopolitan background, his extreme success in finding ivory and failure as a standard bearer for western civilization, his African lover and unspeakable rites, and his degeneration physically and psychologically Kurtz transgresses the boundaries of geography, history, race and sanity. In fact, as if taking inspiration from the kingly trees, Kurtz writes for himself and enacts another history that parallels and undermines that from which Marlow has come. In retrospect the Towson's Manual with its indecipherable Cyrillic midrash appears as a parallel to Kurtz's speech and report. Even when Marlow discovers that the midrash is not cipher but Cyrillic it remains indecipherable. The Cyrillic shows up Towson's text as simply text, as something whose meaning for Marlow is beyond its practical application but is rather the abstract idea of application itself. If Towson's text offers protection against the unknowable, the Cyrillic

represents the threat of the unknowable, invading the borders of Towson's text and demanding new readings according to its own alternative.

Kurtz's report is similarly divided between the main body of the text and his 'note', 'scrawled ... in an unsteady hand ... "Exterminate all the brutes!"' (HD 110). The main report outlines a history different from the frame narrator's initial history of progression and different again from Marlow's king-trees; this is a history in which the colonialists are 'deities' (HD 110). The apparent difference between the 'unbounded power of eloquence' in the main body of Kurtz's text, which Marlow characteristically describes in abstract language, and the scrawled 'exposition of a method' is less than it first seems (HD 110). The latter is a practical argument whilst the former is essentially a rhetorical one yet both complement each other: The scrawl exposes the vacuity of the eloquence, the eloquence exposes the human need for an 'idea' at the back of things, to justify the 'aggravated murder on a great scale' (HD 52).

This duality and complementarity reaches its zenith in Kurtz final words, the double exclamation, 'The horror! The horror!' (HD 137). Marlow emphasizes the duality as he leads up to these words. The attributes of 'sombre pride', 'ruthless power', 'craven terror', 'intense and hopeless despair' fall into pairs as pride and power, terror and despair, as well as being two-word constructs (excepting the last phrase which is set apart from the rest with a dash and maintains the dual element through the use of the conjunctive), (HD 136-137). Reporting his cry Marlow again uses repetition to multiply the possibilities inherent in the moment: 'He *cried* in a *whisper* at some *image*, at some *vision*, - he *cried* out *twice*, a cry that was no more than a *breath* -' (HD 137, my italics). The repetition of 'The horror!' itself becomes self-reflexive, the second 'horror' a comment on the first, undoing the regret of one with a regret for that regret. The phrase becomes a Möbius strip and this is emphasized by the internal rhyme of the word 'horror' itself.

This is the revelation granted Marlow, a cry that parodies Christ's double cry, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabacthani', which is made 'with a loud voice.'<sup>118</sup> It is a revelation of emptiness, of absence, the hollowness of an echo sounded in the internal rhyme. Moreover, Marlow cannot escape this repetition. His engagement at the Intended's house resounds with echoes: Marlow has already seen the Intended, reproduced in a

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<sup>118</sup> Mark 15:34

portrait amongst Kurtz's papers, so that when he meets her the Intended appears as a physical reproduction of a primary Kurtzian text (HD 141). More striking than this, though, she also reproduces in gesture Kurtz's other, African, lover (HD 146). Moreover, the Intended's dramatic embodiment of aesthetic photographic reproduction, intellectual and physical imperialism, black and white, is itself emblematically preceded by the massive 'grand piano' whose 'dark gleams' of ebony and ivory bring to Marlow's mind a 'sarcophagus' (HD 143).<sup>119</sup>

Kurtz's very speech haunts Marlow and the Intended demands its reproduction. His response, 'The last word he pronounced was - your name', betrays Marlow's surrender to the power of Kurtz's eloquence (HD 147): not only does he lie, something he has formerly said he 'can't bear' for its 'flavour of mortality', in the lie is also a repetition of the truth (HD 79). 'Your name' is in fact no name, it is a gap to be filled, and any name substituted would have as much relevance to Kurtz's last degraded moments as his own hollow phrase. As Marlow notes, 'the heavens do not fall for such a trifle' and despite its effect on Marlow his narrative is in one sense only the anecdote of a man who went mad in the Centre of Africa. If we imagine again the events told by the narrator of 'An Outpost of Progress' it is immediately apparent that it is in the retelling, in the echo, that Marlow's story appears abstractly significant.

Peter Brooks measures the plotting of 'Heart of Darkness' against the paradigm of detective fiction, introducing Todorov's distinctions of *sjuzet* and *fabula* as he does so.<sup>120</sup> His thesis is that narrative must always present itself 'as a repetition and rehearsal ... of what has already happened.'<sup>121</sup> The narrator therefore is always in the role of going back over the events in the way that a detective does in order to piece together his story. Furthermore, Brook claims that 'it is the role of fictional plots to impose an end which yet suggests a return, a new beginning, a rereading. Any narrative, that is, wants its end to refer us back to its middle, to the web of the text: to recapture us in its doomed energies.'<sup>122</sup> This is clearly the case for the Intended whose mourning clothes and interest in the end of Kurtz indicates her desire to reanimate

<sup>119</sup> Note that the piano's music is a result of the *resounding* of cords' vibrations within their chamber.

<sup>120</sup> Brooks, Peter. *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1984. pp.24-25, 244. Cf. 'An Unreadable Report: Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*'. pp.238-263.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. p.25.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. pp.109-110.

their shared past. It is also the case for Marlow, whom Brooks deems 'in a state of belatedness ... in relation to his forerunner' Kurtz.<sup>123</sup> Brooks continues,

his journey is a repetition, which gains its meaning from its attachment to the prior journey. Marlow's plot (*sjuzet*) repeats Kurtz's story (*fabula*), takes this as its motivating force – and then will seek also to know and to incorporate Kurtz's own plot for his story.<sup>124</sup>

This repetition must be extended to include the frame narrator too, who does not give a reason for retelling Marlow's tale and yet surrenders enough to it that the language he uses to describe his own experience repeats Marlow's so that the experience itself gains meaning through the echo:

The offing was barred by a black bank of clouds, and the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed sombre under an overcast sky – seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness. (HD 148)

Implicit in this repetition is the surrender of the reader to the darkness. Early on the frame narrator claimed that the meaning of Marlow's tales was seen like a 'halo'. When we reach the end of the text it becomes clear that it is only in the representation, in the encircling of one narrative with another, that the meaning appears but that as a result that meaning is subjective at best. Kurtz's revelation to Marlow of the hollowness of life, indicates a vacuum to be filled. For even as Marlow maintains the gap, his desire to show it, halo-like, places a value on the gap which displaces it once more.

Finally, Marlow's quest is fulfilled negatively. The revelation he is given is of an absence, a space of endless repetition in which meaning is swallowed up 'voraciously' as if by a black hole. The presentation of this revelation is given theological connotations through the language used and its implicit critique of teleology. The absolute indeterminacy that 'Heart of Darkness' speaks of in Kurtz's

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid. p.244.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. p.244.

hollow, echoing, cry-whisper has indeed found a continuing repetition in the texts of its readers as we shall now see in the following chapter.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> For a discussion of the long term reception, repetition and absorption of 'Heart of Darkness' in popular culture cf. Dryden, Linda. "To Boldly Go": Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Popular Culture', forthcoming in *The Conradian*.



'Heart of Darkness', *The Waste Land* and *Mrs Dalloway*:  
The Modernist Quest Repeated

One of the most striking aspects of *Mrs Dalloway* is Woolf's frequent verbal allusion to 'Heart of Darkness'. This has been commented upon by various Woolf critics, notably Shirley Neuman, in her essay 'Heart of Darkness: Virginia Woolf and the Spectre of Domination'.<sup>126</sup> A second textual referent for Woolf, and one less discussed, is Eliot's *The Waste Land*. In this case there are fewer specific verbal echoes, although as might be expected certain geographical locations occur in both. However, we do find images and ideas echoed, particularly in those passages treating Septimus Warren Smith.

There is no reason to be surprised by these allusions, 'Heart of Darkness' was a crucial point of reference in Woolf's first novel, *The Voyage Out* and Neuman notes its importance in the narrative structure of *Night and Day*.<sup>127</sup> As to *The Waste Land*, Woolf was setting up the poem for printing at the Hogarth Press during the summer of 1923, a period when she was also engrossed in writing *Mrs Dalloway*.<sup>128</sup> We know from her diaries that she had heard Eliot read *The Waste Land* aloud the previous summer when she was first writing 'Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street', 'a story for Eliot' which was to be published in *Dial* the following July:<sup>129</sup>

Eliot dined last Sunday & read his poem. He sang it & chanted it  
rhythmed it. It has great beauty & force of phrase: symmetry; &  
tensity. What connects it together, I'm not so sure. But he read till he  
had to rush – letters to write about the London Magazine - &  
discussion thus was curtailed. One was left, however, with some strong  
emotion. The Waste Land, it is called; & Mary Hutch, who has heard it

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<sup>126</sup> In Clements, Patricia and Isobel Grundy eds. *Virginia Woolf: New Critical Essays*, London: Vision 1983. pp.57-76.

<sup>127</sup> Neuman, Shirley. 'Heart of Darkness: Virginia Woolf and the Spectre of Domination'. Clements. p.64.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. 'V. I've been setting up your poem. Its a good poem.

Vivien a damned good poem, did you say?

V. Well, you've improved what I said. But it is a d-d good poem.'

Tuesday 17 July 1923 (recording Sunday tea with Eliots, i.e. 15 July). *DVW*:2 256-7.

<sup>129</sup> Friday 23 June 1922. *DVW*:2 178.

more quietly, interprets it to be Tom's autobiography – a melancholy one.<sup>130</sup>

A particularly interesting coincidence of all Conrad, Eliot and her own writing appears in her diary entry for Friday 28 July 1923:

I've pulled through my Chaucer chapter; & written ahead at *The Hours*, & fill in spare space with 'serious' reading for my book, reading with pen & notebook. ... At the moment I feel myself fairly [sic] free of foreign influence: Eliot, or whoever it might be: & this I must prize, for unless I am myself, I am nobody.

As for the press, we have finished *Tom*, much to our relief. He will be published this August by Marjorie; & altogether we have worked at full speed since May. & this is I'm persuaded the root & source & origin of all health & happiness, provided of course that one rides work as a man rides a great horse, in a spirited & independent way; not a drudge, but a man with spurs in his heels. So I don't force myself any more to read against my will. ... For plans, I have immediately to write a dialogue on Conrad: so must read for that too.<sup>131</sup>

This entry occurs at a time when Woolf was beginning to struggle with *The Hours*. It took a month or so for her to emerge from this 'crisis of August' emboldened by her 'discovery; how I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters'.<sup>132</sup> It is interesting to note then the value she places on freedom from 'foreign influence' and that she connects Eliot with such an influence.

That she was reading Conrad at the same time is of note too, of course. However, when we look at her reading notes for Conrad at the time we find no reference to 'Heart of Darkness', specifically. Rather a quote from the "Author's Note" to *Youth and Two Other Stories* is included with notes on *Chance* and

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<sup>130</sup> Friday 23 June 1922. DVW:2 178.

<sup>131</sup> 'The Hours' was Woolf's working title for *Mrs Dalloway*. DVW:2 259.

<sup>132</sup> Monday 26 May 1924. DVW:2 302; Thursday 30 August 1923. DVW:2 263.

comments on *Nigger of the Narcissus* and *Nostramo*.<sup>133</sup> Furthermore, in the 'dialogue on Conrad' there is again no mention of 'Heart of Darkness' despite direct and indirect allusions to 'Youth', *The Arrow of Gold*, *The Rescue*, *Chance*, *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*, 'The End of the Tether', *Victory*.<sup>134</sup> On the face of it this would imply that 'Heart of Darkness' had little influence on Woolf whilst she composed *Mrs Dalloway*. However, the verbal echoes within the text imply otherwise and grains of evidence are to be gleaned elsewhere. Firstly we have the evidence of the novella's influence on Woolf's earlier writing, in particular *The Voyage Out*. From this it is possible to assume that Woolf was familiar enough with the work not to need to re-read it. Secondly, and more circuitously, we have her desire to avoid 'foreign influence.' Given that 'Heart of Darkness' had been an influence before, Woolf was perhaps, at this stage, keen to avoid subsuming her own voice and narrative in the immense darkness of that other novella. Such a threat to her own voice, from Conrad in particular, was all the stronger given her work with Eliot's *Waste Land*, which had derived its original epigraph and much of its original imagery from 'Heart of Darkness'.<sup>135</sup> In this sense the omission of 'Heart of Darkness' from Woolf's survey in her 'dialogue on Conrad' only serves to underscore its absent presence, all the more so given the inclusion of its partners in publication, 'Youth', and 'The End of the Tether'.

There is a contradiction here, though. If Woolf wished to avoid 'foreign influence' why are there so many textual allusions in the finished *Mrs Dalloway*? Either she has failed to keep such influences at bay or she was less worried about such influences than her diary implies. This apparent contradiction may be resolved if we recognize the qualification of this influence as 'foreign.' Given her concern that her voice should be very much her own, 'foreign influence' can be understood as any influence that led Woolf away from her own narrative voice, style, methods of

<sup>133</sup> Cf. Silver, Brenda. *Virginia Woolf's Reading Notebooks*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1983. pp.128-129. (Holograph Reading Notes Vol.25 Berg).

<sup>134</sup> Published as 'Mr. Conrad: A Conversation' in *Nation & Atheneum*, 29 September 1923. Woolf, Virginia. *Collected Essays*, 4 vol. ed. Andrew McNeillie, London: Hogarth Press 1986. vol.3. pp.376-380.

<sup>135</sup> Pound suggested dropping the Conrad epigraph and sensibly cut many of the passages that echo 'Heart of Darkness'. Although these passages are of interest they are not Eliot's best verse. See for example lines 10 – 13 of 'Song for the Ophion' and lines 64 – 78 of the early drafts of 'Death by Water'. Eliot, T.S. *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts including the annotations of Ezra Pound*, ed. Valerie Eliot, London: Faber and Faber 1971. pp.99, 59-60.

writing. However, this does not exclude all influence as problematic, so that those that might augment her work may be perceived positively.

There is a further point to this matter, though. Were Woolf's allusions simply to Conrad and not to Eliot the resolution of the problem delineated above would stand as it is. However, once we recognize the allusions to Eliot these must be resolved with her designation of him as a 'foreign influence.' This requires 'foreign' to be read yet more specifically. At the time of the diary entry Woolf had been, by her own accounts, working 'full speed' on setting *The Waste Land* for some months. Involved as closely as she was with setting up the text it is hardly surprising that she would feel overwhelmed by it at that time. Such an extraordinary piece would, of course, feel alien too. Yet Woolf was unlikely to have remained uninfluenced by such a text. Rather it can be assumed that in her struggle with her own text that summer Woolf sought ways in which to accommodate apparently foreign influences without their altering her own narrative voice. Furthermore, it was exactly such contacts with the apparently 'foreign influences' of the likes of Eliot and, elsewhere, the visual arts, that motivated Woolf to make allusion a crucial strand of her aesthetic in *Mrs Dalloway*.

Study of the particular and various types of allusion made in *Mrs Dalloway* is necessary to make evident the theory proposed above. Three types of allusion can be identified in the novel, linguistic, narrative and thematic. These types are, naturally, related and at times interdependent. For example Elizabeth, in *Mrs Dalloway* is referred to as 'like a hyacinth' recalling the 'hyacinth girl' of 'Burial of the Dead' (*MD* 123; *WLBD* 36; cf. *Mrs Dalloway* Appendix). However, this linguistic allusion is augmented by the thematic significance of the hyacinth for both texts as 'a symbol for the resurrected god of the fertility rites' and as a reference to the youth Hyacinthus from whose blood grew the flower marked with the Greek lament *Ai Ai*.<sup>136</sup> There are numerous linguistic allusions to 'Heart of Darkness' in *Mrs Dalloway* and these are

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<sup>136</sup> Southam, B.C. *A Student's Guide to the Selected Poems of T.S. Eliot*, London: Faber and Faber 1974. p.75; Cf. Biedermann, H. *Dictionary of Symbolism*, Ware: Wordsworth 1996. p.180. For the youth Hyacinthus, cf. Ovid. *Metamorphoses*, trans. A.D. Melville, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1987. pp.230-232. Ovid also mentions the hyacinth as growing from the ground soaked in Ajax's blood on the event of his suicide, p.306. His description there,  
Upon its petals letters are inscribed,  
Letters for boy and man alike the same,  
There for a wail of woe, here for a name' (lines 396-398)  
resonates with Woolf and Eliot's own agendas in writing their texts as responses to the First World War.

alongside others to *The Waste Land*, Shakespeare, classical drama and philosophy, and much more.

In terms of narrative the primary allusion is to quest narratives. Neuman identifies the borrowing and subverting of the quest narrative from 'Heart of Darkness' in Woolf's early fiction thus:

Woolf's glances back to 'Heart of Darkness' in her first two novels help identify her plot; our recognition of the quest plot means that we can also see the impasses it yields when women are its protagonists, when the end of the hero's quest (the discovery of identity and reintegration into the community) is recast as the end of the heroine's quest, particularly as it is posited in the nineteenth-century novel: marriage.<sup>137</sup>

She continues by acknowledging a change in Woolf's continued allusion to 'Heart of Darkness' in *Mrs Dalloway*, which she considers in terms of Woolf's 'reassessment of Conrad for her 1923 and 1924 articles.'<sup>138</sup> However this is done without reference to *The Waste Land*. Obviously *The Waste Land*'s reliance on a quest narrative motif cannot have influenced Woolf's work prior to 1922 and Woolf had already identified that motif in 'Heart of Darkness'. However I contend that it was primarily Woolf's close contact with *The Waste Land* that modified and threw into relief her previous reading of the quest narrative motif in 'Heart of Darkness'.<sup>139</sup>

We have already seen the way in which 'Heart of Darkness' fits a quest narrative pattern. The quest narrative Eliot uses is implicit in the myth of the Fisher King that he sourced in Jessie L. Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*, first published in 1920. Weston explored the various narrative versions, in which a quester encounters the Fisher King, and the results of those encounters, before surmising their implications. In Weston's accounts the Fisher King, like the Green Knight, is a character encountered, with his own story indeed, but a story auxiliary to that of the

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<sup>137</sup> Neuman. p.64.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. p.65. The articles being 'Mr. Conrad: A Conversation', and 'Joseph Conrad'. The latter appeared as a valedictory essay in the *TLS*, 14 August 1924, and was collected the following year in *The Common Reader*. Woolf, Virginia. *The Common Reader*, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1938. pp.222-229.

<sup>139</sup> By implication the same influence can also be understood as brought to bear on Woolf's critical response to Conrad at the time.

grail questing hero. The basics of the Fisher King narratives, as outlined by Weston, are that a king (or knight) is dying (or dead) through failing health and fertility and his lands are also failing. The quester's arrival is linked to the regeneration of the king and his lands by way of recovery or replacement. In many of the narratives the quester's healing powers are indicated. The restoration of the king and his lands is linked (most usually causally) to the quester's questions concerning the grail, and it is in this way that the Fisher King's story is made auxiliary to that of the quester.

If we were to apply this narrative framework to 'Heart of Darkness' Marlow becomes the grail-quester and Kurtz the Fisher King. In this way the emphasis of the narrative is on Marlow's quest, to which Kurtz's sickness is necessary but auxiliary. We might suppose that Marlow's loyalty to the nightmare of his choice, and his consequent lie to the Intended, has the same restorative power for the civilization that he returns to as the healing questions of the grail-quester.

Eliot's use of the Fisher King story is oblique, however, and his borrowing is not of narrative but of theme. In Eliot's poem the Fisher King speaks as a primary protagonist and most importantly there is no sign of a salving quester. If there is to be any restoration the implication is that the Fisher King must be his own doctor and quester.

As if to emphasise this Eliot's quotation from 'Heart of Darkness' for the original epigraph is from the point of complete abjection,

"Did he live his life again in every detail of desire,  
temptation, and surrender during that supreme moment  
of complete knowledge? He cried out in a whisper at  
some image, at some vision, - he cried out twice, a cry  
that was no more than a breath -  
'The horror! the horror!'"

Conrad.<sup>140</sup>

As is generally known Pound recommended the excision of this epigraph, doubting 'if Conrad is weighty enough to stand the citation.'<sup>141</sup> Eliot's response is important here:

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<sup>140</sup> Eliot, T.S. *The Waste Land: A Facsimile*. pp.2-3.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid. p.125. The replacement passage from *Satyricon* had been the source for the first proposed title of 'A Game of Chess', i.e. 'In the Cage'.

'Do you mean not use the Conrad quote or simply not put Conrad's name to it? It is much the most appropriate I can find, and somewhat *elucidative*.'<sup>142</sup> Pound not only excised the Conrad epigraph, he was also instrumental in ridding the poem of many other allusions to Conrad, notably the distinct echoes of *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* from the original manuscripts of 'Death by Water'.<sup>143</sup> And Eliot himself omitted various allusions to 'Heart of Darkness' present in earlier poems that were cannibalized for *The Waste Land*.<sup>144</sup> That Eliot then chooses the moment of final abjection, the failure of the quester to restore the health of the dying 'king', from 'Heart of Darkness', as 'most appropriate' and 'elucidative' not only reinforces the negative use Eliot makes of the Fisher King story but indicates his negative reading of 'Heart of Darkness'. This choice also indicates, as with his reference to Weston in his footnotes, Eliot's appropriations in terms of concerns and themes rather than of specific narrative and linguistic allusion. 'Heart of Darkness' is (as in *Mrs Dalloway*) a present absence by which the poem may at least in part be understood.

It remains to be seen then how Woolf has filtered 'Heart of Darkness' through *The Waste Land*. Let us begin by looking further into the subject of the quest narrative that has been of concern here already. Weston's interpretation of the Fisher King narrative is that it is a description of fertility myths and rites.<sup>145</sup> Woolf uses this theory in a variety of ways.

The first candidate for quester must surely be Peter Walsh:<sup>146</sup> He has travelled to far-off lands and in doing so has had romantic encounters with various women. He is even armed as a latter-day knight with his trusty pocket-knife. Furthermore, when he sits down to dream in Regent's Park he figures himself as a 'solitary traveller' in terms that recall Marlow's experiences. The grey nurse knitting by his side, 'the champion of the rights of sleepers... one of those spectral presences which rise in twilight in woods made of sky and branches' echoes the women Marlow encounters in Brussels, 'one fat and the other slim ... knitting black wool. The slim one got up ... her dress was as plain as an umbrella-cover', '[one] guarding the door of Darkness ...

<sup>142</sup> Ibid. p.125. My italics.

<sup>143</sup> Cf. ibid. pp.54-69 and in particular pp.64-67.

<sup>144</sup> Cf. ibid. p.99 lines 10-13; p.109 lines 9-13.

<sup>145</sup> Weston, Jessie. 'The Fisher King', *From Ritual to Romance*, New York: Anchor Books 1957. pp.113-136.

<sup>146</sup> For further discussion of Peter as a specifically Conradian quester (and Woolf's undermining of this role) cf. Neuman. pp.60-61.

one introducing, introducing continuously the unknown,' (*MD* 74; *HD* 56, 57).<sup>147</sup> As the solitary traveller advances his visions become complicated by the yoking together of the abstract and the actual, just as Marlow had read meaning into the forest: 'an exotic Immensity ruled by an august Benevolence' (*HD* 110). At times Peter comes close to Kurtz in his disdain for 'these miserable pigmies, these feeble, these ugly, these craven men and women' and his search for 'something outside' them (*MD* 74); and in his desire to 'blow to nothingness with the rest' (*MD* 75).<sup>148</sup> Peter recalls Marlow again as he nears the end of his dream journey and meets the woman who seeks 'a lost son ... a rider destroyed' (*MD* 75). This woman and the villagers who wait 'as if some august fate, known to them ... were about to sweep them into complete annihilation', draw on Marlow's encounter with Kurtz's Intended<sup>149</sup> and encourage a sense of metaphysical foreboding that like Marlow's is unfounded: the heavens do not fall in on Marlow and Peter finds himself '[I]ndoors among ordinary things' (*HD* 147; *MD* 75). Peter's cry "the death of the soul" recalls Kurtz again and his cry, "The horror! The horror!" as it is interpreted by Marlow. Marlow and Peter interpret these cries as judgments upon others and as summing-ups of the world's lack.<sup>150</sup> As such the cries attain a privileged status – Peter's ticketing of the moment indicates a cataloguing for future reference, as if the phrase and the moment itself might be used again, reapplied as an interpretative tool to other moments. Since Peter links this phrase with Clarissa the impression is reinforced that Peter takes all his bearings in life from the pole of Clarissa just as Marlow's originary point of reference becomes Kurtz's darkness.

Yet, we may also apply Peter's cry "the death of the soul" to Marlow and himself, as if they were questers who had arrived too late and found their Fisher Kings irrevocably dead. Unlike the questing knights whose words can bring back to life the Fisher King, Peter's cry and Marlow's estimation of Kurtz's 'victory' cannot bring

<sup>147</sup> These fateful knitters also recall the *tricoteuses* of the French Revolution.

<sup>148</sup> Compare Kurtz's postscript "Exterminate all the brutes!" and 'He had kicked himself loose of the earth' (*HD* 110, 132).

<sup>149</sup> 'such a look of awful desolation came upon her face that I perceived she was one of those creatures that are not the playthings of Time. For her he had died only yesterday' (*HD* 143).

<sup>150</sup> "The death of the soul." He had said that instinctively, ticketing the moment as he used to do – the death of her soul' (*MD* 76). 'He had summed up – he had judged. "The horror!" ... After all this was the expression of some sort of belief; it had candour, it had conviction, it had a vibrating note of revolt in its whisper, it had the appalling face of a glimpsed truth' (*HD* 138).



back the metaphysical, soulful element that both men had searched for (HD 138).<sup>151</sup> Both men are doomed to 'ordinary things'.

Peter's desire to 'blow to nothing with the rest' and much else of his dream also recall *The Waste Land*. His chant of charity, comprehension, absolution echoes Eliot's Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyata (MD 74).<sup>152</sup> The woman who 'seek[s] over the desert, a lost son' recalls Eliot's 'Murmur of maternal lamentation/who are those hooded hordes swarming/Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth' (WLWTS 367-369). And again we may apply Peter's final cry to the end of the poem. Furthermore Peter's dream is obviously concerned with the effects of the First World War and this allows a deeper association with *The Waste Land*, which takes much of its motivation from a desire to address that war's aftermath. Thus 'Death of the soul' is not only a metaphysical problem here but tacitly includes the physical death of war. When Peter awakes he reapplies his cry back in time so that it becomes attached to memories of his own youth, as if he cannot consciously consider its application to the present, something perhaps 'too dark altogether . . .' (HD 147). In this way Woolf indicates Peter's inability to confront the spiritual death that the war, imperially motivated and thus implicating Peter himself as a colonial, had brought to the metropolis.<sup>153</sup>

Peter's evasion of the residual horrors of the war indicates a failure to make full and conscious use of his ticketed moment. Instead the original moment at Bourton overwhelms as a *type* its present *antitype* of war so that Peter can maintain a safe, because familiar, frame of reference. Peter repeats this kind of operation throughout the novel as, for example, when he observes the ambulance as 'one of the triumphs of civilization' (MD 144). Here, towards the end of the novel, Peter's operations of elusion are more evident. Peter's immediate response is to assume that the ambulance's body has been afflicted by something beyond its control, 'some one hit

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<sup>151</sup> Marlow's original desire for 'a talk with Kurtz' quickly gives way to the passivity of 'the inestimable privilege of listening to the gifted Kurtz.' (HD 106, 107) This passivity and the aural nature of the encounter with Kurtz emphasise Marlow's inadequacy as healing quester in this context.

<sup>152</sup> Later Peter's mantra becomes 'compassion, comprehension, absolution' (MD 75). Eliot translates 'Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyata' as 'give, sympathise, control' in his own footnotes. Eliot, T.S. *Collected Poems 1909-1962*. p.85.

<sup>153</sup> Woolf's use of dreams to indicate subconscious feelings would have had particular resonance for readers whose interest in dreams as psychological indicators had been renewed by recent translation and publication in Britain of Freud's work: *Über den Traum: On Dreams*, trans. M.D. Eder, London: Heinemann appeared in 1914 and in 1922 the Woolf's own Hogarth Press, in association with the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, published *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse: Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, an authorized translation by Bloomsbury, James Strachey.

on the head, struck down by disease, knocked over ... as might happen to oneself' (*MD* 144). But as soon as Peter thinks of such afflictions in relation to himself he turns away again to interpret the ambulance in terms derived from Marlow's appraisal of colonization: 'It struck him coming back from the East – the *efficiency*, the *organization*, the *communal spirit* ... Ah, but thinking became morbid, *sentimental*, ... fatal to art, fatal to friendship' (*MD* 144 my italics). The implied equivalence of art and friendship and the order in which they appear is telling: one might assume that friendship unlike art is something that evolves continuously. Here, even if we read 'art' as craftsmanship, which might then be applied back to friendship, the implication is that the process of both will lead to some static finished object. For Peter friendship, like a moment, is something to be registered and ticketed.

Peter compounds his evasion by thinking through the emotional effects of the ambulance in the third person: the 'busy men hurrying home' and the impersonal 'one'. These others, 'the busy men hurrying home ... bethinking them ... of some wife' are notably different from Peter, the single man strolling back to his hotel room. It is clear that in his thoughts Peter goes out of his way to distance himself from the emotional charge of the ambulance. However, in this case, Peter's recourse to 'the triumphs of civilization' as a screen against morbidity and sentimentality fails and he finds himself only a few lines later feeling, 'I have that in me ... which could now dissolve in tears' (*MD* 144). Once again, though, the emotional charge of the present is rapidly overwhelmed by the recollection of the past and the *antitype* is subsumed to its *type* (*MD* 145).

All this takes us some way from our starting point of quest narrative. Yet it has illustrated the problems of applying such a narrative to Peter. He fits the role as Quixote does: Peter gets little beyond tilting at windmills. His questing has none of the urgency or seriousness implied in Weston's account of the Fisher King narratives and even his own earnestness is dissipated by his recourse to reverie and his lack of what Conrad terms 'a sustaining illusion' (*N* 413). If we are to find a more determined engagement with Weston's account we must turn to Septimus Warren Smith and his doctors.

Firstly we may understand Septimus in terms of the Fisher King. His primary qualification is his sickness, a sickness that requires healing. However, the perspectives of and on this Fisher King are problematic. Septimus Warren Smith most resembles Weston's analysis in his own eyes: Weston traces the title of the Fisher

King through a variety of Indo-European sources, in which 'the Fish is a Life symbol of immemorial antiquity, and ... the title of Fisher has, from the earliest ages, been associated with Deities who were held to be specially connected with the origin and the preservation of Life.'<sup>154</sup> From her analysis Weston concludes of the Fisher King that

[h]e is not merely a deeply symbolic figure, but the essential centre of the whole cult [of the grail], a being semi-divine, semi-human, standing between his people and land, and the unseen forces which control their destiny. If the Grail story be based upon a Life ritual the character of the Fisher King is of the very essence of the tale, and his title, so far from being meaningless, expresses ... the intention and object of the perplexing whole.<sup>155</sup>

We may compare with this Septimus's understanding of himself as knowing 'the meaning of the world', as 'the lord of men' and bearer of 'the supreme secret', as interpreter 'to mankind' (*MD* 82, 83).

Throughout these passages the allusions are manifold.<sup>156</sup> When Septimus imagines himself as a corpse sprouting poppies he recalls Eliot's sprouting corpse (*MD* 83; *WLBD* 71-72). The factual reference for both is, of course, the poppy fields of France. Both also refer to the regeneration implicit in the myth of the Fisher King. This reference is more explicit in Septimus's sense that he had 'been dead, and yet am now alive' (*MD* 83). However, the verbal echo of Eliot is negative: 'He who was living is now dead/We who were living are now dying/With a little patience' (*WLWTS* 328-330).

And when we turn to Conrad we find a similar negativity: Marlow's encounter with the bones of his predecessor insists upon their stasis 'the grass growing through his ribs was tall enough to hide his bones; the supernatural being had not been touched after he fell' (*HD* 55). This negativity is picked up in Septimus's desire to 'rest still' (*MD* 83). Septimus has here no desire to be resurrected into the 'queer harmony' of life (*MD* 83). Referring back again to 'Heart of Darkness' and comparing

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<sup>154</sup> Weston. p.125.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid. p.136.

<sup>156</sup> Cf. *Mrs Dalloway* Appendix, in particular for pp.82-84.

the eloquent voices of Septimus and Kurtz we are forced to reread Kurtz's muttered phrase "Live rightly, die, die . . .": Kurtz's statement in Septimus's terms is not unfinished; he is not lost for words but rather 'begs' with Septimus to 'rest still' (HD 135; *MD* 82-83). Septimus is unable to escape either from his own self-dramatization or from the growing volume of life's 'queer harmony', capped by Rezia's 'It is time' (*MD* 84).

Rezia recalls Septimus to the fact that it is time that they set off to see Dr. Bradshaw. It is time for Septimus, the unwilling Lazarus, the ailing Fisher King, to meet his healer. The irony is apparent. For neither Bradshaw nor Holmes is able to fulfil his apparent role as restorer to life. However, even here we find a whole complex of implications that do not allow for a simple ironical reading.

Firstly, if Bradshaw and Holmes are healers, in terms of Weston's Grail narratives they are also questers. For Doctor Holmes the role seems somewhat incongruous, and this perhaps is the joke.<sup>157</sup> With the knighted Bradshaw the implications are more apparently sinister. His devotion to Proportion and her 'sister' Conversion mean that his powers are less of restoration than transformation. He offers to teach Septimus 'to rest' but this offer is unsatisfactory in two ways: Firstly, rather than restore Septimus to his romantic self Bradshaw intends to rest Septimus until he converts to the doctor's pragmatic theory of proportion. The implications of this rest are that he remains rested and we recall that it was rest that Septimus longed for in the same way that Kurtz could get no further than death. And here is the second problem with Bradshaw's prescription: we might at first suppose that at least Septimus will be satisfied in his desire for rest: however, Bradshaw's insistence on 'teaching' indicates that Septimus's idea of still 'rest' may be somewhat different from the doctor's. In fact it becomes apparent that this rest is defined in terms of obeying what Bradshaw 'order[s]' (*MD* 106). The sapping of the will takes on a vampiric or cannibalistic quality when we are told that 'Conversion ... loves blood better than brick' (*MD* 107). Conversion 'feasts' on the will and we realize now, if we had not worked it out before, that despite his knighthood this healer cannot restore the Fisher King and is, in fact, predatory for his soul.

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<sup>157</sup> Unless we are to read in a sarcastic allusion to Sherlock Holmes whose creator, Doyle, had trained in medicine. Certainly Woolf's Holmes's powers of deduction are closer to Doyle's Watson's. This reading is nevertheless not necessary to the joke, at Woolf's Holmes expense, of casting the dim and unadventurous doctor as grail quester.

If we look at how this passage draws on Conrad and Eliot we find this threat underlined. Septimus's sense that 'Once you fall ... human nature is on you. Holmes and Bradshaw are on you. They scour the desert. They fly screaming into the wilderness....' echoes closely Eliot's description of those who seem to threaten the Fisher King's lands with appropriation (*MD* 105).<sup>158</sup> This threat of colonization and appropriation is even more apparent in examining the allusions to 'Heart of Darkness'. We may firstly remember Marlow's own visit to the doctor's before embarking on his journey. That doctor's interest in insanity and insistence on 'du calme' is echoed in Bradshaw's own work and his insistence on rest (*HD* 59). That need for calm takes on an overtly moral and political form when Marlow discusses Kurtz's 'unsound method' with the manager (*HD* 126). Marlow's response that he considers it 'no method at all' indicates the manager's need to create a sensible dichotomy through which he may still control Kurtz and his 'method'. That is to say, if we agree with Marlow that Kurtz operates without method, he threatens the manager's methods because his action cannot be understood or contained by the manager's methodical world. By allowing Kurtz some method the manager is then able to judge it, place it in an understandable and therefore controllable relation to his own method. Marlow's ability to see that 'there is a world elsewhere', so to speak, in which the manager's methods have no point of relevance or reference, places him too beyond the pale: 'I found myself lumped along with Kurtz ... I was unsound' (*HD* 127). We must keep in mind that the purpose of the manager's method is colonization. Returning to *Mrs Dalloway*, the similarities between Bradshaw's emphasis on 'proportion' and the manager's on 'sound method' are apparent. Both men and their ideals require the submission of others to them. Bradshaw's action to make it 'impossible for the unfit to propagate their views until they, too, shared his sense of proportion' presages his devotion to Conversion and draws on the same inability identified in the manager to accommodate 'a world elsewhere' (*MD* 106).<sup>159</sup>

When Woolf comes to figure Bradshaw's goddess Conversion, she does so in language that emphasises in particular her colonizing aspect and again in language that recalls Conrad's. The 'mud and swamp of Africa' alert the reader in a direct way

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<sup>158</sup> Cf. 'Who are those hooded hordes swarming/Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth' (*WLWTS* 368-369). It is interesting to note that the line had originally run 'Over Polish plains'. Eliot, T.S. *The Waste Land: A Facsimile*. pp.74, 75, line 49. Whether this relates specifically to Conrad and how is speculative. Its more broad reference is to the Russo-Polish war of 1919-1920.

<sup>159</sup> Shakespeare, William. *Coriolanus* III.iii.137. *Complete Works*. p.853.

and in her actions we find further connections (*MD* 106). The violence of Conversion and Bradshaw's devotion to her recall the violence of 'the conquest of the earth' as Marlow describes it and in particular the need for 'an idea', a metaphysical referent, by which that violence maybe justified and framed (*HD* 52). Conversion's violence recalls, too, the language of the brickmaker discussing his method for dealing with insubordination: "Transgression – punishment – bang! Pitiless, pitiless" (*HD* 77). His words do not even form sentences and begin to mimic the violent action he advocates. Likewise the voracious actions of Conversion are mimicked by Woolf's sentence structure, which places the verb right at the beginning of each clause, emphasizing her relentlessness:

At Hyde Park Corner on a tub she stands preaching; shrouds herself in white and walks penitentially disguised as brotherly love through factories and parliaments; offers help, but desires power; smites out of her way roughly the dissentient, or dissatisfied; bestows her blessings on those who, looking upward, catch submissively from her eyes the light of their own. (*MD* 106-107)

In these ways Woolf aligns Bradshaw with those imperialists for whom Marlow appears to have least sympathy.<sup>160</sup> However, we cannot but notice those other similarities between Bradshaw and Kurtz. In particular, Kurtz's belief that the native Africans should be approached 'with the might as of a deity' brings to mind not only Bradshaw's own deities but his desire to play God himself through the controlling and containing of others' lives (*HD* 110). Marlow's impression of 'an exotic Immensity ruled by an august Benevolence' provides a precursor to the sinister care of Bradshaw (*HD* 110).

This comparison between Kurtz and Bradshaw opens up new possibilities in the text when the comparison between Kurtz and Septimus are acknowledged. Septimus's manic epithets in Bradshaw's rooms: 'the most exalted of mankind; the criminal who faced his judges; the victim exposed on the heights; the fugitive; the drowned sailor; the poet of the immortal ode; the Lord who had gone from life to

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<sup>160</sup> The antipathy between Marlow's and Bradshaw's point of view is underlined by Bradshaw's claim that "Nobody lives for himself alone," which contrasts with Marlow's 'We live as we dream – alone....' (*MD* 105; *HD* 79).

death' recall Kurtz the poet who 'had taken a high seat amongst the devils' (*MD* 104; HD 128, 108).<sup>161</sup> They recall, too, the same text that we have just applied to Bradshaw, in which Kurtz claimed the might of deities for the colonizers (HD 110).

The common source for Bradshaw and Septimus in Kurtz has two implications. Firstly, turning back to 'Heart of Darkness', it is apparent that although the reader may well judge with Marlow that Kurtz has 'no method at all' Kurtz himself believed that he did act according to some sort of method. Marlow's judgment occurs just after his first brief encounter with Kurtz and his later posthumous appraisal of Kurtz takes into account Kurtz's own idea of himself and his actions ('He had summed up – he had judged. "The horror!" He was a remarkable man. After all, this was the expression of some sort of belief' (HD 138)). In this way the reader realizes that rather than being utterly at odds Kurtz and the manager have in common the very fact that they understand themselves to be working according to a 'sound' method, which is in fact utterly arbitrary. The reader is able to see that these methods are arbitrary because Marlow introduces his tale by typifying imperialism as undertaken for the sake of an arbitrary idea (HD 52). The second implication is that, likewise, Bradshaw and Septimus are closer to each other than either could acknowledge. Bradshaw's observation that Septimus 'was attaching meanings to words of a symbolical kind' might as easily apply to himself with his devotion to Proportion and Conversion. Both men operate in metaphysical terms and it is their inability to recognize that they are operating in this way that leads them to cause so much damage to others. Their desire to structure the world according to an ideal chimes exactly with Marlow's analysis of the role of ideas in colonization. They are, by analogy, 'blind – as is very proper for those who tackle a darkness' (HD 52). They are blind to the world over which they spread the net of their metaphysical reference. They are unable to distinguish the forms writhing beneath it. Those forms remain dark to them.

Yet again this discussion has ended at a distance from the original topic of the quest narrative and that is as it should be. The point is that in *Mrs Dalloway* the quest narrative rapidly breaks down for those characters to whom we might first look in this regard and according to an application of 'Heart of Darkness' and *The Waste Land*. This is not to say that the possibilities of quest narrative have been exhausted but

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<sup>161</sup>Cf. *WLBD*47, *WLDW* 312-321, *WLWTS* 322-330.

rather that we must look elsewhere. Remaining, for the moment, with the Fisher King narrative we must look beyond the men to Rezia to find an alternative healing quester. It is Rezia who travels to London, far from family and her own country. It is Rezia who resembles Marlow's trireme commander in terms of her origins and her growing disgust with her new surroundings. Rezia's vision of 'darkness' 'as the Romans saw it, lying cloudy, ... the hills had no names and rivers wound they knew not where' recalls the experience of Marlow's Roman, having 'to live in the midst of the incomprehensible' (*MD* 50; *HD* 51).<sup>162</sup> Similarly Rezia resembles Marlow himself as she finds herself 'surrounded by the enormous trees, vast cloud of an indifferent world' (cf. *MD* 81; *HD* 88, 117-118). The echoes we find of the commander in Rezia's response to London confuse her role as quester, for it is implicit in Marlow's prolegomena that the commander is a type for Kurtz. However, this apparent confusion has its points of interest. It becomes apparent from a study of Rezia's despondent responses to her situation that she differs less from Septimus than might, at first, be thought.<sup>163</sup> And thus, as we found through recognition of the similarities of Bradshaw and Septimus, we may apply this comparison back into Conrad's text. We may not have doubted the similarities between Marlow on the one hand and Kurtz and the commander on the other but Woolf's allusions enrich that reading.

The Marlovian echoes reinforce the notion of Rezia as healing quester and it becomes apparent that it is to her that Septimus eventually looks for protection and justice. Rezia, like Marlow, is entrusted with the papers of her visionary, some of which she thinks 'very beautiful' in much the way Marlow finds Kurtz's report for the Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs 'a beautiful piece of writing' (*MD* 141; *HD* 110).

However, Rezia exceeds Marlow in her role as healing quester in that she is able to affect some kind of redemption for Septimus and herself. Just prior to his suicide Septimus is granted a vision of Rezia as

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<sup>162</sup> Note Marlow's original statement which introduces his prolegomena on the trireme commander: 'I was thinking of very old times, when the Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago – the other day. ... Light came out of this river since – you say Knights? Yes ... the sea the colour of lead, the sky the colour of smoke, ... cold fog, tempests, disease, exile, and death, ... [t]here's no initiation either into such mysteries' (*HD* 50-51).

<sup>163</sup> Compare Rezia's sense of exposure: 'she was surrounded by the enormous trees, vast clouds of an indifferent world exposed; tortured; and why should she suffer? Why?' with Septimus as 'the victim exposed on the heights' and later 'alone, exposed on his bleak eminence' (*MD* 81, 104, 140).



a flowering tree; and through her branches looked out the face of a lawgiver, who had reached a sanctuary where she feared no one; not Holmes; not Bradshaw; a miracle, a triumph, the last and greatest. Staggering he saw her mount the appalling staircase, laden with Holmes and Bradshaw ... men who ... talked of proportion; who differed in their verdicts ... yet judges they were; who mixed the vision and the sideboard; saw nothing clear, yet ruled, yet inflicted. Over them she triumphed. (*MD* 142)

As a flowering tree Rezia images the revitalization that will occur with the healing or replacing of the Fisher King. She appears to him as Miss Pole had appeared to him, 'walking in a green dress' whom he had considered 'impeccably wise' (*MD* 95).<sup>164</sup> In this way Rezia represents Septimus's source of fructification prior to the war and prior to his subsequent decline. Rezia's restorative role and her image as flowering tree leads us back to Weston's assumption that the Fisher King narrative is to be understood in terms of vegetation mythology and rites. Weston refers her reader back to Frazer for analysis of the social aspects of vegetation mythology, and in Frazer's *Golden Bough* we find two chapters dealing with trees and an opening chapter entitled 'The King of The Wood'.<sup>165</sup> This chapter concludes with Frazer's theory concerning 'Diana of the Wood' and her devotee who may be presented as the 'King of the Wood' and who 'regularly perish[es] by the sword of [his] successors'.<sup>166</sup> In Frazer's other chapters on trees he links them continuously to fertility and vegetation myths and rites.

These sources allow Rezia a complex of associations, which enrich her restorative role. Unlike Septimus she will survive, a Diana of the Wood, but that very fact of her survival, as replication of Miss Pole, implies a restoration to youth of Septimus and his ideal. In this sense she fulfils the role of the quester, responsible for the healing of the Fisher King's lands if not his own body. That this is the case is reinforced by Rezia's vision after Septimus's suicide. This vision, which recalls

<sup>164</sup> Note the juxtaposition of sentences: 'he saw her, one summer evening, walking in a green dress in a square. "It has flowered," the gardener might have said....' (*MD* 95).

<sup>165</sup> Weston, p.157; Frazer, James. 'The King of the Wood'; 'The Worship of Trees'; 'Relics of Tree-Worship in Modern Europe' *The Golden Bough A Study in Magic and Religion*, London: Macmillan and Co, Abridged edition 1963. pp.1-11; 44-158; 158-178.

<sup>166</sup> Frazer, p.11.

Clarissa's opening vision,<sup>167</sup> is also one of all that Septimus had originally set out to fight for when he enlisted: it is a vision of pastoral England (for Septimus has little concept of Britain). Rezia returns in pastoral vein to those places where Septimus has lain wishing for death since his return to London.<sup>168</sup>

Yet this vision is interrupted by the 'large outline of [Holmes'] body dark against the window' (*MD* 144). Holmes's hole indicates Septimus's absence, indicates visually Septimus's vanishing point.<sup>169</sup> This black hole threatens to swallow up Rezia's pastoral vision and Woolf's abrupt closure of this scene, 'So that was Dr. Holmes' leaves little room for escape. This image of Holmes's threat yet again secures the affinity between Rezia and Septimus by reinforcing the allusions in the text at that point to Plato's caves. Earlier, lying on the sofa, Septimus had watched the sun's light and shadows playing on the walls of the room (*MD* 135, 139). These images like Holmes's black hole recall the shadows in Plato's cave.<sup>170</sup> In facing the sun and finally escaping the cave/room Septimus liberates himself and enters the 'real' world of Platonic ideals.

When conducting his suicide Septimus believed that Rezia 'was with him'. His belief is born out in the following paragraph, when, 'Rezia ran to the window, she saw; she understood' (*MD* 143). Rezia is 'with him' because she sees, because she understands, so that Mrs. Filmer's concern that 'she must not see him' is not only belated but also darkly comical (*MD* 143). Rezia at the window has already seen the mangled body of her husband and sees, that is to say understands, his suicide. That understanding is relayed to the reader through what Rezia sees in her vision just when

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<sup>167</sup> Compare, 'It seemed to her as she drank the sweet stuff that she was opening long windows, stepping out into some garden. But where? The clock was striking – one, two, three: how sensible the sound was; compared with all this thumping and whispering' with, 'What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air...  
...an indescribable pause; a suspense ... before Big Ben strikes. There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. Such fools we are, she thought....' (*MD* 143, 35-36).

<sup>168</sup> Compare Rezia's sensation of running 'on to some hill, somewhere near the sea, for there were ships, gulls, butterflies; they sat on a cliff. In London, too, there they sat, and, half dreaming, came to her through the bedroom door, rain falling, whisperings, stirrings among dry corn, the caress of the sea, as it seemed to her, hollowing them in its arched shell and murmuring to her laid on shore, strewn she felt, like flying flowers over some tomb' and Septimus's 'visions. He was drowned, he used to say, and lying on a cliff with the gulls screaming over him. He would look over the edge of the sofa down into the sea. Or he was hearing music' or his sense that '[h]e lay very high, on the back of the world. The earth thrilled beneath him. Red flowers grew through his flesh; their stiff leaves rustled by his head' (*MD* 143-144, 136, 83).

<sup>169</sup> As opposed to 'Holmes's homes' (*MD* 104).

Mrs. Filmer is 'flapping' about what Rezia should not see. Thus, Holmes's hole in her vision through the window represents for Rezia the same consuming threat that the man himself represented for Septimus in life. The return of this threat obscures both the reality and the restorative symbolism inherent in Septimus death. Rezia's is denied sight of both her husband's body and that which moved his spirit. They are blanked out by or swallowed up in Holmes's hole.

Although there is little linguistic allusion here, if we return to Eliot and Conrad as our foils we find illumination through a comparison of endings. Were we to say that Rezia's 'seeing' and 'understanding' are akin to Eliot's 'Shantih shantih shantih' we would have to acknowledge that hers is a 'peace which passeth all understanding' under threat. Whereas Eliot's 'ruins' finally seem bearable if inevitable, Holmes's presence implies that shoring fragments is not enough in the face of ruin. Conrad's ending compares more closely:

The offing was barred by a black bank of clouds, and the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed sombre under an overcast sky – seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness. (HD 148)

The heavens do not fall on Marlow when he lies, despite his own sense that there is 'a taint of death, a flavour of mortality in lies, - which is exactly what I hate and detest in the world' (HD 79). However, the skies glower at the end of his tale, warning the reader not to be drawn in by Marlow's own 'gorgeous eloquence', not to forget his mortality in lying. Marlow's lie is not a saving lie and death catches up with everyone. The heavens do not fall on Marlow because the heavens are absent. All that is left is the mundane and the mundane is absolutely terrifying: 'that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose' (HD 137). Mundane reality, the hell of other people, the nightmares we chose to be loyal to, these are the darkness at the end of Conrad's novella and in the outline of Holmes against the window. Rezia does fulfil the role of healing quester momentarily, then, but the restoration she affects is no more than a flicker rapidly quenched by the presence of Holmes.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Cf. Plato: 'The Simile of the Caves', *The Republic*, Part VII: section 7 (Book VII) trans. H.D.P. Lee, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1963. pp.278-286.

<sup>171</sup> 'We live in the flicker ... But darkness was here yesterday.' (HD 50).

There is one more narrative strand we may consider in terms of the quest but it is one that radically changes the constituent elements. The narrative strand is the relationship between Clarissa and Elizabeth. In the prior discussion we found it was a female character that came closest to affecting the role of healing quester in relation to Septimus. In the case of Clarissa and Elizabeth all the main protagonists are female. The change of sex indicates a change in typological narrative too. Rather than using the male quest narrative of the Fisher King Woolf turns to classical literature and casts Clarissa, Elizabeth and Miss Kilman in the roles of Ceres, Proserpine and Pluto respectively. The significance of their narrative mirrors that of the Fisher King's as analysed by Weston and incorporated into *The Waste Land* by Eliot. Both narratives stem from myths of fertility and have rites of fertility attached to them. The significance of the roles for fertility remains the same. Both Proserpine and the Fisher King are in the clutches of death. Ceres and the quester must find Proserpine and the Fisher King, respectively, in order that life be restored to death's prisoners and fertility restored to the land. What does change is the relationship between the protagonists. The narrative is no longer homosocial but female and familial.

Woolf's recasting of the quest narrative as female and familial results from her continuing development of this narrative form in her own fiction from *The Voyage Out* on. Neuman's discussion of this development falters somewhat because it is tied in so specifically with 'Heart of Darkness'. Such a discussion necessarily precludes variant applications of quest narrative and the nuances that arise from those applications.<sup>172</sup> A wider application of quest narrative sees a development from the failure of masculine plots in their transposition on to female protagonists in *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day*, through to the variant forms evident in *Mrs Dalloway*.<sup>173</sup> Essential to this development is *Jacob's Room* which may be thought of in terms of another quest, that of Isis and Osiris.<sup>174</sup> Like Isis the narrator seeks out the parts that speak of the whole in an attempt to recreate the lost love and give him life again. Considered in this light the process reflects Woolf's own quest at that time for a revitalized narrative technique, one in which things stand in for (with the possibility of recreating) the presence that is absent. Leonard Woolf on reading the finished text

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<sup>172</sup> Pace Neuman who indicates the boundaries of her discussion and works well within them. However, what is of interest for *this* discussion appears right at Neuman's boundaries.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. Neuman. p.64.

<sup>174</sup> A text unmentioned in Neuman's article.

described the characters as 'ghosts ... puppets, moved hither & thither by fate.'<sup>175</sup> So her characters reflect the text itself, which Fry had discussed with Woolf in terms of wishing 'that a bronze body might somehow solidify beneath the gleams & lights'.<sup>176</sup> The romantic and familial aspects of the Isis and Osiris narrative and the active strength that the female narrator is able to appropriate in the application of that narrative paved the way for Woolf's use of Ceres in *Mrs Dalloway*.

Woolf feminises the Ceres narrative beyond its original terms by recasting Pluto in the form of Miss Kilman; her name is an obvious pun on Pluto's role as lord of the underworld. Rather than the implications of the role being simplified by this move, however, they become more various and complex as will become apparent. And for these and other implications of this paradigm to be seen we must turn now to look first at where and how the Ceres narrative operates in *Mrs Dalloway*. There is only one explicit reference to Ceres in the novel: a plaster cast in Mr. Brewer's garden that is 'smashed' by the 'prying and insidious ... fingers of the European War' (*MD* 96). The reference comes at the end of an explanation of Septimus's life prior to his enlistment and is immediately indicative of the cultural and social devastation the war caused. The plaster cast of Ceres symbolizes here not only fertility and growth but also a continuity of European culture, and, moreover the British domestication of that fertility and culture through the placement of a reproduction Ceres in a suburban garden.<sup>177</sup> Every aspect - fertility, culture, suburban domestication - is 'smashed' by the war. As a prolegomenon for the application of the Ceres narrative this symbolic image does not bode well and indeed the Ceres narrative as it is fitted to Clarissa, Elizabeth and Miss Kilman is not wholly positive.

Miss Kilman fulfils the role of Pluto in her desire to 'grasp' and 'clasp' Elizabeth, making her 'hers absolutely and for ever' (*MD* 130). Furthermore their final parting, in the Army and Navy Stores, involves a contrast between Miss Kilman's voracious appetite and Elizabeth's modest consumption, thus recalling Proserpine's partial consumption of the pomegranate. Elizabeth herself is implicitly related to Proserpine through the continual comparisons others make of her to spring flowers like hyacinths and lilies (which Proserpine was collecting when she was

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<sup>175</sup> Wednesday 26 July 1922. *DVW*:2 186.

<sup>176</sup> Monday 27 November 1922. *DVW*:2 214.

<sup>177</sup> There is a certain ironic punning implicit here in that the plaster cast Ceres is both a cheap reproduction but also a discredited deity of reproduction.

carried off by Pluto), as well as more general vegetation like poplars (*MD* 132).<sup>178</sup> Clarissa's association with Ceres is indicated by her maternal jealousy for Elizabeth and, more tacitly, her green dress.<sup>179</sup>

As elsewhere this narrative structure is enriched with linguistic allusions to 'Heart of Darkness'. Thus Miss Kilman's bald forehead recalls Kurtz's baldness, (*MD* 128; *HD* 108); her intense appetite and capacious mouth likewise recalls Kurtz's 'weirdly voracious' looking mouth, (*MD* 128-130; *HD* 123). Likewise Clarissa thinks of Miss Kilman in terms of 'the brute' whose hooves 'planted down in the depths of that leaf-encumbered forest' echoing Kurtz's term 'the brutes' applied to the natives of the Congolese forests, and Marlow's return of that term to describe Kurtz's attraction to them as 'the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts' (*MD* 41; *HD* 110, 132). These allusions are augmented by the similar patterns of relationships between the protagonists themselves. Thus, Clarissa and Miss Kilman are alike in their hatred of each other, both finding a powerful sense of life in their antagonism (cf. *MD* 124, 161).

Woolf's use of the Ceres narrative adds a third party to the Fisher King quest framework by splitting the character of the Fisher King between Miss Kilman and Elizabeth: Miss Kilman represents the barren king, Elizabeth represents the rejuvenated king. Combined with this the feminization of the narrative provides an apparent alternative to the sterile failures of the Fisher King narrative in 'Heart of Darkness' and *The Waste Land*. However, as the image of the smashed head of Ceres implies this alternative narrative of fertility and rejuvenation is also unsuccessful. Clarissa's sexuality and sexual 'failure' of Richard hardly make her a convincing embodiment of Ceres, the Goddess of fertility (*MD* 55ff.). Nor does she hear, as do Peter and Rezia, the 'bubbling burbling song' that 'streamed away in rivulets ... fertilising, leaving a damp stain', which echoes in its appearance and streaming the song of Arethusa to Ceres (*MD* 93). All this blurs her characterization as Ceres and emphasizes her similarities with Miss Kilman as Pluto. Elizabeth herself, once released from Miss Kilman, does not escape back into an innocent pastoral but immediately investigates those areas of London, the Strand and Victoria Street, that appear as landmarks of Eliot's *Waste Land* (*MD* 132ff.; *WLFS* 257-258). She

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<sup>178</sup> Interestingly the nymph Leuce was turned into a white poplar by Pluto having been his lover.

<sup>179</sup> Note that Miss Pole too wears a green dress and when Rezia has her vision at Septimus's death she runs through 'corn-fields' (*MD* 95, 143).

observes the business of the city as it is embodied by men who recall Marlow's audience aboard the *Nellie*.<sup>180</sup> In other words she enters a world that Eliot and Conrad had already undermined and that Woolf, in her fiction and non-fiction, was desirous to undermine. Momentarily Elizabeth seems able to transform this world of masculine and imperial culture, positing a 'republic of women' as her inheritance from the Dalloways, and including 'sisterhood' and 'motherhood' with the 'brotherhood of this uproar' (*MD* 134). However, her thought that her 'mother would not like her to be wandering off alone like this' indicates her inability to sustain an emancipated vision of the city so that in returning to Westminster she confirms the continuing power of that masculine and imperial culture (*MD* 135).

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<sup>180</sup> Compare 'people busy ... with thoughts of ships, of business, of law, of administration' with Marlow 'a seaman', the 'The Accountant', 'The Lawyer', and 'Director of Companies' (*MD* 133; HD 47-49).

## Woolf, Windows and the Aesthetic of Aperture

If Woolf's use of the quest narrative, as it is shaped in Eliot and Conrad, only indicates its failure when applied to women, as Neumann suggests, it seems that the alternative feminized quest narrative of Ceres fares little better. Woolf enacts a deconstructive process by which purposive narratives are dissipated through echoes, cross-references and failure to reach a satisfactory conclusion. This is in keeping with Woolf's critical stance toward fiction. For Woolf linear narrative could not do justice to her experience of the world. She shared with Conrad a scepticism of religion that found the Judeo-Christian narrative structure of purposive history inapplicable to the experiences of life. For Woolf this kind of narrative structure was doubly frustrating since she perceived it as inherently, and problematically, patriarchal. Despite Elizabeth's 'republic of women' Woolf felt that history, as it was written by men such as her father, did not provide an adequate account of, nor do justice to, women's lives. Her critique of this masculine form of history is crystallized in *A Room of One's Own* and more stridently in *Three Guineas* but already in *Mrs Dalloway* Woolf finds a way no longer simply to show its problems for fiction, as she had for example in *The Voyage Out*, but to circumvent its insistency through a new form of narrative construction.

Woolf's new form counterbalances her deconstruction and discarding of linear narrative with a mode of writing that attempts to present rather than represent her protagonists' moments of experience. 'Stream of consciousness' and 'free and indirect discourse' are the most obvious and most noted methods Woolf utilizes to this effect. However these alone do not fully account for the immediacy and sensory aspects of her new form. Nor does Woolf's much quoted discovery of her 'tunnelling process'.<sup>181</sup> In addition to these techniques Woolf refined what is referred to in Conrad as 'impressionism' (although Conrad's descriptive technique is already post-impressionist) to provide a visual prompt in keeping with the paintings of her sister and their visual precursors in Fauvism. Furthermore, this visual element takes on a metonymic quality as a signal for Woolf's aesthetic of fiction itself. This development in Woolf's fiction is best illustrated by her use of windows in the text of *Mrs Dalloway* and is demonstrable through an examination of four discernible types: the

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<sup>181</sup> Monday 15 October 1923. DVW:2 272. Cf. Thursday 30 August 1923. DVW:2 263.



blank window, the shop window, the window as a site of beauty and the window as a space to be traversed. Not that these types are mutually exclusive; in fact they are most interesting when hybrid.

The first type, the blank window, occurs most pointedly in the form of the car proceeding to Piccadilly with 'greatness ... seated within' (*MD* 44). By the second sentence of this section the 'face of the very greatest importance' has been erased so that 'there was nothing to be seen except a square of dove grey' (*MD* 43). The dove grey blind matches the dove grey of the car's upholstery and on another level reinforces the erasure of the face by its very blandness. This blandness is echoed in the description of the Prime Minister at Clarissa's party:

One couldn't laugh at him. He looked so ordinary. You might have stood him behind a counter and bought biscuits - poor chap, all rigged up in gold lace. And to be fair, as he went his rounds, first with Clarissa, then with Richard escorting him, he did it very well. He tried to look somebody. It was amusing to watch. Nobody looked at him. They just went on talking, yet it was perfectly plain that they all knew, felt to the marrow of their bones, this majesty passing; this symbol of what they all stood for, English society. (*MD* 159-160)

This trying to 'look *somebody*' only reinforces his indistinction, only when the Prime Minister is ushered out of sight does his presence become a matter of open interest and of actual significance. Returning to the car, the substitution of the grey blind for the face means that the person's presence is left to be signified by the car: the person becomes indistinguishable from the dove grey of the car. Similarly, when Clarissa goes into the room, contemplating Septimus's death, she notices the imprints of the Prime Minister and Lady Bruton on the chairs, their presence is indicated by what remains in their absence.

The blankness of the dove grey is continuously emphasised by the repetition of its 'drawn blinds' over the following pages. The punning of this is evident, particularly when we are told, 'now mystery had brushed them with her wing; they had heard the voice of authority; the spirit of religion was abroad with her eyes bandaged tight and her lips gaping wide. But nobody knew whose face had been seen' (*MD* 43). Religion comes in the form of Rumour and we are forced to reconfigure

Religion in this light. The blinded Religion represents not simply a churchgoing community but the 'spirit' of devotion to a numinous being whose absent presence is indicated by an unreadable object. This spirit is kindled through the stirrings of one's peers or neighbours. The irrationality of this faith is encouraged and figured by blindness. A blindness which entices one to draw a face or a conclusion: 'Was it the Prince of Wales's, the Queen's, the Prime Minister's? Whose face was it? Nobody knew' (*MD* 43). And indeed perhaps only the 'nobody', erased by the grey blind, who might later impersonate a 'somebody', can know.

Grey windows reappear with the same connotations at Westminster Abbey when Mr Fletcher attempts to pass Miss Kilman in the pew. The 'power' of Miss Kilman praying is counterpointed by the 'marbles, grey window panes, and accumulated treasures' of which Mr Fletcher is 'extremely proud' (*MD* 132). By association the term 'Religion' returns to church but burdened with the accretions of irrational blindness which it acquired on its flight through Piccadilly:

For thirty seconds all heads were inclined the same way - to the window. Choosing a pair of gloves - should they be to the elbow or above it, lemon or pale grey? - ladies stopped; when the sentence was finished something had happened. Something so trifling in single instances that no mathematical instrument, though capable of transmitting shocks in China, could register the vibration; yet in its fulness rather formidable and in its common appeal emotional. (*MD* 45)

We have already noted the 'vibrations' we as readers feel at Westminster Abbey. Here we find the vibrations changing the choice of glove colour. The choice of pale grey, at the end of the sentence indicates the response of the turned head, not only an immediate naming of colour seen but also a loyal response, to wear the colour of that 'greatness' passing.

The reverberation of the blinded window amongst window shoppers leads us on to our second group of windows: those of shops. Looking in firstly at Hatchards, Clarissa does see through the glass but even before she reads the lines from *Cymbeline* she is already 'dreaming' and 'trying to recover' something. In fact the term 'recover' implies that even as she is looking out and into the window her mind's

eye is casting back into the recesses of dreams. This movement in two directions, mirrored by the 'heat o' the sun' and 'winter's rages' under glass, finds a corollary in the 'well of tears' countered by 'perfectly upright and stoical bearing.' The window's transparency giving access to Shakespeare's text prompts a reflected transparency whereby Clarissa gains access to an understanding about herself and those about her 'who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist'. Clarissa's window-shopping seems less about being able to see through the glass to a desirable, material, commercial commodity than about seeing through the glass to a reflection of life (*MD* 39).

Another instance of window-shopping becoming shop-window-reflecting occurs in a recollection of Rezia's excursions with Septimus, recommended by Holmes:

They went to the Tower together; to the Victoria and Albert Museum; stood in the crowd to see the King open Parliament. And there were the shops - hat shops, dress shops, shops with leather bags in the window, where she would stand staring. But she must have a boy.

She must have a son like Septimus, she said. But nobody could be like Septimus; so gentle; so serious; so clever. Could she not read Shakespeare too? Was Shakespeare a difficult author? she asked. (*MD* 98)

Whilst Rezia's need for a son is separated grammatically from her window-shopping the two seem causally linked. Rezia's stare is as much at their own childless reflection as it is at the windows' contents. Rezia's continuous concern about how she and Septimus are perceived by others returns here in the shop window's reflection where she sees them as others can see them, noting with regret the absence of a third, son's, reflection. That Rezia's vision is akin to Clarissa's here is borne out by the reference to Shakespeare in the following paragraph. Rezia's desire to read Shakespeare is a desire to enter Septimus's world, to find a unity whose proof would be Septimus's replication, his reflection.

A final example of window-shopping as shop-window-reflecting may be taken from the incident of Richard Dalloway and Hugh Whitbread at the antiques shop (*MD* 116). Like his wife's, Richard Dalloway's thoughts open with a pastoral image which,

through consciousness of the objects behind glass, is transformed into a perception of 'wreckage'. Clarissa's 'perfectly upright and stoical bearing' petrifies into 'the lethargy of the old, stiff with the rigidity of the old' (the Jacobean mug he gazes at finds temporal affiliation with Shakespeare). Of all three reflections Clarissa's had been the most optimistic and here it is transformed, ossified. This 'looking in' robs Richard Dalloway of purposive language: he assents to follow Hugh into the shop although '[g]oodness knows he didn't want to go buying necklaces with Hugh.' Even when returning to Clarissa, buying her roses and holding her hand, his tongue is tied (*MD* 120). The lack of language, of a son, of something to be recovered, haunts the shop windows as much as a jug or a bag or a book.

That shopping was an increasingly popular pastime is indicated by the list of Rezia's diversions for Septimus. However Woolf undercuts the culture of consuming as leisure by depicting shop windows as points of entry back into the mind rather than as places of material desire and satisfaction. Any felt lack is not one that can be filled by the goods on display, and ironically the act of window-shopping as shop-window-reflecting only emphasises the inadequacy of the satisfaction of the goods displayed. Even the voyeurism of the *flâneur* is displaced by the need and shock of seeing and lacking in shop windows.

Turning to the window as a site of beauty, there is only one obvious passage in which this use of windows occurs: Where Peter Walsh walks through Bloomsbury to Clarissa's party:

Beauty anyhow. Not the crude beauty of the eye. It was not beauty pure and simple - Bedford Place leading into Russell Square. It was straightness and emptiness of course; the symmetry of a corridor; but it was also windows lit up, a piano, a gramophone sounding; a sense of pleasure-making hidden, but now and again emerging when, through the uncurtained window, the window left open, one saw parties sitting over tables, young people slowly circling, conversations between men and women, maids idly looking out (a strange comment theirs, when work was done), stockings drying on top ledges, a parrot, a few plants. Absorbing, mysterious, of infinite richness, this life.... And so on into the flare and glare. (*MD* 153)

The first few lines of this passage contain a muted dig at the visual arts, particularly Roger Fry's critical work, and Bell's theory of 'significant form'. '[B]eauty pure and simple', 'straightness', 'emptiness', 'symmetry' all recall phrases such as Fry's 'purely abstract rhythmical attraction of the line' and 'harmonious sequence of planes'.<sup>182</sup> As a critique of 'significant form' 'emptiness' becomes ironic, for 'significant form' was championed as giving a solidity equivalent to that of the represented object without recourse to the tricks of chiaroscuro and perspective. The suggestion here is that 'the infinity of the sphere ... reduced to half a dozen planes' empties or deflates the sphere rather than providing solidity.<sup>183</sup> Woolf, and Peter Walsh cannot help but get tangled up in the suggestive simile of a corridor, which has already brought beauty back from the abstract and into the representational.<sup>184</sup> The empty corridor suggests doors leading off it and an interior. Further on (a couple of paragraphs later) doors are repeatedly opened onto the street. However, just here, we are given windows rather than doors. Furthermore, the interior corridor becomes an exterior corridor with the windows giving only partial entry into the housed world.

Yet, having rejected the purity of abstract art the windows rapidly become frames for painterly images. We might even go so far as to claim the traces of an artistic genealogy: the first two social scenes recall the snapshot images of impressionists like Renoir; the second two images in their greater intimacy and interest in maids as well as mistresses recall Sickert (who prided himself, and who was admired by Woolf, as a *literary* painter);<sup>185</sup> the last three indicate Vanessa Bell as a visual source, through the feminine stockings, the brightly coloured parrot, the plant (a frequent object in Bell's still-lives), and the arbitrariness of each as a framed aesthetic object. We might also trace Woolf's own literary aesthetic through these objects in the same way. The social groups of the first two windows imply a clear narrative, which gives way to the intimate observations of people in the third and fourth frames. The last images are devoid of narrative implications, they exist as

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<sup>182</sup> Fry, Roger. 'On some Modern Drawings' *Transformations*, London: Chatto and Windus 1926. p.201; 'Plastic Colour' *Transformations*. p.218.

<sup>183</sup> Fry, Roger. 'Jean Marchand' *Vision and Design*, London: Chatto and Windus 1920. p.185.

<sup>184</sup> Fry was in fact always more sceptical of complete abstraction than Bell: '[Bell] also declared that representation of nature was entirely irrelevant ... and that a picture might be completely non-representative. This last view seemed to me always to go too far since any, even the slightest, suggestion of the third dimension in a picture must be due to some element of representation.' Fry, Roger. 'Retrospect' *Vision and Design*. p.195.

<sup>185</sup> Cf. Woolf, Virginia. 'Walter Sickert' *Collected Essays*, 4 vols. ed. Leonard Woolf, London: Hogarth Press 1966. vol. 2. pp.233-244.

objects in their own right to be considered aesthetically, disinterestedly, within the window's frame. Thus the narratives implied in the first two windows accord with the narrative drive of *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day*; the third and fourth frames correspond with *Jacob's Room* in their greater intimacy and emphasis on observation; the final frames indicate Woolf's disbandment of a narrative drive in favour of direct and apparently disinterested presentation of the thing itself as itself. This is not a complete negation of the epistemological urge, rather a new hermeneutic that requires the reader to suspend interpretation and stem narrative desire in order to create space for the thing to appear as itself.

Peter Walsh's gradual dissolution from the epistemological urge in relation to these framed images echoes Fry's own description of the 'value of the aesthetic emotion' in his 1920 'Retrospect', written to be included as a culmination of and response to the essays collected in *Vision and Design*:

.... [I]t is clearly infinitely removed from those ethical values to which Tolstoy would have confined it. It seems to be as remote from actual life and its practical utilities as the most useless mathematical theorem. One can only say that those who experience it feel it to have a peculiar quality of "reality" which makes it a matter of infinite importance in their lives. Any attempt I might make to explain this would probably land me in the depths of mysticism. On the edge of that gulf I stop.<sup>186</sup>

For Peter Walsh not only his visual response but his intellectual and imaginative responses are rarefied. By the end of the paragraph life's 'absorbing, mysterious' and 'infinite richness' has become 'the flare and glare.' Peter Walsh moves from description to (re)presentation, prompted by the aesthetic stimuli of window framed images.

Let us turn now to the final group of windows - those to be traversed. These last are the most important in that they have the possibility to be life changing not simply life illuminating. It may be no coincidence that the stockings on the window ledge give a tiny hint of this in the passage discussed above. The stockings drying on the top ledge presumably traverse the frame, hang out over it, even step out of it. This

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<sup>186</sup> Fry, Roger. 'Retrospect'. p.198-199.

being the case the fact that they are female garments is significant since inherent in Woolf's aim is the need to create a female mode of writing that can escape the framework of patriarchal narrative.

The first key passage for this discussion is that where Peter Walsh moves to the window having burst into tears in front of Clarissa (*MD* 67). Clarissa sees her own isolation represented by the 'desolate' Peter Walsh framed in the window (later her cry 'as of a sleeper' is echoed by Peter Walsh's 'death of the soul' when he wakes from his dream in Regent's Park). Here the window frame is transformed not into a picture frame but into a proscenium within which Peter Walsh is to act out an adventure. Clarissa is able to make use of this momentary theatrical space for cathartic effect. By setting Peter Walsh within this makeshift proscenium she can involve herself in his life and exhaust her desire without endangering herself, according to Aristotle's prescription.

The window frame is only traversed by an imagined voyage but the effect of the voyage is all the more important because of its fictiveness. This sudden and brief 'willing suspension of disbelief' drops Clarissa as audience back into a world of objects.<sup>187</sup> However even her return to the world of objects maintains for a while a fictional aspect, for the 'cloak', 'gloves', 'opera-glasses' are pretend objects, similes for her dress, thimble, scissors and needle. Having made this journey vicariously Clarissa is able to avoid the reality of adventure with Peter Walsh, averting intimacy through another female accoutrement, her daughter: "“Tell me,” he said, seizing her by the shoulders. “Are you happy, Clarissa? Does Richard - ” The door opened. “Here is my Elizabeth,”” (67).

The most obvious case of a window being traversed is Septimus Warren-Smith's suicide:

There remained only the window, the large Bloomsbury lodging-house window; the tiresome, the troublesome, and rather melodramatic business of opening the window and throwing himself out. It was their idea of tragedy, not his or Rezia's (for she was with him). Holmes and Bradshaw liked that sort of thing. (He sat on the sill.) But he would wait till the very last moment. He did not want to die. Life was good.

The sun was hot. Only human beings? Coming down the staircase opposite an old man stopped and stared at him. Holmes was at the door. "I'll give it you!" he cried, and flung himself vigorously, violently down on to Mrs. Filmer's area railings.

"The coward!" cried Dr. Holmes, bursting the door open. Rezia ran to the window, she saw; she understood ... She must be brave and drink something, he said ... It seemed to her as she drank the sweet stuff that she was opening long windows, stepping out into some garden. But where? ... "Let her sleep," said Dr. Holmes, feeling her pulse. She saw the large outline of his body dark against the window. So that was Dr. Holmes. (*MD* 143-144)

This passage contains a myriad of references to other window scenes stretching forward and back through the text. Septimus's distaste for melodrama and tragedy contrasts with Clarissa's brief drama with Peter Walsh in the proscenium of her drawing room's window frame. There Clarissa, even after her cathartic vision, speaks 'histrionically' when introducing Elizabeth (*MD* 67). The heat of the sun recalls not only Clarissa's meditation on the lines from *Cymbeline* but Septimus's own connection of the sun's heat with the car stopped outside Mulberry's window (*MD* 39, 43). The man in the window opposite is a clear parallel to the woman Clarissa watches through their windows (*MD* 126-127, 170). Rezia, stepping out through 'long windows', echoes Clarissa bursting out at Bourton (*MD* 35).

Septimus's suicide can be read as a refusal of art: a refusal to be framed, a refusal to conform to aesthetics. Despite, perhaps because of, the 'tiresome and troublesome ... business' of opening the window which undercuts the drama of the situation (Septimus does not consider throwing himself through the window pane) Septimus hurls himself onto the 'area railings' and thereby escapes the confinement of these parameters. He lies, like the stockings, traversing the boundary's edge. That his suicide is a rejection of art is born out by the platonic aspect of his actions. Earlier, lying on the sofa, Septimus had watched the sun's light and shadows playing on the walls of the room (*MD* 135, 139). These images are like the shadows in Plato's cave. In facing the sun and finally escaping the cave/room Septimus liberates himself and

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<sup>187</sup> Coleridge, S.T. 'from Biographia Literaria: XIV', *The Portable Coleridge*, ed. I.A. Richards,





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Charlestown Pond

by Vanessa Bell, c.1919. 63.5 x 67.5 cm.  
City Art Gallery, Sheffield.

enters the 'real' world of Platonic ideals. Thus Septimus's move toward the world of ideals is a rejection of art along Platonic lines. That is to say, art is no more than a representation of a re-presentation and therefore unreliable and dangerous because imitative. Septimus's violent union with 'real' objects as opposed to those fictions that haunt (and hunt) him is imaged in his impalement. Rezia we are told understands Septimus suicide and seeing Holmes against the window she recognises who he is. His silhouette is a black hole where her husband had been, on the window ledge. His silhouette guards the mouth of the platonic cave.

Lastly there is Clarissa's own window to be traversed: the scenes in which she watches out of her own window and in at another the 'strange' and 'fascinating' activities of an old woman alone. In the first passage in which Clarissa observes she remains unseen (*MD* 126-127). Like Hatchards's window the window opposite her own provides a space for reflection. But Clarissa is concurrently concerned with the activities of the old woman. The sensation of looking through one window and into another is akin to the pleasure and fascination of the kinetoscopes, or nickelodeons as they became known. The brief cinematic glimpses of a woman about her toilette engage Clarissa in a voyeurism of sorts. The separation of the two women embodied by their rooms is silent and spatial. Roger Fry in 'An Essay in Aesthetics' articulates the result of such framed vision. In cinema, or in a mirror imaging a street,

.... we become true spectators, not selecting what we will see, but seeing everything equally, and thereby we come to notice a number of appearances and relations of appearances, which would have escaped our vision before, owing to that perceptual economising by selection of what impressions we will assimilate ... The frame of the mirror ... [turns] the reflected scene from one that belongs to our actual life into one that belongs rather to the imaginative life.<sup>188</sup>

We may add to Fry's analysis that the transformation into 'true spectators' is facilitated by the lack of a responding gaze from the object of contemplation. This allows the spectator to lose self-consciousness in her gaze.

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Harmondsworth: Penguin 1978. p.518.

<sup>188</sup> Fry, Roger. 'An Essay in Aesthetics'. pp.12-13.

The need for Clarissa's gaze to be unselfconscious is underlined by her shock when she returns to look out of the window on hearing of Septimus's suicide (*MD* 170). The passage implies that when their gazes meet the old woman is as surprised as Clarissa, turning away under a returned gaze to go to bed. Clarissa too is more self-conscious than in the previous passage. Her awareness of the party in the room behind her is juxtaposed with a query as to whether the old lady can see her.

Clarissa approaches the curtained window expectantly, looking as much for her own reflection as for a view. Her idea of a 'dusky', 'solemn' sky is confounded not only by the gaze of her neighbour but also by the sky itself, which is 'ashen' and disturbed by clouds. The window does not hold the reassuring picture of self she had hoped for. The image is uncanny, and 'new'. The old lady frees Clarissa from her voyeurism by pulling down the blind, presenting a blank canvas on which to paint or project shadows. And then even the blank canvas is removed: with the extinction of the light it is not apparently clear whose house is plunged into darkness for the free running of the sentence consumes both women.

Clarissa's emotional detachment from Septimus's suicide is heightened by the growing noise around her (of clocks' striking and 'all this going on'). Her sense of affiliation with Septimus and her approval, contrasts with her own vicarious melodrama with Peter Walsh. Yet somehow, unexpectedly, like the surprise of a returned gaze and the fleeting expressions of the sky, she manages to traverse her window enter the blinding gulf of darkness signified by death, the 'extraordinary night' beyond the frame. Clarissa, like Mr Lucas in 'The Road from Colonus', does not sustain this traversal and transformation, and must return to her party. This excursion into darkness dissolves with 'the leaden circles' of time.

What these window moments indicate and illustrate is Woolf's interrogatory aesthetic engagement with narrative form. Just as Pound had excised many of the narrative passages originally contained in *The Waste Land*, Woolf limits her plot and alludes to purposive narratives only to display their failure in her own fiction. She implies that the framework of traditional narratives does not do justice to the experience of life and forces a predetermined vision of the subject represented. Even Conrad's frame narrator, whose powers of deconstruction have been noted here and by others, still acts as a frame, encodes for the reader the meaning of the subject as text. To be satisfied with such representation is to be satisfied with the screen in Plato's cave, Woolf suggests. Fiction, she claims, requires 'no plot, no comedy, no

tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style' in order to be true to life.<sup>189</sup> Window frames, like books, can either contain and separate the observed from the observer, or they can be traversed.

Moreover, Woolf tacitly links the former type of representation with a specifically theological patriarchy. *Mrs Dalloway* undermines the spiritual motivation inherent in the original quest narratives by refusing any satisfaction of the quest, through confusion and diffusion of roles. And more generally her deconstruction of purposive linear narrative makes the same refusal of the Judeo-Christian history that we saw operating in *Nostramo*. This refusal becomes a critique through her characterization of Miss Kilman, Bradshaw, Rumour and Religion. Their violence and ignorance echoes the violence and ignorance of imperialism as it is portrayed by Marlow in 'Heart of Darkness', so that through allusion within and beyond the text the purveyors of religion and their methods are linked to all that Woolf is suspicious of in society more generally. Religion, in other words, becomes a signifier of violence and ignorance; violence and ignorance signifiers for religious modes of thinking.<sup>190</sup> Clarissa's belief in nothing is posited as the alternative, which frees activity from a determining, framing narrative of dutiful, pious action, and allows for ethical and aesthetic response to the real according to the demands of the real.

The possibility of belief in nothing and an untrammelled response to the real is symbolised by the traversable window. Of course it is clear that traversing the window and escaping Plato's cave can be fatal: Septimus is literally impaled on the reality beyond his window frame. What is required is the ability to draw one's foot back from the edge, as both Marlow and Clarissa are able to do. They cannot *realize* the world as both Septimus and Kurtz do, in their different ways, but they see that possibility.

Woolf recognizes this problem for fiction too. She refrains from completely annihilating fictional narrative with techniques such as Stein's automatic writing, but she does allow that boundary to be visible. What she presents in prose is closest in style to Eliot and Pound's poetic technique in *The Waste Land* and the cinematic techniques of early 1920s French Dadas such as Cocteau. Just as Jean Vigo, in his

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<sup>189</sup> Woolf, Virginia. 'Modern Fiction', *The Common Reader*. p.149.

<sup>190</sup> Marlow's comment that what 'redeems [the conquest of the earth] is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea - something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to' is pertinent here, implying the need for a religious and transcendent framework for action and justification (HD 52).



1929-30 film, *Concerning Nice*, utilized Dada film techniques to present a picture of Nice that gains coherence through the accumulation of repetitious cuts, so Woolf draws upon apparently arbitrary fragments of imagined life and literary allusion abstracting and interleaving them repetitiously.<sup>191</sup> This accumulation is mosaic-like in that what these fragments depict only becomes clear at a (temporal rather than spatial) distance.<sup>192</sup> What result are apertures, instants prior to interpretation and understanding, which momentarily present metonymically the reality beyond their frame.

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<sup>191</sup> Cf. Woolf's diary entry for Tuesday 19 June 1923: 'its only the old argument that character is dissipated into shreds now: the old post-Dostoevsky argument. I daresay its true, however, that I haven't that 'reality' gift. I insubstantise, wilfully to some extent, distrusting reality – its cheapness. But to get further.' *DVW*:2 248.

<sup>192</sup> Woolf's mosaic-like results no doubt borrow in part from her sister's characterization of her own painting technique: 'I am trying to paint as if I were mosaicing, not by painting spots, but by considering the picture as patches.' Vanessa Bell to Roger Fry, 5 June 1912, (King's College, Cambridge). Qtd. in Spalding, Frances. *Vanessa Bell*, London: Phoenix 1996. p.105.

## The Aesthetic of Aperture: Dada and Imagism

Woolf's use of moments of aperture in narrative finds unlikely correspondence with the work of Dadas and Imagists. Their use of this aesthetic mode whilst producing quite dissimilar works came out of similar motivations for a purification of language. So far we have focused on problems in narrative; however, as is evident in the word play of 'The End of the Tether', for example, language is crucial to these narrative problems. It is worth then looking in closer detail at the work of the Dadas and Imagists before returning to Conrad's later fiction and his own uses of the moment of aperture. For not only do the works of these groups enrich our understanding of Woolf's innovations, they alert us to some of the tropes that operate in Conrad's later fiction that are easily missed, or dismissed.

In order to explore the aesthetics of the Dadas and Imagists it is worth returning briefly to Emig and the two responses to the fragmentation of language and meaning he discerns in Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Emig understands this fragmentation as a severance of the sign from its referent. The sign no longer reaches its referent: the referent is 'deceived' of reference. A gap is evident between the sign and its referent and this gap is the problem for communication. One response is that of the magician. The magician attempts to reconcile the sign to its referent. This inevitably requires further signs to bridge the gap between the original sign and its referent. Thus a sequence of infinite deferral is established whereby each new sign requires for itself reconciliation with the referent through the production of further bridging signs. The other response is that of the trickster. The trickster accepts that the gap is unbridgeable and plays in the possibilities of the gap. Neither response provides a stable relationship between the sign and its referent. In fact stability can only be attained through linguistic self-sufficiency. The sign no longer has the edenic power to attain (or maintain) its referent. It must rely completely on its context for coherence. The sign can only function in relation to other signs not in relation to anything beyond its textual domain.<sup>193</sup>

Furthermore since signs are thus considered unable to signify beyond the frame of the artwork they are no longer able to make any statement of value applicable outside their frame. That is to say they can neither meaningfully evaluate

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<sup>193</sup> Emig, p.88ff.

anything outside their frame, nor can they be used as interpretative tools for understanding the world beyond that frame. For the Imagists this led to a reductive style in which the presentation (not, note, the *representation*) of a single image was all. Thus Jones describes 'Oread', by H.D.:

no similes ... no symbols ... no moralizing tone ... no reflection ... no striving for the spiritual: no fixed metre or rhyme ... no narrative ... no vagueness of abstractions ... no form but the poem itself.<sup>194</sup>

Interest in classicism had been recently revitalised with new editions of *The Greek Anthology*, such as Lord Neaves translation, published by Blackwood in 1897. The Imagists were drawn to at least two aspects of classical culture: they admired the inscriptive style and myopic frame of classical lyrics, that is to say the interest in the precise object intensely viewed, for instance, in the fragments of Sappho; and they sympathized with a philosophical classicism that acknowledged the finiteness of man and his creativity, in opposition to the romantic idealism and transcendence that lurked in much late nineteenth century poetry.<sup>195</sup> From the basis of a hard classical style the Imagists not only attempted some form of reconciliation, between sign and referent, the magician's response, but also, as tricksters, exploited the possibilities created by the severance. Imagism renounced the possibilities for transformation and transcendence in language, and in so doing reduced language's potential in one area, and yet developed with intensity those potentials left open to them. The Imagists restrained their language in an attempt to avert the invasion of excess meaning through simile and metaphor. The ideal was to *present* a poetic image, nothing more: 'It is better to produce one Image in a lifetime than to produce voluminous works', claimed Ezra Pound in 'A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste' (the title itself speaks of the negatively defined aspect of Imagism).<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> *Imagist Poetry*. p.31.

<sup>195</sup> Whilst it was the hard graphic style of classical poetry that appealed to (proto) Imagists such as Pound and Hulme, H.D., whose poetry conforms more than most to Pound's strictures, was also attracted to the lyrically amorous elements in Sappho and other classical love poetry. It is this peculiar mix of influences – Pound and Sappho – which gives rise to her later, lengthier, poetry.

<sup>196</sup> Pound, Ezra. 'A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste' (1913). *Imagist Poetry*. p.130.

For Dada the search for new forms in art was not only a quest but also, with the outbreak of war, a protest as Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia has pointed out.<sup>197</sup> As a protest Dada initially desired and creatively enacted destruction: 'we must smash the toys of these gentlemen said the dadaists in order that the lousy materialists can recognize on the ruins what is essential.'<sup>198</sup> The 'toys of these gentlemen' were the 'lady's shanks cast in marble or bronze', the 'landscape prepared with vinegar and oil', the 'graceful garland' to which 'man clings like a drowning creature.'<sup>199</sup> This destruction was and was not that of a petulant child, tearing at his Sunday suit because he wants to go out and play. Arp continues to explain that, 'dada wanted to destroy the rationalist swindle for man and incorporate him again humbly in nature. dada wanted to change the perceptible world of man today into a pious senseless world without reason.'<sup>200</sup> Destruction was to be revolutionary and was to lead to rejuvenation, quite specifically, in cultural terms: to return to the childhood of European culture and to take inspiration from contemporary, particularly African, 'primitive' cultures.

There was something in the air of ageing Europe that demanded an attempt, by a last effort of the will ... to return to the old intuitive possibilities, from which, it was realized, the various styles had emanated hundreds of years ago.<sup>201</sup>

Thus the inability to make any statement of value applicable outside the sphere of the work of art led the Dadas in the opposite direction. Dada expanded language, stretched meaning to breaking point, invented new words and new syntax: 'No "secondhand" words could be used since they had become mere commodities. Literary language had to be "invented all over again," just as painters were inventing new visual languages for themselves.'<sup>202</sup> The Dadas forced new relationships between signs rather than inhibiting them as the Imagists did.

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<sup>197</sup> Buffet-Picabia, Gabrielle. 'Arthur Craven and American Dada' (1938). Motherwell. p.13.

<sup>198</sup> Arp, Hans. 'Notes from a Dada Diary (1932). Motherwell. p.222.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid. p.222.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid. p.222.

<sup>201</sup> Huelsenbeck, Richard. 'En Avant Dada: A History of Dadaism' (1920). p.32.

<sup>202</sup> Elderfield, J. 'Introduction' *Fl* xxviii.



When Frank Kermode writes about the secrecy of narrative in *The Genesis of Secrecy* he identifies two types: those secrets that can be unlocked, that is to say those which provide a key such as allegory, symbolism or emblamatism; and those that are inherently mysterious, i.e. *mysterion*.<sup>203</sup> Imagism by its reduction of the image to the smallest possible form overtly communicates that image directly, yet covertly conceals any means for unlocking the image such as emotion, morality, subjective reaction: the poets 'refuse to give away the secret of their creation in their attempt to be impersonal and to refrain from the narrative'.<sup>204</sup> Imagist language verges on the symbolic in its metonymy; however as Pound points out, '[t]he symbolist's *symbols* have a fixed value, like numbers in arithmetic, like 1, 2 and 7. The imagist's images have a variable significance like the signs a, b, and x in algebra'.<sup>205</sup> Impoverished through lack of ornament (Pound wrote to Harriet Monroe in January 1915 that the language of poetry should not depart from speech 'save by a heightened intensity (i.e. *simplicity*)' (my italics)), the language of Imagism is at once forced to acknowledge its finitude and at the same time to contain 'heaven in ordinary'.<sup>206</sup>

The way in which Imagism stretches language to its limits bears similarity to the opacity of parable. Just as the Imagist's image has variable significance, according to Pound, so too parables deny their reader a comprehensive codification, such as one finds in allegory, but simultaneously invite and repulse interpretation of their various elements. Thus, the revelatory and reticent nature of Imagist poetry aligns it with parables and *mysterion*. Furthermore, the critical language implemented to discuss parables is synonymous with that used for Imagism, as much as the texts are themselves. Indeed when John Crossan seeks to expand Gunther Bornkamm's point that, 'the parables are the preaching itself' he recalls to Pound's 'the image itself is the speech'.<sup>207</sup> When Sally McFague speaks of the ordinary and extraordinary 'related intricately *within* the confines of the parable', or when she says that, 'the setting is

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<sup>203</sup> Kermode, Frank. *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 1979. Cf. Chapter Two, 'Hoti's Business: Why are Narratives Obscure?' pp.23-47.

<sup>204</sup> Emig, p.151.

<sup>205</sup> Pound, Ezra. 'Vorticism', in *Fortnightly Review*, September 1914. p.464. Qtd in *Imagist Poetry*. p.21.

<sup>206</sup> *Imagist Poetry*. p.141; Herbert, George. 'Prayer (I)' line 11. *George Herbert and the Seventeenth Century Religious Poets*, ed. Mario A. Di Cesare, New York: W.W. Norton and Company 1978. p.22.

<sup>207</sup> Crossan, D. *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus*, New York: Harper and Row 1973. p.21; Pound, Ezra. 'Vorticism', in *Fortnightly Review*, September 1914. p.466. Qtd in *Imagist Poetry*. p.33.

worldly but the orientation or “frame” of the story is radical’, or that, ‘what *counts* ... is not extricating an abstract concept but precisely the opposite, delving into the details of the story itself’, her statements are easily transposed to criticism of Imagism, whose poetry entices the reader in to extrapolate from within, creating new realities in each text.<sup>208</sup>

H.D.'s 'The Pool' exemplifies this technique while at the same time describing the very sensation of encountering the *mysterion*:

Are you alive?  
I touch you.  
You quiver like a sea-fish.  
I cover you with my net.  
What are you – banded one?<sup>209</sup>

Every line directs itself to the 'you' or object. The poem opens and closes with a question whilst the object's only action is surrounded by the two actions of the speaker. Note here then the chiasmic structure, which not only focuses the reader's attention on the object but creates a sensation of approach and recession. The speaker's actions are significant: the first implies an attempt at sensory cognition, the second an attempt to control. This second, in following the action of the object, indicates a response on the speaker's part to that action. Yet this attempt to control fails to illuminate so that the last question is more basic than the first: the verb - to be - is used as an auxiliary in the first line, in the last it is the main verb.

The simile of 'sea-fish' is significant too. The defining 'sea' indicates the greatest freedom available to fish (as opposed to the greater boundary limits of fresh water). Thus the net is not simply an appropriate response to the fish simile but also to the great freedom of the sea, which threatens in its boundlessness. Thus the bands about the object describe both appearance and boundness in the speaker's net.

Dembo explains that the imagist poem is ‘not simply a vehicle for transcribing a sensation but represents part of the sensation itself - ... it is an idealized re-creation

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<sup>208</sup> McFague, S. *Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1975. pp.13, 15.

<sup>209</sup> Doolittle, Hilda. (H.D.) *Selected Poems*, ed. Louis L. Martz, Manchester: Carcanet 1989. pp.17.

of a sensation ... which has come to be a thing-in-itself.'<sup>210</sup> In 'The Pool' the poet describes the reader's response in her own response to the object - an inability to control or elicit meaning beyond the thing itself presented within the bands of form placed upon it. The poem invites interpretation and repels it. The reader is left to enter into that repulsion aware that the net of interpretation can neither contain nor elicit the object's being other than as it presents itself.

Dada art, too, resembles Kermode's *mysterion*, in hinting at meaningful intent but refusing its audience the key to comprehension. The abstraction of images, the dissolution of syntax and words, in Dada, might be read critically as no more than an extreme case of that same solipsism which modernism professed to disdain. In certain instances this is the case in so far as the Dadas mocked and parodied that solipsism, as we find in the manifestoes of Tzara and the ready-mades of Duchamp: these manifestoes and ready-mades demand that they are received as whatever their authors name them, in accordance with the author's wholly subjective interpretation, whether or not they appear to bear any relation to their dictated appellation and interpretation. Yet even in these cases the apparent lack of meaningfulness in itself communicates by way of mockery, parody and confrontation. Furthermore, Dada works were intended to create their own inherent systems, disjunct from perceived reality:

The materials are not to be used logically in their objective relationships, but only within the logic of the work of art. The more intensively the work of art destroys rational objective logic, the greater become the possibilities of artistic building.<sup>211</sup>

The results, as may be predicted from Schwitters's statement, were expansive. In Zurich, particularly, the Dadas were hyper-productive, as, for example, in their nightly soirees at the Cabaret Voltaire. These evenings provided the bones, or fragments of a new *Gesamtkunstwerk*, envisaged by Hugo Ball: music, art, dance, recitation, and song. Marcel Janco produced masks, inspired by African sculpture, that liberated their wearers on stage, encouraging them to take upon themselves the

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<sup>210</sup> Dembo, L.S. *Conceptions of Reality in Modern American Poetry*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press 1966. p.12.

<sup>211</sup> Schwitters, Kurt. 'Merz' (1920). Motherwell. p.62.

nature implied in the masks' features.<sup>212</sup> These masks, in one sense implied a break from nature with their highly stylized features and decorations, yet in that they broke with a cultural tradition of naturalism in preference for a more 'primitive' essentialist form they represented a return to what were perceived by Zurich Dadas as more natural forms of art.<sup>213</sup>

The sound poems of Ball, Arp and Huelsenbeck may be understood similarly. Huelsenbeck's 'Negro Poems' were recited alongside original African poetry, transcribed by Huelsenbeck from the recollections of the Cabaret's landlord, Jan Ephraim, who had heard such poetry at first hand. Importantly Huelsenbeck refused to 'correct' his own 'Negro Poems' according to Ephraim's advice on authenticity.<sup>214</sup> Thus Huelsenbeck's primitivism is not based on a desire for anthropological authenticity, to reproduce an artefact for intellectual consideration, but on an appropriation and emulation of a cultural style, in this case 'Negro poetry', for the purpose of pure expression.

Like Janco's masks the sound poems recited in the Cabaret Voltaire were intended as unmediated (natural) expressions that would stir in the audience unmediated (natural) responses. Their 'authenticity' came from the fact that they were not in fact reproductions of primitive works. And, just as Janco also drew on Futurist and Cubist styles and used modern materials such as shiny paper, so too the sound poems when printed utilized a variety of typefaces and the Futurist methods of 'parole in libertà' to create a highly stylized word image.<sup>215</sup> 'We have now driven the plasticity of the word to the point where it can scarcely be equaled. We achieved this at the expense of the rational, logically constructed sentence....' Ball proclaimed, (18 June 1916. *Fl* 67).

A similar tension between natural and cultivated forms can be found in Dada uses of chance. Various Dada artists are well known for their reliance on chance for

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<sup>212</sup> 24 May 1916. *Fl* 64.

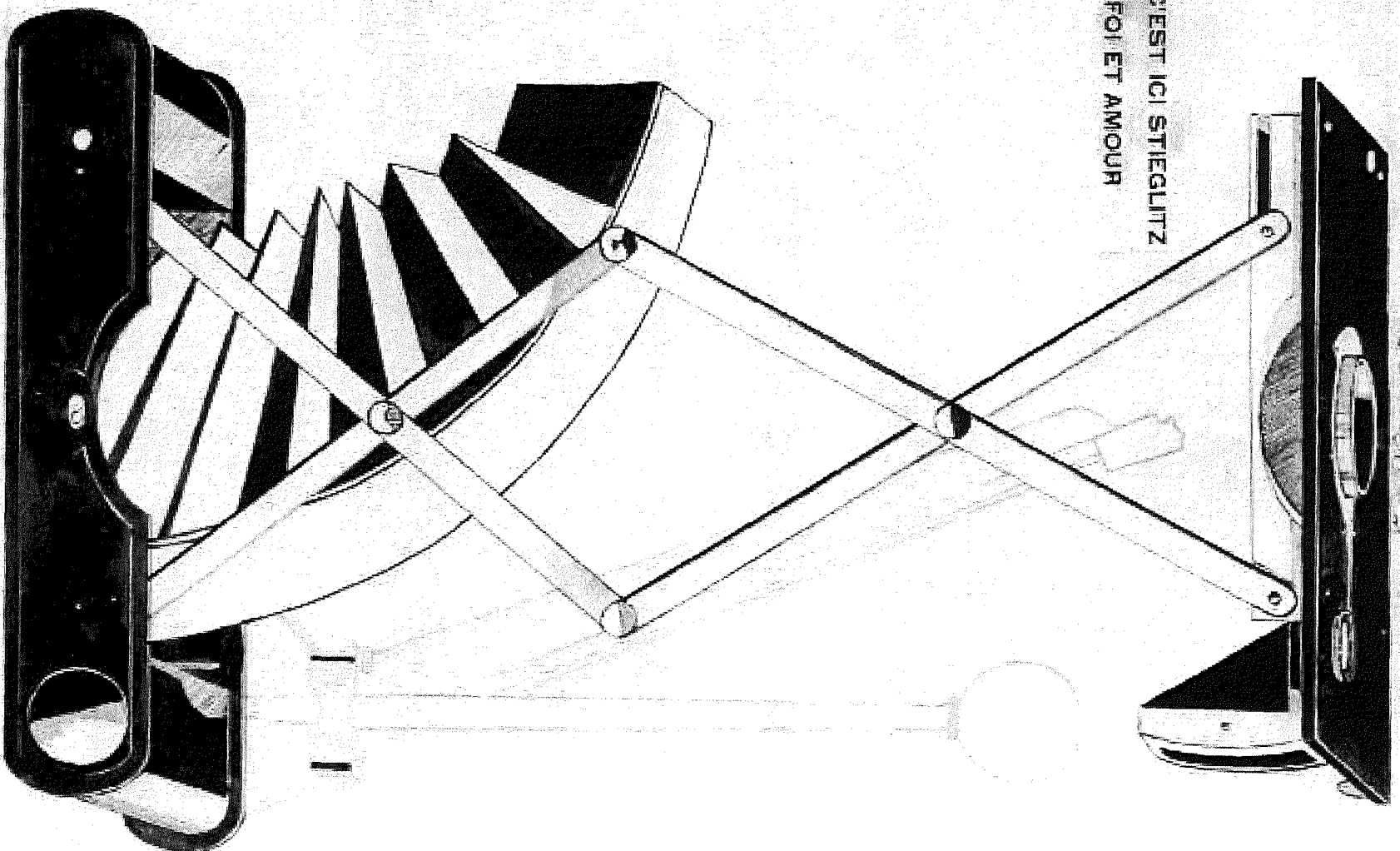
<sup>213</sup> Cf. Arp, Hans. 'Notes from a Dada Diary' (1932). p.223.

<sup>214</sup> '... when I recited some Negro poems that I had made up myself, he motioned for me to join him outside.

"They sound very good," he said, "but unfortunately they're not Negro poems. I spent a good part of my life among Negroes, and the songs they sing are very different from the ones you just recited." He was one of those people who takes things literally, and retain them verbatim.' Huelsenbeck, Richard. *Memoirs of a Dada Drummer*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel, London: University of California Press 1991. p.9.

STIEGLITZ

ICI, C'EST ICI STIEGLITZ  
FOI ET AMOUR



material, inspiration and even the work of art itself. Hans Arp used chance in the construction of his collages by dropping pieces of paper onto the picture base. To begin with Arp and his wife, Sophie Tauber, did their best to minimize human involvement – discarding scissors for a paper cutter – but as they continued their work they began to favour the forms of paper torn by hand, as more open to the laws of chance. It should be noted, however, that Arp did not stick the paper pieces exactly as they fell but adjusted their angles as he thought fit without altering their basic specific position on the picture base.<sup>216</sup>

For Arp, Chance was an aid, not a self-sufficient method as is demonstrated by the origins of chance in Arp's work. Arp, dissatisfied with a painting tore it up and threw the pieces on the floor of his room as he left. On returning sometime later he found the pieces had fallen in such a way as to form exactly that expression he had laboured earlier to produce. The pieces, then, had fallen by chance but they were in themselves pieces of a consciously produced creative work, albeit arbitrarily fragmented. Similarly in his poetry Arp utilized newsprint that he chanced upon, inserting it into his own compositions, and additionally including and elaborating on chance printing errors in their publication.

Duchamp is perhaps the best known of the Dadas for his work with chance, and of his ready-mades his 'fountain' is the most famous. A urinal was upended, signed R. Mutt and entered for exhibition in the New York *Salon des Indépendents* in 1917. The object, as a mass-produced object of a community culture, is intended to serve the 'calls of nature' and yet as intended for exhibition this functionality is rendered obsolete. An additional tension exists in the title, which invites expectations of either pastoral representation or a stylized monumental structure fit for the cultivated garden or the cultured metropolis. The latter was particularly encouraged by Duchamp, when he had Stieglitz photograph the object in a niche intended for a Buddha. The object itself obviously confounds either expectation and challenges the viewer to work out a meaningful relationship between object, title, and context.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Note that these visual forms were made possible through mechanical advances in printing methods and were stimulated by the sophisticated metropolitan use of typeface in Art Nouveau, in contrast with their content.

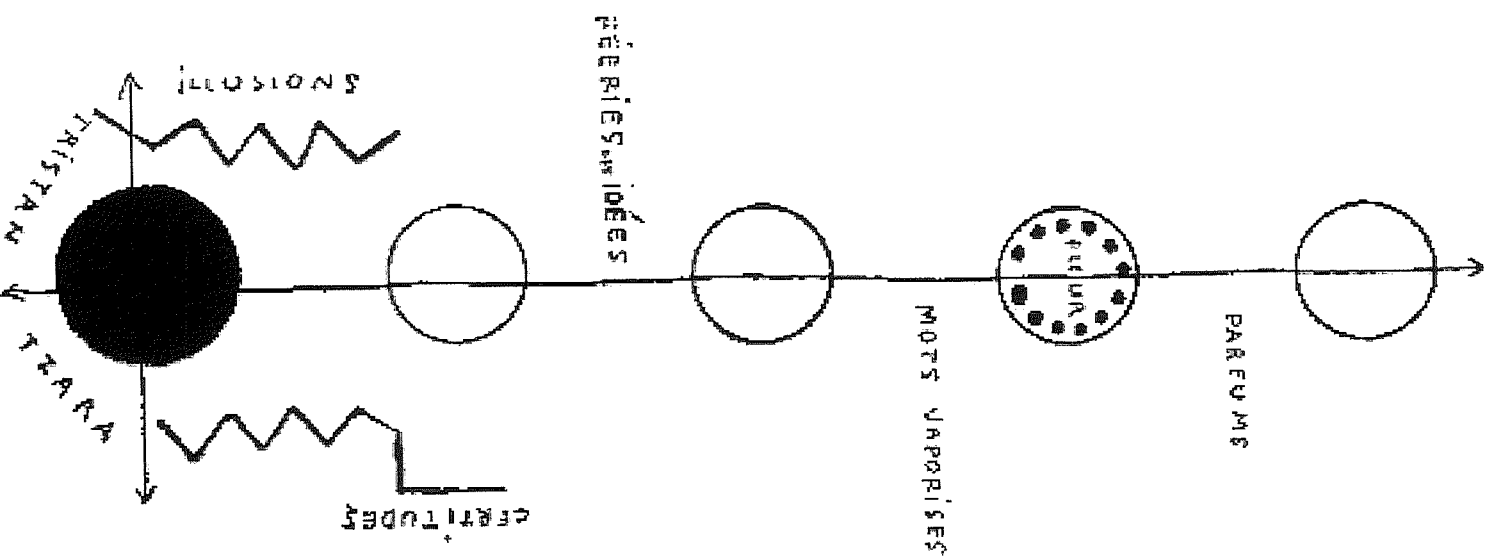
<sup>216</sup> Richter, Hans. *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*, London: Thames and Hudson 1997. p.60.

<sup>217</sup> In fact the original was not exhibited so that later reproductions and miniatures further destabilize notions of originality, authenticity and what Benjamin calls the 'aura' of the work of art.

# Portrait de TRISTAN TZARA

par

## FRANCIS PICABIA



The challenge to find meaning in the Dada work of art was complicated in those works that included both visual and verbal elements, exemplified by Duchamp's text 'The', of 1915, in which a sensible grammar is encased in a nonsensical content, confused further by the substitution of asterisks for the definite article. Picabia's machine portraits propose humans in their titles yet machines in their content. This anomaly is frequently complicated by the inclusion of words in the visual image. These words appear as though they might be instructions for the mechanical diagram or interpretative keys to elucidate the presentation of a machine with the title of a human. On closer inspection the words might or might not have relevance to the person named in the title but shed no light on why they have been presented in the manner of a mechanical diagram. The titles imply a two dimensional image of a three dimensional person, the images imply a three dimensional construction from a two dimensional diagram, the words provide no resolution to either of the implications nor to the inconsistency of title and image. Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia wrote of such pieces,

These titles are exceedingly mysterious for anyone who hopes to find in them any key to reality. The whole develops in an imaginary realm, where the relations between words and forms have no objective, representational intent, but recreate among themselves their own intrinsic relations.<sup>218</sup>

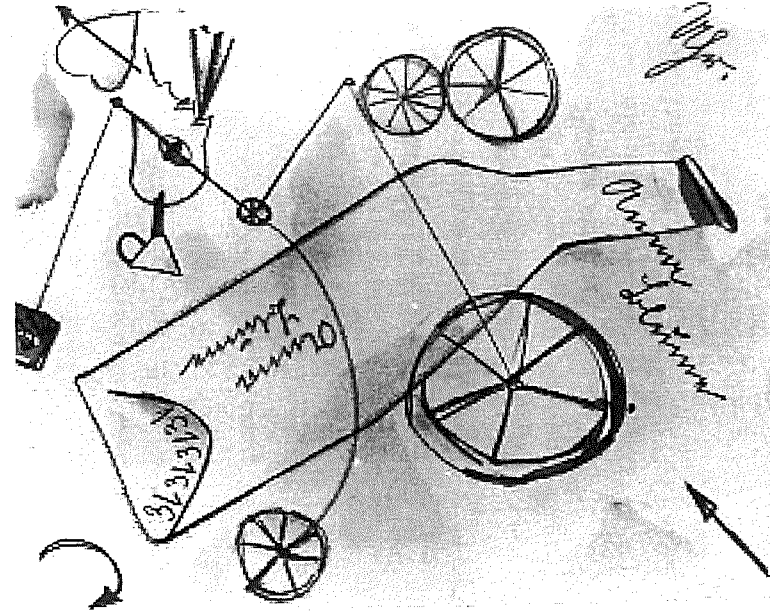
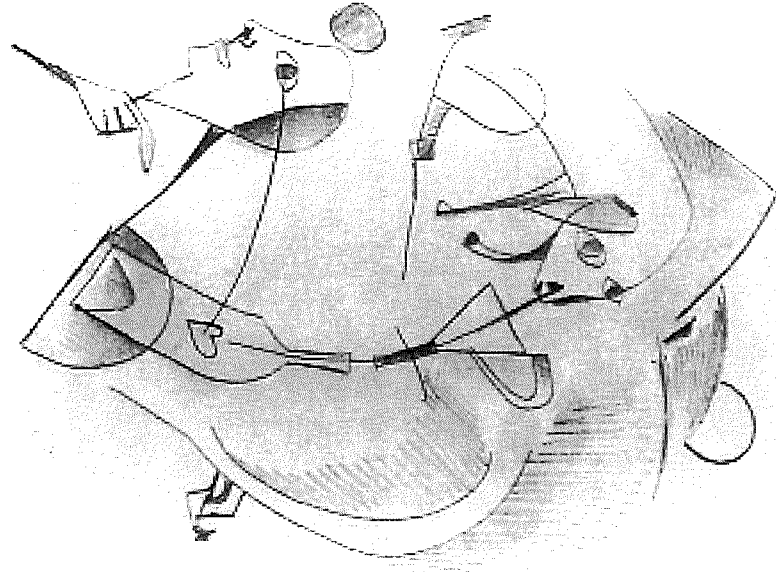
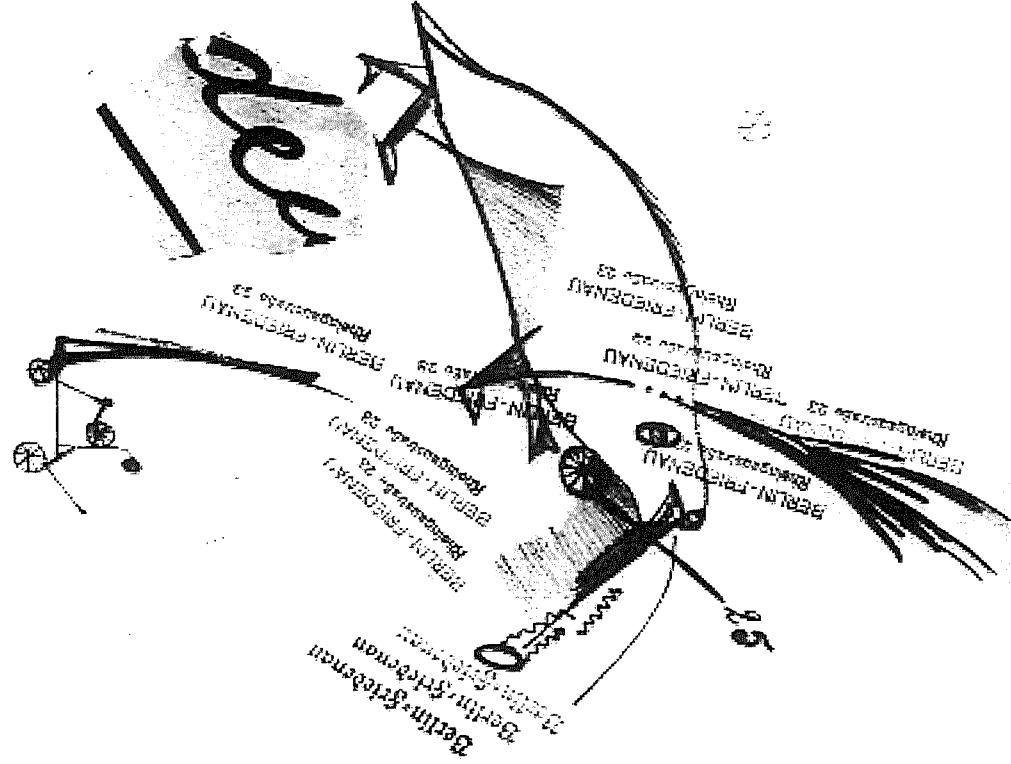
In fact some of the earlier portraits can be interpreted. For example *Ici, c'est ici Stieglitz* (cf. Plate 3) has been intelligently explicated by William Camfield: the camera represents Stieglitz the photographer and editor of the magazine *Camerawork*, who was challenged in 1915 by the younger avant-garde as having failed, despite 'foi et amour', 'to realize his "ideal" of discovering America and helping Americans to discover themselves through art and photography.'<sup>219</sup> The camera is broken (no longer able to capture the *ideal* that hovers tantalizingly above it); the hand-brake is up and the gear-lever in neutral illustrating in emblematic form the criticisms levelled at Stieglitz by de Zaya on the facing page. The portrait, in this case, has only become

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<sup>218</sup> Buffet-Picabia, Gabrielle. 'Some Memories of Pre-Dada: Picabia and Duchamp' (1949). Motherwell. p.261.

<sup>219</sup> Camfield, William. *Francis Picabia: His Art, Life and Times*, Surrey: Princeton University Press 1979. p.83. Camfield in his footnotes indicates that this criticism made by de Zayas appeared on the facing page to Picabia's portrait in 291, no.s 5-6, New York July-August 1915.





mysterious through the picture's abstraction from its original, partially illustrative, context to be considered as an isolated work of art. The picture does not in fact refuse connection with any external context, rather its meaningful context as a work of art and as a portrait of a man within the pages of *291* is rarely realized, because it is rarely reproduced with de Zaya's article.

Later portraits are more hermetic. Picabia's *Portrait of Tristan Tzara* (cf. Plate 4), eliminates perspective completely and the remaining diagram bears no specific visual reference to machinery. The circles, lines, arrows and zigzags are in themselves mechanical symbols, shorthand for mechanical drawings. Furthermore even as a shorthand diagram the image is incomplete and confusing. The indeterminate lengths of 'illusions' and 'certitudes' do not connect to the main body of the diagram, nor do they balance each other, despite the picture's apparent overall symmetry. The words do not appear to relate, even emblematically, with the lines of the diagram (as the words in the portrait of Stieglitz do), despite their specific positioning.

At the same time that Schwitters was beginning his Merzbild collages in Hanover he was also producing small watercolours similar in form to Picabia's machine portraits. More Expressionist in content they mix figures, allusion to landscape, symbols like arrows and hearts, words, numbers and unrecognizable machinery, usually involving wheels. In some cases the pictures seem to rely on each other for interpretation. In *Das Schwein neist zum Herzen* (cf. Plate 5), the pig sneezes inspiration into a bottle via a siphon containing a heart. The inspiration then enters the artist mediated by the heart. The artist's backward gesture indicates the background landscape as the result of the pig's sneezing. In *Dies ist das Biest das manchmal niest* (cf. Plate 5) the sneezer is the artist. Here the bottle must rotate on the wheeled contraption to fill the siphon into the artist's head. The bottle is filled with Schwitters's fictional lover and female self, Anna Blume, and with repeated, alternately inverted numbers. Now that the artist is the sneezer of inspiration he is to be filled with Anna but only through mechanical aid, and in sneezing the artist of course becomes one with the pig.

The implications of mechanical sex are evident in other of Schwitters's works, such as *Merz 239, Frau-Uhr*, and also in Picabia's machine portraits and pictures. The machinery implies an unending copulation doomed to sterility. Unlike the Futurists, the Dadas saw the machine in generally negative terms. Recalling his feelings in 1913 Ball wrote in his preface to *Flight out of Time*,

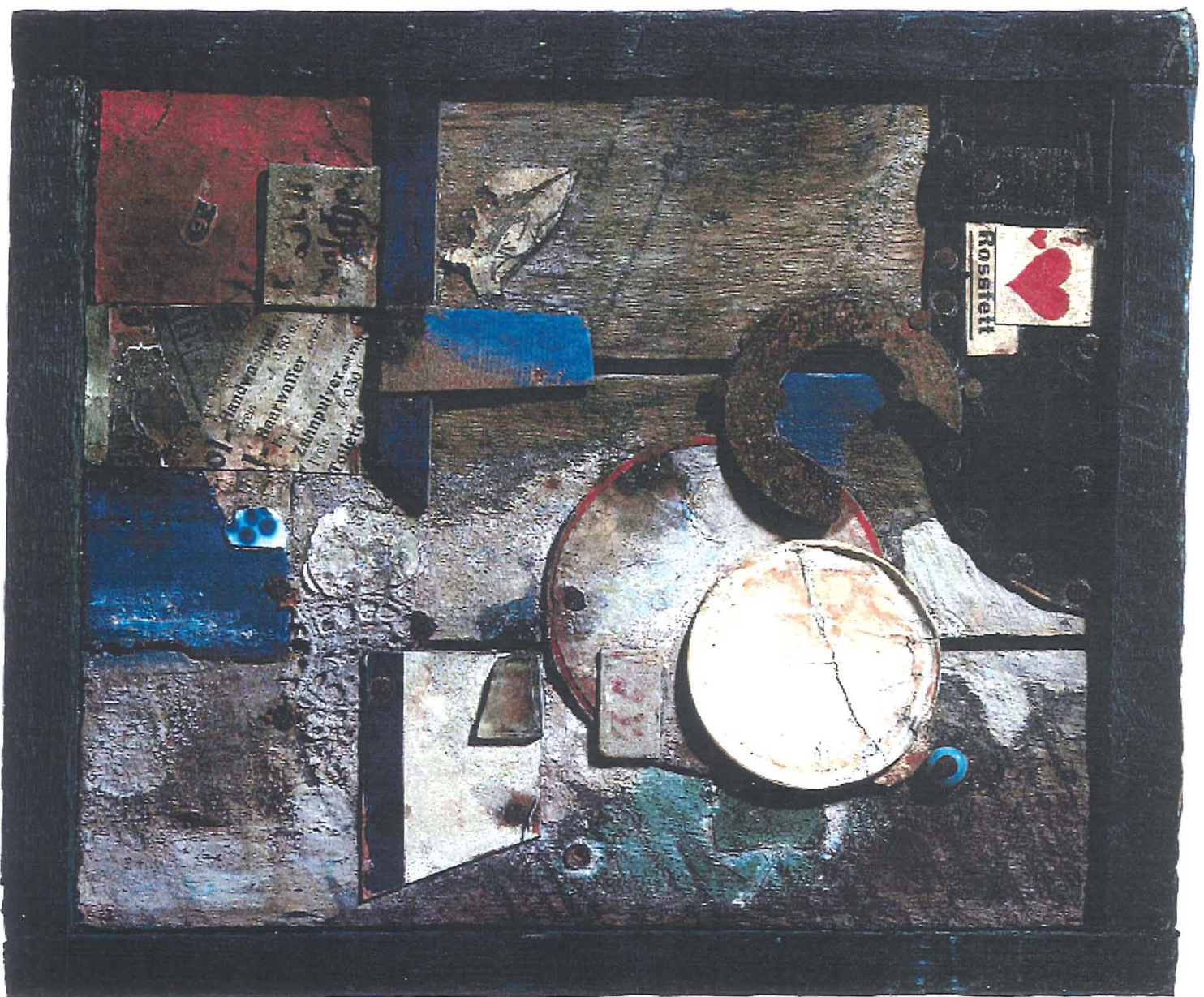


Plate 6

The machine gives a kind of sham life to dead matter. It moves matter. It is a specter. It joins matter together, and in so doing reveals some kind of rationalism. Thus it is death, working systematically, counterfeiting life. It tells more flagrant lies than any newspaper that it prints. (*Fl* 4)

And later on he feared,

Before long, they will make use of heartbeats and drive turbines with the forces of the soul. With such an expansion of the legal mechanism, things must reach an absurd point at which art will become conscious of the situation only when it has to fight for its freedom. Then art will set up and advocate structures that are unyielding in their opposition and defy every approach and comprehension.<sup>220</sup>

In Picabia's machine portraits we find these confusions of man and machine presented immediately, in the irreducible pairing of content and title, and covertly, in the emotive language of heartbeats and souls (e.g. 'foi et amour'; 'certitudes'; 'jeunesse'<sup>221</sup>) that are the only interpretative keys given to make the machinery "work". There is despair in these pictures, however witty: despair in the implosion of art, despair in its sterility, despair in what is left – playing with bones in the desert. By contrast Schwitters's *Merzbilds* display the creative response Ball predicted. They are made in the same spirit that allowed Arp to rejoice, and find poetic inspiration, in misprints. They are made up of the detritus, the faeces, of the 'living' machines: newsprint, chicken wire, bottle tops, the imprint of rubber stamps, all that can be replicated and therefore all that is expendable. And from this waste, whose very nature is anonymous and marked by lack of individuality, Schwitters created unique artworks.

In *Merzbild Rossfett* (cf. Plate 6) the title, literally 'horsefat', is humorously placed adjacent to a semicircle of iron. Superimposed on the title is, more mystifyingly, the corner of the seven of hearts. At the bottom lace seems to grow on

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<sup>220</sup> 10 November 1915. *Fl* 45.



the painted board like lichen. An advertisement for cleaning products and a ticket appear to be organically joined together, yet distinguished carefully from that around them by creases and shadows. Nearby a potsherd mocks the advertised cleaning products with a pattern that looks like spots of mould. Patches of blue, green, white, red and black radiate from the bare wood and vibrate toward each other within the frame. The rusted iron, the painted wood, the fired potsherd not only set up new relations between themselves but redefine the relationship of organic and inorganic matter, natural and cultural forms.

Ball wrote of the artist's task 'to create existences [existenzen] which one calls images but which have a consistency of their own that is equivalent to that of a rose, a person, a sunset, or a crystal'.<sup>222</sup> Likewise Imagism attempted to make depiction (note, not representation) both form and content in a move similar to Wittgenstein's claim, in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, that 'we picture facts to ourselves', and 'a picture is a fact'.<sup>223</sup> Wittgenstein continues,

2.15 The fact that the elements of a picture are related to one another in a determinate way represents that things are related to one another in the same way. Let us call this connexion of its elements the structure of the picture, and let us call the possibility of this structure the pictorial form of the picture.

2.151 Pictorial form is the possibility that things are related to one another in the same way as the elements of the picture.

...

2.171 A picture can depict any reality whose form it has....

2.172 A picture cannot, however depict its pictorial form: it displays it.

2.173 A picture represents its subject from a position outside it. (Its standpoint is its representational form.) That is why a picture represents its subject correctly or incorrectly.

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<sup>221</sup> Cf. *Portrait of Tristan Tzara* 1918. (Plate 4).

<sup>222</sup> Ball, Hugo. 'Kandinsky' (7 April 1917). *FI* 226.

<sup>223</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 2.1, 2.141 *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness, London: Routledge 2001. p.9, 10.

2.174 A picture cannot, however, place itself outside its representational form.<sup>224</sup>

The images of both Dada and Imagism follow Wittgenstein's theory by 'displaying' their pictorial form as equivalent to the form of something beyond their frame, or 'structure'. But both Imagism and Dada went further than Wittgenstein in attempting to demolish the subject-object, art-reality dichotomies by demanding that the only reality possible to communicate exists within the work of art. Sign and referent are yoked together in the object created between the two.

In *A Few Don'ts* Pound explains that the Imagist's image should give, 'that sense of sudden *liberation*; that sense of *freedom* from time limits and space limits'.<sup>225</sup> Elsewhere, in his article 'Vorticism' he describes his own attempt, in 'In a Station of the Metro', 'to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective.'<sup>226</sup>

That liberation is one that allows the image as word-object to expand and encapsulate a universe and therefore overcome the limits of time and space. Hereby the poet acknowledges language's inadequacy of meaning outwith its textual self and exploits this inadequacy as a mode of art. However, this expansion, if successful, allows the sign and referent a unity, even if only momentarily, because it *presents* the referent without any attempt to define it, for definition would inevitably give rise to the possibility for metaphoric pollution of the descriptive language, in the gaps between truth and meaning: 'the natural object is always the *adequate* symbol'.<sup>227</sup> The result is a constant oscillation between encapsulating expansion and deferential contraction of both form and content.

This oscillation is well illustrated in F.S.Flint's, 'November'.

What is eternal of you  
I saw  
in both your eyes.

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid. pp.10-11.

<sup>225</sup> Pound, Ezra. 'A few Don'ts by and Imagiste'. *Imagist Poetry*. p.130 (my italics).

<sup>226</sup> Pound, Ezra. 'Vorticism', in *Fortnightly Review*, September 1914. p.467. Qtd.in *Imagist Poetry*. p.33.

You were among the apple branches;  
the sun shone, and it was November.

Sun and apples and laughter  
and love  
we gathered, you and I.

And the birds were singing.

The 'eternal' of the first line aims at universal expansion, yet is enclosed in particularised 'eyes', themselves enclosed in 'apple branches'. The use of 'and' separates the elements of 'sun', 'November', 'apples', 'laughter', 'love', 'you' 'I', 'birds', and does not allow them metaphoric interplay. The singing birds interrupt the sharedness of *seen* eternity, echoing the father's interruption of the omnipotent child-mother relationship. There is no hint at description, we must fill in as readers the metonymic blanks. The two abstractions, 'what is eternal' and 'love', by their very rarity run together like question and answer, pushing out the boundaries and create that albeit momentary freedom referred to by Pound. The expansion and contraction is mirrored by the cyclical notions of time implicit in 'November' and the harvesting of 'we gathered', which both particularise time but also speak metonymically of eternity.

Pound's comments on that 'sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits', and much of Hugo Ball's writings, imply that whilst art must acknowledge its finitude it must at the same time expand and encompass 'heaven in ordinary' (an idea that particularly appealed to Schwitters), creating its own self-sufficient integrity, undisturbed by external contradictions. We may note, here, a similarity of aim, if not of method, between these moderns and the romantics. But whereas the romantics' attempt to encapsulate 'heaven in ordinary' is an outward movement, expansive and transcendent, the moderns' is inward, contractile, essential. 'Heaven in ordinary' is not a heaven pointed up by the ordinary - man does not pass through glass but into the glassiness of glass itself as heaven, the essence of glass.<sup>228</sup>

The ideal is neatly summed up by Schopenhauer:

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<sup>227</sup> Pound, Ezra. 'A few Don'ts by and Imagiste'. *Imagist Poetry*. p.131.

<sup>228</sup> Cf. Herbert, George. 'The Elixir' lines 9-12. *George Herbert and the Seventeenth Century Religious Poets*. p.65.

[If a man] looks simply and solely at the *what*; if, further, he doesn't allow abstract thought, the concept of reason, to take possession of his consciousness, but, instead of all this, gives over the whole power of his mind to perception ... the quiet contemplation of the natural object actually present, whether a landscape, a tree, a mountain, a building, or whatever it maybe; inasmuch as he *loses* himself in this object ... then that which is so known is no longer the thing as such; but is the idea, the eternal form....<sup>229</sup>

The Platonic overtones of Schopenhauer's statement are obvious. The sense that the Platonic *idea* and the external object might touch albeit momentarily indicates a move away from the trickster's response toward that of the magician. This reconciliation of sign and referent can only occur through the play of the trickster, that is to say, through the acknowledgement of the sign's severance from its referent and an enforced self-sufficiency on the part of the sign. But that self-sufficiency, which creates its own internal logic, through that internal logic can expand to encompass all to itself in an instant. Dembo warns the reader that despite the mystical aspect of this self-sufficient logic, 'a given object [in an imagist poem] is not a manifestation of the divine, but of itself, - aesthetically - generates the sense of mystery in the mind of the sympathetic or empathetic beholder.'<sup>230</sup>

The internal logic of Imagist and Dada works of art finds an illuminating parallel in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Wittgenstein states that 'The limits of my language means the limits of my world' and that the 'subject does not belong to the world: rather, it is a limit of the world.'<sup>231</sup> What Dada and Imagism attempt, is to signpost the limits of language as the limits of the world and at those limits reintegrate the two. If, as Wittgenstein claims, 'we cannot think what we cannot say', then the conservative and expansive boundaries of Imagism and Dada, respectively, become immediately apparent.<sup>232</sup> Furthermore just as 'a picture cannot ... depict its pictorial form: it displays it' so 'what finds its reflection in language,

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<sup>229</sup> Schopenhauer, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*, New York: Random House 1956. p.146. Qtd in. Dembo. p.2.

<sup>230</sup> Dembo. p.13.

<sup>231</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 5.62, 5.632. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. pp.68-69.



language cannot express.'<sup>233</sup> Returning to the Imagist and Dada works of art we find that they similarly 'display' themselves rather than interpreting themselves and in particular display the limits of their form, as their form. What allows for the moment of integration is the fact that a 'picture contains the possibility of the situation it represents.'<sup>234</sup> The form of the work of art 'displays' itself not only as parallel to the form of the world, beyond its frame or the lines on the page, but also, despite refusing the epistemological urge, as a realizable form.

Schopenhauer's Platonism recalls us to Septimus's suicide and his impalement on the real. If Septimus's suicide enacts the moment of aperture literally by way of traversing the window then we find in Dada and Imagism similar poetic and visual apertures that invite us to step from one realm to another. If Clarissa cannot extrapolate a clear meaning from his death, nor the theologian give a clear allegorical reading for the parable neither can the reader of the Imagist or Dada work of art read the work in direct relation to the world outside it. What the suicide, the parable, and the Imagist or Dada work of art offer is the moment of aperture, prior to understanding, a refusal of the epistemological urge. This aperture returns language to the mystical, not a transcendent but an immanent *mysterion*. Septimus cannot 'express' his realization of a Platonic real anymore than the theologian can explain definitively the parable: rather, Septimus enacts and the theologian rehearses the thing itself. Likewise Dada and Imagism present the limits and therefore metonymically 'manifest' what is beyond those limits of representation.

'There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. *They make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical.'<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid. 5.61. p.68.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid. 2.172, 4.121. pp.11, 31.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid. 2.203. p.12.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid. 6.522. p.89.

## Conrad's Revelations of Solitude

Returning to Conrad, we can begin to see how the notion of aperture accords with his later fiction. It is evident that Kurtz's cry, 'The horror! The horror!' and Decoud's suicide, prior to the cord snapping, fit into the formula of aperture: they are not epiphanies, in that they are uninterpretable. Instead, like Septimus's suicide, they open out on to a reality that is apparent only in the moment prior to understanding. And yet *Nostromo* and 'Heart of Darkness' themselves do not attempt to function like an Imagist or Dada poem, or even the prose of Woolf. In his later work, however, we find in Conrad narrative tropes and strategies that come close to the mysticism of Wittgenstein's 'manifestation'. In the final two chapters we shall see how Conrad dismantled and went beyond romance narrative in his long fiction. However, it is worth starting with a short story and a novella. As for his contemporaries, the war had a great impact on Conrad's aesthetics. Both narratives contain similar trials and yet demonstrate a difference between Conrad's pre-and post-war narration, and point up how that difference came about through his experience of the war.

The texts of 'The Secret Sharer' and *The Shadow-Line* have accrued a considerable and varied body of interpretation and critical response. Many of these responses have attempted to 'solve' points of symbolic, psychological, and ethical ambiguity in the texts.<sup>236</sup> However although these prior solutions are not necessarily wrong or unhelpful, the very notion of (re)solving the ambiguities of these texts is mistaken. Close reading of these texts uncover narrative claims for ambiguities that invite and resist interpretation. Of course, this proposal itself is interpretative; however where symbolic readings frequently lapse into allegorical readings and where psychological interpretations fall back all too easily on archetypal frames, the readings proposed here open up the texts, rather than foreclosing them, to contiguous and complementary interpretations.

In order to unpack this claim for ambiguity I take up a challenge laid down by Andrew Roberts in 'Conrad, Theory and Value' to rethink and break out of 'unsatisfying and limiting ... binary formulations' in Conrad studies.<sup>237</sup> Roberts's

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<sup>236</sup> Cf. Devers, James. 'More on Symbols in Conrad's "The Secret Sharer"', *Conradiana*, 28.1 1996. pp.66-76; Paccaud-Huguet, Josiane. 'Reading Shadows into Lines: Conrad and Lacan', *The Conradian*, 22.1/2 1997. pp.147-177; Facknitz, Mark A.R. 'Cryptic Allusions and the Moral of the Story: The Case of Joseph Conrad's "The Secret Sharer"', *Journal of Narrative Technique*, 17.1 1987. pp.115-130.

<sup>237</sup> Roberts, Andrew Michael. 'Conrad Theory and Value', *The Conradian*, 22.1/2 1997. p.181.

discussion develops from a reading of Steven Connor's *Theory and Cultural Value*.<sup>238</sup> I am particularly interested in what Roberts, following Connor, identifies as 'the opposition between ... the imperative to continue evaluating and the operation of particular values'.<sup>239</sup> 'The structure of value itself' explains Roberts, is 'inherently paradoxical and conflictual: the establishment of values must always be threatened by the process of evaluation and vice versa.'<sup>240</sup> Roberts suggests that this hermeneutic circle might usefully replace theories of 'the divided Conrad offered by Erdinast-Vulcan and Bongie'.<sup>241</sup> Instead,

one might see his work in terms of value and evaluation: Conrad's work does indeed manifest a desire for fixity within values such as fidelity, truth, duty, community, yet calls those values into question by recognizing the force of the imperative to evaluation ... We then have a model for Conrad, not as pulled between two alternatives ... but as enacting what Connor calls the very 'structure of value' itself.<sup>242</sup>

Despite his opening critique of academic concentration on interpretation and meaning at the expense of debate over value Roberts's application of Connor's theory gives scope to the interpretative aspects of value and evaluation.<sup>243</sup> This is inevitable since both interpretation and evaluation aim at a reading and a comprehension of their object. In fact, although Roberts does not go so far as to say this, if all interpretation involves some kind of evaluation, all evaluation is interpretative. Furthermore, although this reading expands Roberts's theory to address interpretation explicitly, it limits the areas of application, attending solely to the aesthetic and social in 'The Secret Sharer' and *The Shadow-Line*.

The texts under consideration show a development in Conrad's deployment of the tenet 'we live as we dream – alone' (HD 82). This development is illuminated by a consideration of the texts' claims for ambiguity and difference, and, contextualized, we may see how this development reflects developments in Conrad's own concerns for literature and for life. Indeed the very claim for ambiguity exhibited in the texts is

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<sup>238</sup> Connor, Steven. *Theory and Cultural Value*, Oxford: Blackwell 1992.

<sup>239</sup> Roberts. p.181.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid. p.182.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid. p.189.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid. p.189.

motivated by Conrad's symbolic, psychological and ethical concerns and encourages exploration of the texts' symbolic, psychological and ethical meaning. Thus by attending to the texts, it is possible to diagnose the causes of our continual interpretative engagement with them.

Conrad's extensive exploration of isolation, loneliness and futility is exemplified by Marlow's tenet 'we live as we dream – alone.' Try as they may to make sense of the world Conrad's protagonists cannot contain it. As Conrad has it in *Nostromo* all '[a]ction is consolatory. It is the enemy of thought and the friend of flattering illusions. Only in the conduct of our actions can we find the sense of mastery over the fates' (N 86). This conduct then serves as an illusory frame through which the world is perceived but into which the world, in reality, cannot fit. But the futility of action halts neither the endless activities nor the search to give those actions meaning. "A man must work to some end," Charles Gould said, vaguely', only a few pages after Conrad's famous dictum. Even Decoud breaks up when no longer able to formulate events into a meaningful structure through his letters back to Paris. Left alone on the Great Isabel Decoud must face the logic of his own scepticism. Activity may be an illusion but it is a 'sustaining' one, allowing us to make believe in our own 'independent existence as against the whole scheme of things of which we form a helpless part' (N 413). Decoud, who fails to recognize this, becomes 'swallowed up in the immense indifference of things' (N 416).

There is a second paradox dependent, to a large extent, on this first for, according to Conrad, we desire independence, a 'sense of mastery over the fates', through action and therefore desire to be distinguished, separate, unique. However this desire is predicated upon the existence of others who perceive us as different and respond to our difference. Neither Jim's romanticism nor Decoud's scepticism can operate without a framework of human existence, that is to say an audience, against which to define these roles. Their dreams of individuality are mirrored nightmarishly in their real isolation. The protagonists must act out their life in the company of others and yet without that interaction which is necessary to self-definition. They are not alone but neither are they acknowledged and this is the source of both their and the novels' anguish.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid. pp.178-181.

<sup>244</sup> Hegel illustrates the need for that interaction which is necessary to self-definition, in his parable of 'Lordship and Bondage'. Cf. Hegel, G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Mind*, 2 Vols. trans. J.B. Baillie,

It becomes the novel's problem too if we grant the reality of the problem for the protagonists. For what else is the novel but an attempt to frame a thing, to mould language into a distinguishable form and to give a heartbeat to a handful of dust, as Eliot interprets it (Y 37). And, like the protagonists, the novel (or any form of art for that matter) is only a novel when it is perceived as such; it depends upon other novels as paradigms against which it can be measured. The anxiety that the narratives can never fully distinguish themselves through a stable context of differences and similarities is made explicit in Conrad's use of conflicting and incomplete narrative voices and disjunctive narrative chronology. In addition, the inclusion of extracts from diaries, manuscripts, books and letters within the main body of the text and the addition of epigraphs and prefaces, although they are common devices in the novel genre, reinforce the suspicion of the narrative's inadequacy, by providing stylistic polyphony.

Furthermore, if both the protagonists and the novel itself are isolated and inadequate so by inference are we the readers. For each narrative voice implies an audience and when there is no one else we alone must become that audience. We cooperate because we have chosen to read, of course, but also from that sense, which the narrator of Julian Barnes's novel *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* voices: 'I wanted to be judged, do you see? It's what we all want, isn't it? I wanted, oh, some kind of summing-up, I wanted my life looked at.'<sup>245</sup> If we enter into the chain of audiences perhaps we too will get our own audience. But Barnes's narrator continues 'We don't get that....'<sup>246</sup> And if this is our fear, it is also the fear of Conrad for his novels and the protagonists' for their narratives and actions.

In the opening of 'The Secret Sharer' we find a captain who, 'in consequence of certain events of no particular significance, except to [him]self,' is a stranger to his ship, to his crew and, by his own admission, to himself (SS 93). He is 'untried' and desirous to meet 'that ideal conception of one's own personality every man sets up for himself secretly' (SS 93, 94). He echoes figures like Jim with his heroic aspirations and his unclear identity – unknown and unknowing. The text confuses identity from the start: the opening description of the seascape is given solely in terms of what is visible to the narrator/captain; instances of the plural are first person, 'we'; and only

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London: Swan Sonnenschein and Co. 1910. vol.1. p.174ff.

<sup>245</sup> Qtd in Clark, Alex. 'Tell us about it' rev. of *Love, etc* by Julian Barnes, *London Review of Books*, 22.16, 24 August 2000. p.23.

in the last sentence does the narrator separate himself from his ship (SS 91-92). Even here, the captain claims he is 'left alone with [his] ship,' subsuming his crew to the idea of his ship making them invisible as individuals. The second paragraph mirrors the first as the captain and his ship are first referred to separately ('she floated'; 'I was alone') and then together ('around us nothing moved'; 'we seemed to be measuring our fitness'; 'both our existences'). And, as in the first paragraph he scanned the desolate horizon so in the second the captain claims he and his ship will be 'far from all human eyes, with only the sky and the sea for spectators and for judges' (SS 92).

The narrator's aesthetic parallelism diverts attention from the implications of his other literary trope of anthropomorphism. The attentive reader may wonder whether the gaze and judgment of sky and sea, if such things exist, could ever be anything other than indifferent. The narrator takes this trope further when he claims that 'the sea was not likely to keep any special surprises expressly for my discomfiture' (SS 96). He is right, in that the sea is without *any* 'express' motive; however his very negation reiterates his anthropomorphic perception of the surroundings. The use of anthropomorphism itself underlines the captain's egocentrism, in interpreting nature according to himself. This egocentrism is further emphasized by his assumption that an anthropomorphized nature might take an interest in his existence.

The third paragraph opens in further confusion as to who may be present:

There must have been some glare in the air to interfere with *one's* sight, because it was only just before the sun left *us* that *my* roaming eyes made out beyond the highest ridge of the principal islet of the group *something* which did away with the solemnity of *perfect solitude*. (SS 92 my italics)

Instantly the captain and his ship are surrounded by other presences, a 'swarm of stars' appear interrupting their 'quiet communion', and then 'voices', 'footsteps', 'the steward', 'a handbell'. Whilst the reader may be forgiven for assuming the narrator had been in 'perfect solitude', since a crew have not been mentioned, anyone familiar

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid. p.23

with Conrad's work may doubt the assumption that this solitude is necessarily 'solemn'. 'Perfect solitude', like Decoud's, is rarely 'solemn' in Conrad.

All these minor confusions of person and context emphasize the captain's ignorance of himself and his situation, an ignorance perpetuated by his idealism. When the captain asserts that 'the men [are] like other men', he makes the same manoeuvre that he made in subsuming the crew to the ship in the opening paragraph: he presumes a normative and auxiliary type against which his own 'novel responsibility of command' can be set (SS 96). This 'novel responsibility' will attain to the 'elementary', the 'absolute' and, definitively, to 'singleness' (SS 96). Furthermore, this 'novel responsibility', 'invested with an elementary moral beauty', is aestheticized at the very moment it gains moral force. Thus the captain idealizes his isolation in abstract thought, whilst undermining the claims of his crew to a similar ideal state. The solipsism and aesthetic abstraction of the captain's idealism threatens to destabilize his narrative voice particularly when he expands his narrative to include others.

When Leggatt first appears by the side of the ship the captain's incomprehension is emphasized by his passivity.<sup>247</sup> This is mirrored in Leggatt's apparent insubstantiality.<sup>248</sup> The captain comments that '[t]he self-possession of that man had somehow induced a corresponding state in myself', yet it is only after the captain asserts his own identity, '*I am the captain*' that Leggatt responds (SS 99). Although the captain identifies himself by his role, whilst Leggatt identifies himself by his surname, the name Leggatt, too, implies a role.<sup>249</sup> The narrative continues to emphasize the pair's similarities explicitly in physical appearance and implicitly in voice: Leggatt's passive narrative voice is echoed almost immediately by the captain's 'neither did I stir a limb, *so far as I knew*' (SS 103 my italics).<sup>250</sup> The captain suggests 'confidently' Leggatt's motive for murder, 'a fit of temper,' and in

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<sup>247</sup> 'Before I could form a guess'; 'revealed to my stare'; '[t]he cigar dropped out of my gaping mouth'; 'I could only barely make out...the shape'; 'the horrid, frost bound sensation that had gripped me....' (SS 97-98).

<sup>248</sup> Leggatt appears 'elongated and pale', 'floating', 'cadaverous', 'headless', 'ghastly, silvery, fish-like' (SS 97-98).

<sup>249</sup> For critical responses to Leggatt's name, cf. Devers. pp 66-67.

<sup>250</sup> The captain feels 'as though ... faced by my own reflection', and again, 'as though I were myself inside that other sleeping-suit'. Both are Conway boys and Leggatt 'appealed to me as if our experiences had been as identical as our clothes' (SS 101-102); 'They say that for over ten minutes hardly anything was to be seen of the ship'; '[I]t was a miracle that they found us'; 'It's clear that I meant business, because I was holding him by the throat still when they picked us up'; '[I]t seems they rushed us aft'; '[t]hey had rather a job to separate us, I've been told' (SS 102-103).

response Leggatt's 'shadowy, dark head, *like mine, seemed to nod imperceptibly* above the ghostly grey of *my* sleeping-suit' (SS 101 *my italics*). Richardson has pointed out the narrator's suppression of 'all rival accounts of Leggatt and his activities on the Sephora' but we must wonder here to what extent the assent of Leggatt himself is real when he is depicted with such emphatically vaporous language.<sup>251</sup> The captain, once again, subsumes another to his own idea, in this case of what a man is, by imposing the shape of his own mind onto the nebulous presence of Leggatt. That the captain is in some sense aware of this is indicated when, after the reappearance of his crew, the captain asserts '[h]e was not a bit like me, really' and that Leggatt's plan for escape is 'something of which I should have been perfectly incapable' (SS 105, 106). And yet throughout their companionship the captain continues to envelop Leggatt in his sense of self, as earlier he had similarly subsumed the crew to the ship.<sup>252</sup>

When Leggatt takes up his narrative again his sensation on finding the captain recalls us to the passage quoted from *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*: Leggatt explains, 'I wanted to be seen, to talk to somebody, before I went on' (SS 111). And later, when the pair discuss Leggatt's escape, he whispers to the captain, '[a]s long as I know that you understand. ... It's a great satisfaction to have got somebody to understand. You seem to have been there on purpose' (SS 132). If Leggatt is fleeing the judgment of state and church (represented by his captain and his father) he requires of the captain a kind of justice, to have his story heard fairly and understood, before he disappears.<sup>253</sup> What is ironic, and only becomes fully apparent when Archbold appears, is that the captain is as prone to 'mystical' thinking, in his anthropomorphism and idealism, as Archbold and, by implication, the church (SS 118). This unwitting realignment of the captain with state and church undermines his role as discerning audience.

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<sup>251</sup> Richardson, Brian. 'Construing Conrad's *The Secret Sharer*: suppressed narratives, subaltern reception, and the act of interpretation', *Studies in the Novel*, 33.3 2001. p.307. Richardson goes on, '[t]hroughout the piece, the narrator seems determined that no fact or set of facts will tamper with the flattering conception he has so quickly formed of Leggatt.' p.308.

<sup>252</sup> Leggatt becomes the captain's 'other self' (SS 111); 'myself, my secret self', and 'the secret sharer of my life' (SS 114). Further on the captain himself appears incorporated by Leggatt: 'I was not wholly alone with my command; for there was that stranger in my cabin. Or rather, I was not completely and wholly with her. Part of me was absent' (SS 125).

<sup>253</sup> It is the kind of purgative justice Coleridge's ancient mariner demands of the wedding guest and a corrupt version of which that Kurtz demands of Marlow. Cf. Coleridge, S.T. 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', Part 7. verses 14-17. *The Portable Coleridge*. pp.103-104.



Yet Leggatt needs to have his identity confirmed by the attention of an apparently discerning audience. The captain must try to provide that audience as we try to provide one for the captain. The captain, a stranger to his own ship, is tempted too by the thought of having for himself a sympathetic audience in the shape of Leggatt.<sup>254</sup> For if Leggatt and he are identical then the audience they provide for each other will always be an absolving one. Thus, if Leggatt leaves it will not just be that a 'part' of the captain will be forever 'absent' but that he will be without a sympathetic, indeed synonymous, audience. The captain significantly refers to his outburst against Leggatt leaving as 'cowardice' (SS 132).

Leggatt's statements, and the fact of the captain's own narrative, undercut the captain's original reliance on the sky and sea as his only audience and judge. They tacitly acknowledge that the captain's original anthropomorphism is an unsatisfactory fiction. The sympathetic response of an autonomous other is preferable to the fictionalized response of the factually indifferent elements because the former's autonomy allows for deliberate choice. However, as we have seen, the captain's need for human response is problematic because he is unable to detach his own identity from Leggatt's enough to give Leggatt autonomy. Ironically, his tenacity in identifying Leggatt with himself, because it debars Leggatt from autonomy, frustrates any possibility of overcoming his very real isolation.<sup>255</sup> The captain's abstract idealization of his isolation, his anthropomorphism and his identification with Leggatt are attempts to control things beyond himself by imposing his own narrative on them. Yet that very attempt at control maintains his isolation by denying the possibility of an autonomy beyond himself equivalent to his own.<sup>256</sup>

When at last the captain appears to distinguish himself from Leggatt it is by extinguishing him: 'I forgot the secret stranger ready to depart, and remembered only that I was a total stranger to the ship' (SS 141). Even the floppy hat returns to him, 'serving *me* for a *mark* to help out the ignorance of *my* strangeness' (SS 142). The hat, which had been physical evidence of the captain's empathy projected imaginatively into Leggatt's future, becomes an impersonal token of Leggatt's auxiliary relationship

<sup>254</sup> Note that the captain originally refers to 'my choice of that untempted life' at sea (SS 96).

<sup>255</sup> A tenacity that mirrors the 'obscure tenacity' of Archbold for justice (SS 118).

<sup>256</sup> Cf. Thomas, Mark Ellis. 'Doubling and Difference in Conrad: "The Secret Sharer," *Lord Jim*, and *The Shadow Line*', *Conradiana*, 27.3 1995. pp.222-234, for a similar argument: '.... Doubling isolates whoever perceives others in a relation of sameness, and that isolation ironically impairs the capacity of the individual subject to exercise free will in the duties of independent command. Doubling exerts a destabilizing influence rendering interpretation problematic.' p.232.

to the captain. Leggatt is swallowed up in Erebian darkness and the captain is left triumphant once again in his idealized isolation:

I was alone with her. Nothing! no one in the world should stand now between us, throwing a shadow on the way of silent knowledge and mute affection, the perfect communion of a seaman with his first command. (SS 143)<sup>257</sup>

I have implied that Leggatt can in some sense be considered figuratively, no more than a shadow to the captain's conscience and this is born out in the final truncated sentence of the book:

I was in time to catch an evanescent glimpse of my white hat left behind to mark the spot where the secret sharer of my cabin and of my thoughts, as though he were my second self, had lowered himself into the water to take his punishment: a free man, a proud swimmer striking out for a new destiny. (SS 143)

Leggatt as 'secret sharer' of both cabin and thoughts is a physical and psychological presence, and the qualifying 'second self' indicates the similarity of the pair. However the language allows for ambiguities. The adjective 'second' might also be read as the captain's new self, formed by the testing experience related in the narrative: his old first self into which shadows of doubt could creep is jettisoned for this second, newly found, resolute self. When this is the case 'as though' refers the 'second self' not only back to the 'secret sharer' as a separate entity but it also refers the 'self' forward to the 'new destiny.' Thus it is no longer Leggatt himself but those aspects of Leggatt in the captain that receive their judgment and 'punishment' allowing him to move on, a 'free man'.

If the captain is unable fully to overcome his isolation because he can never fully allow Leggatt distinction and autonomy we may well expect similar problems for the narrator of *The Shadow-Line* from a reading of the opening pages. We are

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<sup>257</sup> Note the captain's emphasis on 'silent' and 'mute' understanding. Given the problems evident in the captain's silencing of other voices we should be alert to the ambiguities in this triumphant 'communion' (Cf. Richardson. p.307).

presented with a disaffected young man, overcome with 'that obscure feeling of life being but a waste of days ... Everything was stupid and overrated' (SL 22-23). His ennui is indicative of his isolation. Yet if the narrator is disconnected from the world this does not mean he wishes to be completely assimilated to it. Earlier he explains that 'there was no truth to be got out of [the dreary, prosaic, waste of days]' (SL 7). This 'truth' is in one respect the 'something about oneself' that the narrator would like to find. And if truth is an abstract concept it is also definitive in that if we know the 'truth' about something, that 'truth' is not malleable or permeable, it is distinct and distinguishing. The narrator's desire for truth, then, is motivated by a desire for distinction from 'everything', a desire to seal up the 'emptiness' he fears, lest he himself be filled with inanity and stupidity (SL 23).

Even after the strong 'magic' of command has begun to work on the narrator a sense of indifference and impersonality continues (SL 29). Captain Ellis conceives of himself in the non-human and hackneyed terms of '*the* deputy-Neptune' (SL 30 my italics). '[H]e pretended to rule the fate of the mortals whose lives were cast upon the waters,' the narrator continues, (SL 30). The double meaning of 'pretending', both to claim and to consciously mimic a role, reinforces the ordinary and unsatisfied nature of Ellis' aspirations.<sup>258</sup> Additionally, we might note the passivity of the 'mortals' (against whom Ellis defines himself), who are 'cast' rather than casting, and lack control over their own actions or 'fate'. The distinction between Ellis, the deputy-Neptune, and the unidentified 'mortals' is increased when the latter are first reduced to 'ghosts', then to 'mere symbols', and finally, 'something hardly useful and decidedly inferior' (SL 34). The narrator appears infused with Ellis' detachment as he leaves the harbour-master's offices:

I parted from him as if *he* had been *a mere symbol*.

... nothing in the way of abstraction could have equalled my deep detachment from the forms and colours of this world. It was, as it were, absolute. (SL 35 my italics)

Similarly, the narrator's elaborate wave to Hamilton only accommodates Hamilton as a symbol. Its elaborateness implies an explicit and pantomimic unreality (SL 35).

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<sup>258</sup> Of course, Ellis' aspiration to control fate is one that can never be fulfilled.

The recollection of Captain Ellis as 'a fierce sort of fairy' producing the command 'out of a drawer almost as unexpectedly as in a fairy tale' tinges the narrator's heroic aspirations with bathos (*SL* 40).<sup>259</sup> Even the realization of the concrete object of his command is rapidly transformed with the romance language of heroism and love: the ship is 'spellbound' and 'like an enchanted princess' (*SL* 40). His response is sentimental and sensuously physical.<sup>260</sup> More problematically, the narrator's claim, 'She was mine, more absolutely mine for possession and care than anything in the world' and his blindness to crew and shore at once recalls the captain's misguided idealism, in 'The Secret Sharer' (*SL* 40). The narrator's heroic notion of 'faithful service' is admirable in itself but his easy assumption that he is capable of such 'faithful service' forgets that other, more difficult, heroic notion of the trial, by thinking only in abstract and fictional terms.

Moreover the captain's vision of himself in the mirror as 'not exactly a lonely figure' having 'his place in a line of men ... whose souls in relation to their humble life's work had no secrets for him' again betrays the same mistaken confidence and identification as that of the captain in 'The Secret Sharer' (*SL* 53).<sup>261</sup> When, a few pages later, the narrator claims that Burns turns their conversation back to his predecessor because 'being dead, [he] had no authority, was not in anybody's way, and was much easier to deal with' the irony is only visible with hindsight for both reader and narrator (*SL* 57). On learning the story of his predecessor the captain notes that he 'had been in all essentials but his age just such another man as myself' (*SL* 62). His immediate attempt to distance himself from his predecessor is temporally problematic since the captain, unlike the former, has yet to reach 'the end of his life'.<sup>262</sup> The captain is forced to recognize at least the possibility of similitude and in doing so extends his romance vocabulary to include a gothic tone, introduced and later embodied by Burns: 'It appeared that even at sea a man could become the victim of evil spirits. I felt on my face the breath of unknown powers that shape our destinies' (*SL* 62).

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<sup>259</sup> This bathos returns with a touch of irony at the end of the narrative: for the captain credits Burns' laughter with the superhuman power of dispelling the curse of his predecessor.

<sup>260</sup> 'That feeling of life-emptiness...dissolved in a flow of joyous emotions'; 'I received the feeling of deep physical satisfaction'; 'My rapid glance ran over her, enveloped, appropriated the form concreting the abstract sentiment of my command' (*SL* 50).

<sup>261</sup> The narrator's acknowledgement of ignorance ('men whom he did not know') is at once abandoned in favour of an assumption of kinship (but who were fashioned by the same influences') (*SL* 53).

<sup>262</sup> 'Yet the end of his life was a complete act of treason' (*SL* 62).

The references to the supernatural, here and following, cannot be ignored as Conrad's preface might seem to wish them. Rather they may be explicated, as by Lothe, as imaginative personifications constructed by narrator and crew 'in order to understand [the threat from elemental forces] and thereby to withstand the imminent danger of extinction.'<sup>263</sup> However, there is an additional function for the supernatural references or rather the fact that the narrator and his crew make this interpretative move is not only realistic but also significant. This belief in supernatural forces absolves the protagonists from facing the reality of their situation and of their responsibility. Without a belief in some malevolent force, working against the ship, the protagonists are faced with that 'immense indifference of things' which 'swallowed up' Decoud on the Great Isabel, and haunted Marlow on his return from the Congo. The narrator admits that '[m]y form of sickness was indifference. The creeping paralysis of a hopeless outlook', and feels poisoned by the 'intense loneliness of the sea' (SL 93, 92). In his diary of the time the narrator had written 'I feel as if all my sins had found me out' (SL 106). The sea and sky, that the captain in 'The Secret Sharer' had believed would judge him, are as indifferent and 'empty' here as anywhere in Conrad and it is the narrator's own personal isolation that brings about his sense of guilt and brain sickness.

This use of the supernatural in order to provide meaning threatens narrative stability with the same anthropomorphism and egocentrism that was identified in 'The Secret Sharer', and is (dis)embodied by the captain's predecessor and Burns. The captain's susceptibility to their narrative is prepared for by his earlier, overtly fictional, romance descriptions of Captain Elliot and the ship. This susceptibility is made evident particularly in the records of the diary. Daniel Schwarz claims that, '[t]he diary testifies to the propensity of the captain to fantasize disasters' and continues, '[h]is reductive and hyperbolic language illustrates his anxiety and insecurity.'<sup>264</sup> The danger here is that the solipsism and fantasy of the diary is contagious.<sup>265</sup> Schwarz sees the 'diary device' as enabling Conrad to distance the narrator from his younger self and thus lend veracity to the narrative of the 'mature

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<sup>263</sup> Lothe, Jakob. *Conrad's Narrative Method*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1989. p.131. Daniel Schwarz makes much the same point in his essay 'Achieving Self-command: Theme and Value in Conrad's *The Shadow-Line*', *Renaissance*, 29.3 1977. pp.131-141. Cf. p.135ff.

<sup>264</sup> Schwarz. pp.136-137.

<sup>265</sup> Michael Greaney identifies 'lexical contagion' from Burns to the narrator in 'Delusion and Delirium in Conrad's Fiction', *Conradian*, 21.2 1996. p.43.

speaker'.<sup>266</sup> However, as Lothe demonstrates there is in the diary a 'unity of tone, pace, and voice with the surrounding narrative which establishes a reciprocal relationship between them'.<sup>267</sup> Lothe claims that this 'enhances the plausibility and suggestiveness of both' without considering that such similarities might in fact undermine plausibility.<sup>268</sup> That is to say if we can identify fantasy in the diary then we may suspect it in the main narrative, also. The captain's fear that he is the victim of a 'sort of plot' emphasizes the way in which the narrator assumes an inclusive narrative of which he is the centre (SL 93).

How then does the captain in *The Shadow-Line* avoid succumbing to the solipsism that still surrounds the captain at the end of 'The Secret Sharer'? It is by going beyond Marlow's phrase, 'we live as we dream - alone'. Not that the narrator or the narrative of *The Shadow-Line* refutes Marlow's phrase but in accepting it they are able to use it to their own advantage. For on the ship the narrator is not the only man 'alone' so to speak. At the climax of the narrative the narrator explains:

I knew I was invisible to the man at the helm. Neither could I see anything. He was alone. I was alone, every man was alone where he stood. And every form was gone, too, spar, sail, fittings, rails; everything was blotted out in the dreadful smoothness of that absolute night. (SL 113)

Each man is denied his frame of reference figuratively and literally and must face his absolute aloneness. But the fact of the matter is that they *all* do this. If 'we live as we dream - alone' then we each have that, at least, in common with one another. This parallels on a social and ethical level the previous chapter's aesthetic paradigm of the Imagist or Dada work of art that acknowledges the severance of sign from referent and is thereby able to signify anew, in the moment of aperture.

The result is evident almost immediately in the narrator's response to tripping over Burns. With his frame of reference gone the narrator's responses become elemental, '[i]t was something big and alive' (SL 115). Moreover his response is one of 'innocence'. He loses the self-consciousness he felt when he first boarded the ship,

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<sup>266</sup> Schwarz. pp.136.

<sup>267</sup> Lothe. p.129.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid. p.129.

and constructed his relationships in stereotypical terms, and now responds 'boundlessly'. Thus the narrator's direct responses are no longer self-consciously reasoned, they are responses to Burns as he is, a 'thing', 'alive'.<sup>269</sup> This boundless response is the social equivalent to the moment of aperture, when the thing presents itself to be responded to prior to understanding.

Importantly for the narrative the boundless response is conterminous with, indeed bounded by, the fantastic.<sup>270</sup> The captain's boundless response is a fear stimulated by the irresistible 'fantastic horror' of there being an 'animal' aboard (*SL* 115). Once he regains his interpretative faculties, identifying Burns becomes synonymous with reasoning his presence. Burns' simple reply is 'Boldness' (*SL* 116). This is followed by 'eerie, disturbing, alarming sounds' and, soon after, Burns' exorcising laugh (*SL* 116, 120).<sup>271</sup> The chiasmic effect of surrounding the lucid with the surreal is to emphasize their interaction. The manoeuvre is a kind of hyperbolic double negative in which the narrator's tendency to fantasy and solipsism reaches beyond itself, boundlessly, and in doing so becomes crucial to its own dispersal.

The moment of boundless response passes but the narrator has learned his lesson. When Ransome requests to be paid off the narrator's response recalls that of the captain, in 'The Secret Sharer', when Leggatt speaks of leaving: at first he denies it out of self interest but then he responds to himself in another:

For an instant he was another being. And I saw under the worth and the comeliness of the man the humble reality of things. Life was a boon to him – this precarious hard life – and he was thoroughly alarmed about himself. (*SL* 129)

The narrator's response differs from the captain, in 'The Secret Sharer', in an important respect: it is not just that Ransome appears changed, less strong, and therefore 'another being', but he is separate from the narrator as 'another being'. They have their 'being' in common as it were but they are inevitably separate. The 'humble

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<sup>269</sup> In this respect his response differs from that of the captain in 'The Secret Sharer' when he first sees Leggatt, for that response was more rational (perceiving a cadaver or something fish-like). Furthermore the captain does not learn from that moment of complete response in the way that the narrator of *The Shadow-Line* does.

<sup>270</sup> We are reminded once again of the works discussed in the previous chapter and in particular the fantastic limits of Dada art.

<sup>271</sup> Cf. 'the exorcising virtue of Burns' awful laugh' (*SL* 125).

reality of things' is indeed the precariousness of life as the narrator has had to learn: the precariousness of both our physical and our mental frames of reference by which we support ourselves in the face of 'the immense indifference of things'.<sup>272</sup>

The development from 'The Secret Sharer' to *The Shadow-Line* reflects developments in Conrad's own life and an understanding of this makes clear how the possibilities for critique of 'The Secret Sharer' in particular, are defensible. Conrad's own opinion of the story, 'The Secret Sharer ... is *it* ... Every word fits and there's not an uncertain note', is often cited to back up the justifiably high esteem in which the story is held.<sup>273</sup> The critique of the captain developed here may seem at odds with Conrad's straightforward affirmation but this can be dealt with in two ways. The first maintains that Conrad intended such a critique. This can be confirmed when we look to the extraordinary and drawn out destruction of narrative fixity and affirmation found in the contemporaneous *Under Western Eyes*: the instability of narrative and interpretation was a subject of Conrad's fiction at the time and therefore it is perfectly possible that he intended a similar instability to operate in 'The Secret Sharer'.<sup>274</sup> The second answer is that Conrad did not intend the critique and was attempting to affirm the possibility of narrative fixity in order to combat anxiety caused by and inherent in *Under Western Eyes*.<sup>275</sup> In relation to the first case *The Shadow-Line* appears as an alternative narrative that offers possibilities explicitly denied in 'The Secret Sharer'. In the second case the desire to rework in fiction the common personal source for both stories appears as a belated acknowledgement of the impasse of egocentrism in 'The Secret Sharer'.

Furthermore, the motivation for reworking the source material is clear from *The Shadow-Line*'s dedication. This dedication, 'TO BORYS AND ALL THE

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<sup>272</sup> Note Conrad's comment that of 'all the inanimate objects, of all men's creations, books are the nearest to us ... most of all they resemble us in their precarious hold on life.' 'Books'. p.5.

<sup>273</sup> Joseph Conrad to Edward Garnett, 5 November 1912. *LJC*:5 128.

<sup>274</sup> Additional support for this interpretation may be found in Conrad's letter to William Rothenstein of 17 December 1909: 'I speak to you here as to a second self and thus cannot conceive of you taking it ill. Perhaps I am unreasonable. But today is the second week in my 52[nd] year, a failure from the worldly point of view and knowing well that there can be no change - that this must go on usque ad finem - I may perhaps be allowed a little unreason.' *LJC*:4 300.

<sup>275</sup> Additional support for this interpretation may be found in the same letter to Garnett where Conrad appeals to him as a figure of authority and stability to 'come and pat me on the head, or hit me, or assert your indubitable paternity in some way. You'll find me most dutiful. Do!' Conrad's final exclamation and his pitiful postscript ('I have been worried by a sort of languid gout attack which has lasted 3 weeks or more now'), betray his anxiety despite the otherwise jaunty tone of the letter. Cf. Joseph Conrad to Edward Garnett, 5 November 1912. *LJC*:5 127-128.



OTHERS who, like himself, have crossed in early youth the shadow-line of their generation WITH LOVE', is not an easy identification between his own experience and that of the young men sent to the fronts. Conrad is perfectly explicit about this in his Author's Note: 'There could be no question here of any parallelism ... But there was a feeling of identity, though with an enormous difference of scale' (SL x). The identification is like that of the narrator's with Ransome: the realization is that life is precarious and living a Sisyphean task; that we are all utterly alone *and* that we all have that in common. This does not mean that the novel's success lies only in the veracity of the action and the recollection. The novel presents a possibility, an aperture, albeit a paradoxical one, for breaking through our solitude on the grounds of our solitude by basing commonality on the experience of isolation. Correspondingly, the novel appeals to us, flawed, perhaps, and precarious but an object which in its physicality and its artistic framing is separate and therefore similar to us. On these grounds, just as the Dada and Imagist works of art that acknowledge the severance of sign and referent, so the novel, can become sufficient and communicative. Read in this way 'The Secret Sharer' illustrates the mistakenness of presuming a fixity of interpretation that Roberts's theory highlights.<sup>276</sup> Contrastingly, *The Shadow-Line* illustrates the beneficial possibilities of interpretative flux that Roberts argues for by manifesting those possibilities as ethical and aesthetic apertures.

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<sup>276</sup> The incident of the drowned scorpion in 'The Secret Sharer' is generally read so that the mate's misguided fixation on interpretation is a foil to the captain's superior powers of intuition. Cf. Devers. p.69. I see no reason why it cannot also be interpreted as a foretaste of the captain's own desire to make sense of, give a comprehensive narration to, the appearance and disappearance of Leggatt. That the scorpion drowns in ink is particularly neat.

## The Strange Spaces of *The Rescue*

If *The Shadow-Line* illustrates an ethical development in Conrad's theme of isolation *The Rescue* seems in many ways a backward step. Rather than ending with mutual respect for the absolutely other this long novel ends with its two protagonists disillusioning each other through that same recognition of difference. But this is inescapably part and parcel of opening up to the possibility of absolute otherness: whilst the recognition of difference and isolation may represent a positive ethical development, the possibilities inherent in the acknowledgement of difference, in being open to the other, are not necessarily positive. There is no guarantee of a bountiful responsiveness, a merciful grace, such as inheres in the theology of Buber and is at least implicit in that of Barth. The moment of boundless response is non-transcendent, it is human and may be one of murder. What *The Rescue* does is to return once again to the notion of narrative itself and particularly romance, recalling us to *Nostromo*, where we started out. Whilst Conrad's tropes differ from those used in *Nostromo* he mounts a similar attack on societal and romance narratives. There is less of the aggressive play against theology found in *Nostromo*; however, in Edith Travers's inverse *tromp l'oeil* there is always the implication of a *deus abest ex machina* such as was identified in the early short fiction of Forster and Conrad.

The resulting text of *The Rescue* is what Conrad himself called, 'the swan song of romance.'<sup>277</sup> Again, this may seem a retrograde step, a dismantling of narrative without the possibility of alternative, and yet it paves the way for the post-romance narrative of *The Rover* and the aesthetic and ethical aperture represented by that final finished novel of Conrad. It is necessary then to examine the machinations of *The Rescue* not only to understand Conrad's developing relationship to narrative fiction, since the novel's composition spans most of his writing career, but also so as to comprehend fully the construction and implications of *The Rover*.

In a brief article Joel Kehler usefully draws comparisons between Chaucer and Conrad's protagonists and makes a nod to the similarity of themes in *The Franklin's Tale* and *The Rescue*.<sup>278</sup> I draw attention to Conrad's use of Chaucer here not to

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<sup>277</sup> Joseph Conrad to J.B. Pinker, 15 February 1919, cited in *LJC*:1 382.

<sup>278</sup> Kehler, Joel R. 'A Note on the Epigraph to Conrad's *The Rescue*', *English Language Notes*, 12 1975. pp.184-187.

directly contend with Kehler but to augment his observations by using Chaucer as a way into the strange geography of *The Rescue*.

In the *Franklin's Tale* Chaucer's Franklin bases his story upon a deliberately problematic geography. His tale opens, 'In Amourik, that called is Britaine' (FT 59). Here two lovers make a somewhat unusual marriage pact before the husband, Arveragus, 'Shoop him to goon and dwelle a yeer or tweyne/In Engeland, that kleped was eek Briteyne' (FT 137-138). This confusion of names acts as a prolegomena to the problematic geography of the 'rokkes blake' around the coast of 'Britaine'. Arveragus' wife, Dorigen, is appalled, on account of her husband's endangered return, by 'thise grisly feendly rokkes blake/That semen rather a foul confusion/Of werk than any fair creacion/Of swich a parfit wys God and a stable' (FT 196-199). Her suitor Aurelius' fulfilment of her challenge to remove the rocks is complicated by the fact that the Magician (hired by Aurelius for this purpose) only makes it *seem* 'that alle the rokkes were aweye.' (FT 624) Dorigen's response to the apparent removal of the rocks gives Conrad his epigraph for *The Rescue*:

Alas! Quod she, that ever this sholde happe!

For wende I never, by possibilitee,

That swich a monstre or Merveille mighte be! (FT 670-672)<sup>279</sup>

We may start by noting two aspects of their geographies that *The Rescue* and *The Franklin's Tale* have in common. The first is the physical danger of the Brittany coast and 'the Shallows'. Conrad started work on *The Rescue* whilst on his honeymoon on Île Grande, in Brittany: 'As rocky and barren an island as the heart of (right-thinking) men would wish to have.'<sup>280</sup> Rather than recreate this visibly treacherous landscape in *The Rescue*, Conrad, like the magician in *The Franklin's Tale*, creates a geography in which the dangerous rocks seem not to be there, they are hidden just beneath the water.<sup>281</sup> Conrad makes explicit what is metaphorically implicit in Chaucer: that just because the rocks don't seem to be there does not mean one cannot be wrecked upon them.

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<sup>279</sup> Note the similarity of Dorigen's original complaint about the rocks existence and this, her complaint about their disappearance.

<sup>280</sup> Joseph Conrad to Edward Garnett, 9 April 1896. *LJC*:1 272.

<sup>281</sup> Conrad does use the Brittany coast as his setting for 'The Idiots'.

Conrad's Shallows are dangerous because they are an invisible mingling of land and sea. This 'foul confusion' is reflected in Lingard's own sense of identity when he claims of his brig, '[i]f I lost her I would have no standing room on the earth for my feet' (*Re* 191). For Lingard 'standing room' on earth is in fact not on earth but on the sea. Indeed the culmination of Conrad's first description of Lingard claims that '[t]o him [the *Lightning*] was ... a kingdom!' (*Re* 21). When Lingard first meets Hassim he explains, 'here, which is also my country – being an English craft and worthy of it, too – I am powerful enough. In fact, I am Rajah here. This bit of my country is all my own' (*Re* 71).<sup>282</sup> The liminal geography of coastline then is not only crucial to plot for Chaucer and Conrad but also indicates underlying character traits and themes. King Tom aboard his floating dominion is 'at home' in the Shallows because he shares its characteristics of hidden depths and shallows and its comingling of two theoretically opposed states: Lingard's western difference is accepted and paraphrased (as King Tom and Rajah Laut) rather than abandoned in his interactions with the Malaysians. By contrast Travers's grounded yacht symbolizes his inability to negotiate areas of blurred definition: this is a man for whom, we may suspect, land is land and sea is sea and ne'er the twain shall meet. Like Aurelius (and Dorigen) Travers does not realize that clearly defined boundaries can only ever *seem* so. There are hidden rocks and sandbanks enough to wreck oneself upon.

This brings us to the second similarity of the texts' geographies: the problem of appearance and reality. The Franklin's confused locations of 'Britaine' and 'Briteyne' in some ways presage the magician's pre-dinner entertainment for Aurelius and his brother when they first find him on the outskirts of Orleans.<sup>283</sup> The magician conjures up firstly a sylvan idyll which rapidly becomes a scene of massacre as 'hertes with hir hornes hye' are 'an hondred slain with houndes'; next appear falconers catching herons, followed by jousting, followed, lastly, by 'his lady on a daunce/On which himself he daunced, as him thoughte' (*FT* 518-529).

And whan this maister that this magik wroughte  
 Saugh it was time, he clapte his handes two,

<sup>282</sup> Vide also the Wajo narrator's description of the *Lightning* as 'like an island ... her masts were as high as the summits of mountains; a star burned low through the clouds above her. We knew it for a star at once because no flame of man's kindling could have endured the wind and rain of that night' (*Re* 79).

<sup>283</sup> Note that they meet the magician, 'Whan they were come almost to that citee' (*FT* 499).

And Farwel! Al oure revel was ago.  
 And yet remoeved they nevere out of the hous,  
 Whil they saugh al this sighte merveillous,  
 But in his studie, ther as his bookes be,  
 They seten stille, and no wight but they thre. (FT 530-536)

This display by the magician serves as a warning (unheeded) to Aurelius about confusing appearance and reality: Aurelius has deliberately ignored Dorigen's intention in her challenge to remove the rocks and acts upon her apparent meaning.<sup>284</sup> The result is implied in the violent images that precede the dance scene. This danger is retrospectively underlined by the adjective 'merveillous', the same term Dorigen uses in her horror at the rocks' disappearance. The magician thus provides a visual and spatial illusion to make a point about verbal and theoretical confusion.

Conrad uses similar tropes to make similar points. His overarching trope is a disruption of perspective.<sup>285</sup> This disruption is figured in two main ways: by placing the protagonists in absolute darkness; by alluding to the apparently theatrical unreality of location. Royal Roussel, in particular, has explored some of the implications of darkness in *The Rescue*, and Juliet McLauchlin has drawn attention to the novel's dramatic allusions.<sup>286</sup> I do not intend to rehearse what they have already covered but rather to add to their considerations and to link these considerations together for a more comprehensive understanding of *The Rescue*'s machinations.

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<sup>284</sup> 'By thilke God that yaf me soule and lyf,  
 Ne shal I nevere been untrewed wyf  
 In word ne werk, as fer as I have wit;

...  
 Taak this for final answer as of me.'  
 But after that *in pley* thus seyde she:  
 'Aurelie,' quod she, 'by heighe God above,  
 Yet wolde I graunte yow to been youre love,

...  
 I seye, whan ye han maad all the coost so clene  
 Of rokkes that ther nis no stoon ysene,  
 Thanne wol I love yow best of any man' (FT 311-325 my italics).

<sup>285</sup> This resembles the magician's disruption of space by introducing large vistas into the enclosed space of his study.

<sup>286</sup> Roussel, Royal. *The Metaphysics of Darkness: A Study of the Unity and Development of Conrad's Fiction*, Baltimore: John Hopkins Press 1971; Juliet McLauchlin, 'A Reconsideration of *The Rescue*', *The Ugo Mursia Memorial Lectures: Papers from the International Conrad Conference University of Pisa September 7<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> 1983*, ed. Mario Corelli, Milano: Mursia International 1988. pp.201-226. More recently Susan Jones briefly considers the implications of *The Rescue*'s theatrical references in terms of performativity. Jones, Susan. *Conrad and Women*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1999. In particular cf. p.190.

In the first sections of *The Rescue* much of the action occurs in darkness. Indeed all but one of the crucial boat journeys in the novel are taken in darkness and the other (Lingard, Edith and Jörgenson's rescue of d'Alcacer and Travers) in a 'white heat' of 'ardent sunshine [that] devoured all colours' (*Re* 238). The voiding of visual perspective by this blinding darkness (or lightness) is emphasized by directional distortion. When the *Lightning* appears on the Wajo coast to rescue Hassim and Immada it is 'as though she had sailed down from the clouds' (*Re* 79). Similarly, at the beginning of Chapter six of 'The Capture', Edith feels 'the shock of coming to herself as if she had fallen down from a star' at the same time that Lingard makes out her shape 'on the sky.'<sup>287</sup> On this occasion, too, physical form is distorted: the dinghy appears to Edith as 'a shapeless mass' gliding 'out of the dark void'. As she 'peer[ed] downward' Lingard's 'head and shoulders loomed up alongside and he had the appearance of standing upon the sea' (*Re* 132).<sup>288</sup> When Edith professes her inability to 'believe in danger' Lingard responds that '... you cannot be expected to see through a wall ... This coast is like a wall, but I know what's on the other side' (*Re* 133). Thus what ought to be horizontal, clear, and perspectival is made vertical, opaque, and foreshortened. This sense of the coast as something vertical is reinforced, as Lingard and Edith approach it, by her 'sensation of vertiginous speed and ... headlong motion' (*Re* 204).

In fact, as they get closer, the coast becomes a 'cloud' and then 'a mere sinister immobility ... nursing in its depth the unrest of men who, to her mind, were no more real than fantastic shadows' (*Re* 206). The transition from insubstantiality to abstraction recalls the magician's 'merveille' and further undermines dimensional perspective.

Edith's suspicion of unreal men buried in the coastline is at once confirmed, as the following sentence that opens chapter five introduces her to the 'other-worldly' Jörgenson. D'Alcacer's comment that Lingard, Travers and he are crossing the river Styx becomes equally applicable here as Lingard and Edith move indescribably into a coastline peopled by otherworldly shadows (*Re* 292). Given Conrad's propensity to river journeys his omission of one here is noteworthy. Indeed Conrad underlines its

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<sup>287</sup> The roles in this vision are reversed at the end of the novel when Edith sees Lingard on the sandbank as 'a human form that isolated and alone appeared to her immense: the shape of a giant outlined amongst the constellations' (*Re* 377).

<sup>288</sup> Compare Leggatt's appearance at the bottom of the rope ladder in 'The Secret-Share': '... this being appearing as if he had risen from the bottom of the sea....' (SS 97).

omission with a gap, created by the closing of chapter four and the opening of five of 'The Gift of the Shallows'. The substitution of blank space for the flow of text robs the coast not simply of a third but of any dimension, reinforcing the perception that it is not something that can be physically traversed.<sup>289</sup>

In all the dark water journeys of *The Rescue* velocity becomes impossible to gauge. There is frequently an oscillation between a sense of movement and stillness, a sense of limitless distance and enclosed space.<sup>290</sup> The effect of this is to disturb the fact of journeying itself, making motion seem purposeless. A subsidiary result of this is to emphasize Lingard's enervation in the second half of the novel. What is of interest at this point in terms of space is the way in which this disturbance feeds into the novel's theatrical tropes. We might compare these blacked out journeys to theatrical blacked out scene changes and the foreshortened perspective of the coastline as wall to a stage's backcloth. The treacherous mudflats become stage flats through which the experienced actor moves with ease whilst they deceive the unwary audience.

*The Rescue's* inverse *trompe l'oeil* is more explicit in the second half of the novel, particularly through the eyes of Edith. What is interesting about the theatrical references is their context, which McLauchlan does not pick up on explicitly. In the first of these, the lagoon's far shore and the settlement appear to Edith, 'still and empty to the naked eye and seemed to quiver in the sunshine like an immense painted curtain lowered upon the unknown' (*Re* 216). This vision follows directly, as if in response to, Lingard's muttered claim that Immada and Hassim 'are no dream' to

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<sup>289</sup> We might compare this distortion of *The Rescue's* geography with Dorigen's distorted vision of the Brittany coast line: despite the fact that 'she many a ship and barge seigh / Seillinge hir cours, where as hem liste go' the 'rokkes' in her sight 'dooth no good, to my wit, but anoyeth / Se ye nat, Lord, how mankinde it destroyeth?' (*FT* 178-179, 203-204).

<sup>290</sup> Cf. 'For a moment the speck of light lost in vast obscurity the brig, the boat, the hidden coast, the Shallows, the very walls and roof of darkness – the seen and the unseen alike seemed to be gliding smoothly onward through the enormous gloom of space' (*Re* 169); 'On the other side, within reach of his arm, the night stood like a wall – discouraging – opaque – impenetrable ... The darkness he had to combat was too impalpable to be cleft by a blow – too dense to be pierced by the eye....' (*Re* 170); '... Floating at rest in a wavering halo, between an invisible sky and an invisible sea, like a miraculous craft suspended in the air' (*Re* 171); 'and again the sensation of vertiginous speed and of absolute immobility succeeding each other with increasing swiftness merged at last into a bizarre state of headlong motion and profound peace. The darkness enfolded her like the enervating caress of a sombre universe. It was gentle and destructive. Its languor seduced her soul into surrender. Nothing existed and even all her memories vanished into space. She was content that nothing should exist' (*Re* 204); '... And surrendering herself passively ... to this adventure, Mrs Travers had no sense of motion at all. ... She abanodoned herself to an illusory feeling; to the impression that she was really resting ... The men beside her were less than nothing. She could not speak to them; she could not understand them; the

him. Some pages later Edith sees Lingard as 'a great actor on a darkened stage in some simple and tremendous drama' (*Re* 234). Here her vision of Lingard comes as she struggles with her witness to Lingard's own struggle of allegiance.<sup>291</sup> When Edith has 'the sensation of acting in a gorgeously got up play on the brilliantly lighted stage of an exotic opera' it is at the same moment that Daman startles her with the effect of his question to Lingard, 'But do you see?' (*Re* 244). When recalling that episode as a 'gorgeous show fit to make an audience hold its breath' it is in the context of expressing to Lingard a desire to have understood 'every word that was said' (*Re* 248).

Thus the visual becomes unreal for Edith when she feels aurally excluded from Lingard by his involvement with the Malays. Her inability to understand the language gives back to Daman's question, 'But do you see?' an ironic answer in her attendant inverse *trompe l'oeil*. Conrad underlines Edith's remove by allowing the reader to understand the Malays' speech unmediated whilst she must wait (often for some time) for Lingard to paraphrase. Conrad often omits this reported speech in the text so that the reader believes that the Malay speech that they and Lingard read/hear is more authentic than Lingard's omitted version. This of course reflects back on Edith's vision: the reader imagines, 'in his studie, ther as his bookes be', an authentic three dimensional visual landscape that Conrad, like the Franklin's magician, presents; Edith within this landscape can only see it as a *representation*. In fact Edith admits to Lingard that she has been living since childhood, 'in front of a show, and that I never have been taken in for a moment by its tinsel and its noise or by anything that went on on the stage' (*Re* 252).

Later Edith's vision of the far shore as 'a luminous painting on an immense cloth hiding the movements of an inexplicable life', as 'a painted scene' and a 'curtain' behind which Travers, d'Alcacer and Lingard had gone 'forever out of her sight' comes when Edith is left, humiliated, with the ghostly Jörgenson who is performing inexplicable activities (*Re* 301-304). As with her other recourses to theatrical turns of phrase this coincides with a sense of the illimitable difference and distance between herself and Lingard. Travers, d'Alcacer and Lingard have gone to

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canoe might have been moving by enchantment – if it did move at all. Like a half conscious sleeper she was on the verge of saying to herself, "What a strange dream I am having" (*Re* 320-321).

<sup>291</sup> Cf. 'He shook her with his own struggles, he possessed her with his emotions and imposed his personality as if its tragedy were the only thing worth considering in this matter. And yet what had she to do with all those obscure and barbarous things? Obviously nothing' (*Re* 234).



involve themselves in those 'movements of an inexplicable life'. Momentarily Edith 'admit[s] now the reality of those things no longer a mere pageant marshalled for her vision' on the other shore. This insight, however, fails to place her within reach of Lingard. Returning her gaze to the dead ship, the *Emma*, she becomes aware of 'the empty Cage' whose 'whole struck her as squalid and as if already decayed, a flimsy and idle phantasy' (*Re* 302). As if granted her earlier desire to 'vanish out of life like a wraith', Edith and Jörgenson are left to haunt the deck/stage (*Re* 266). Yet when Jörgenson 'display[s] a weakness of the flesh' by his irritation with her, comes alive, and professes to Edith that *he* 'know[s] what to do' Edith senses herself as distinct even from him (*Re* 303). Her sense that 'she was abandoned by all the world' is quite literal, even Jörgenson has found a purpose in life, she alone images the world as 'a painted scene that would never roll up to disclose the truth behind its blinding and soulless splendour' (*Re* 303-304). Trapped behind the wall of the coast, as if behind a stage curtain she is left to tread the boards like May, in Beckett's *Footfalls*.

These visions of the world indicate Edith's dissociation from it. Even where they appear aesthetically pleasing they remain unreal, unmotivated by any distinguishable purpose. Although others appear to have purposive drives they remain hidden from her, like the meaning of Jörgenson's animation. And since Edith cannot comprehend this world as she envisages it, other than as spectacular, she too becomes aimless, haunting an already unreal stage. Implicit in this is a sense of the absence of God as an absence of teleology. Edith's existential (dis)illusion recalls Conrad's own teleology, as he explained it to Cunninghame-Graham, in terms of a 'knitting machine', 'the most withering thought is that the infamous thing has made itself; made itself without thought, without conscience, without foresight, without eyes, without heart. It is a tragic accident'. This machine is,

indestructible!

It knits us in and it knits us out. It has knitted time space, pain, death, corruption, despair and all the illusions – and nothing matters. I'll admit however that to look at the remorseless process is sometimes amusing.<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> Joseph Conrad to Cunninghame-Graham, 20 December 1897. *LJC*:1 425-426. 'There is a – let us say – a machine. It evolved itself (I am severely scientific) out of a chaos of scraps of iron and behold! – it knits. I am horrified at the horrible work and stand appalled. I feel it ought to embroider – but it

The following month, as their correspondence continued to explore existential issues Conrad wrote to Cunninghame-Graham:

What makes mankind 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 which drives us about a world that whether seen in a convex or a concave mirror is always but a vain and floating appearance.<sup>293</sup>

The correspondence between these letters and Edith's visions make clear the theological implications of her inverse *tromp l'oeil*. The lack of theological critique, such as we find in *Nostromo*, whose play on the Bible although covert is traceable, becomes a new critique itself. Edith, and d'Alcacer's, world is one in which the absence of God is observed, not feared. Although she may seek to have meaning for Lingard, he and his world remain for her a spectacle. Her refusal to give meaning to the Wajo world does not end in death, as it does for Decoud, because such a refusal does not carry the teleological weight for her that it does for him. Whatever lies behind the backcloth of the Wajo world is 'soulless', no more than Conrad's knitting machine. In this light Conrad does not need to play on the Bible as he did in

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goes on knitting. You come and say: "this is all right; it's only a question of the right kind of oil. Let us use this – for instance – celestial oil and the machine shall embroider a most beautiful design in purple and gold." Will it? Alas no. You cannot by any special lubrication make embroidery with a knitting machine. And the most withering thought is that the infamous thing has made itself; made itself without thought, without conscience, without foresight, without eyes, without heart. It is a tragic accident – and it has happened. You cannot interfere with it. The last drop of bitterness is in the suspicion that you can't even smash it. In virtue of that truth one and immortal which lurks in the force that made it spring into existence it is what it is – and it is indestructible!

'It knits us in and it knits us out. It has knitted time space, pain, death, corruption, despair and all the illusions – and nothing matters. I'll admit however that to look at the remorseless process is sometimes amusing.'

<sup>293</sup> Conrad to Cunninghame-Graham, 31 January 1898. *LJC*:2 382. 'Egoism is good, and altruism is good, and fidelity to nature would be the best of all, and any systems could be good, and rules could be made – if we could only get rid of consciousness. What makes mankind tragic is not that they are the victims of nature, it is that they are conscious of it. To be part of the animal kingdom under the conditions of the earth is very well – but as soon as you know of your slavery then the pain begins. We can't return to nature, since we can't change our place in it. Our refuge is in stupidity, in drunken[n]ess of all kinds, in lies, in beliefs, in murder, thieving, reforming – in negation, in contempt, – each man according to the promptings of his own particular devil. There is no morality, no knowledge and no hope; there is only the consciousness of ourselves which drives us about a world that whether seen in a convex or a concave mirror is always but a vain and floating appearance.'

*Nostramo*: Edith's 'soulless' vision itself indicates the utter absence of God that *Nostramo* had threatened.

The association of Edith with the stage is embellished by her adoption of Malay dress. This is done initially for her first visit to Belarab's settlement; however, she maintains the garb for her whole sojourn by the lagoon, to her husband's consternation. Travers immediately links her costume to theatre: not Edith's grand opera, but to a 'farce' played at his 'expense' (*Re* 220, 221). Moreover, he presumes her dress indicates a barbarity and imperfection of discipline, and accuses her of always liking 'extreme opinions, exotic costumes, lawless characters, romantic personalities – like d'Alcacer . . .' (*Re* 225). Here Travers forces d'Alcacer into the unlikely role of understudy to Lingard and his world, unable to name his abhorred rescuer.<sup>294</sup> Yet he is at least partly right in his assumption that Edith is using the clothes to escape the 'discipline' of western society. Her defence that she is 'most severely disciplined' only serves to supply motive for her desire to escape such discipline. Edith's clothing is a part of her wish to usurp Hassim and Immada in Lingard's concerns. Unable to adopt their 'soft speech which had no meaning for her' and which intolerably makes 'its way straight into that man's heart',<sup>295</sup> Edith 'rob[s] the girl of her clothes ... besides other things' (*Re* 216, 236).

Like Cinderella Edith's true identity turns in part on a fantastic shoe. 'No part of her costume made her feel so exotic' as the customized sandal aboard the *Emma* (*Re* 235). Yet when at last she too makes her 'way into that man's heart' at the wall of Belarab's stockade her fear that he should realize she has lost the sandal indicates her sense of reliance on her costume for his affections: 'But she would not have let him know of that dropped sandal for anything in the world. That lost sandal was as symbolic as a dropped veil' (*Re* 324). The dropped sandal indicates concurrently the dropping of a barrier between Edith and Lingard and the dropping of a prop that reveals the unreality of the show.

The purpose of these theatrical tropes in *The Rescue* is best understood by reference to the well known discussion between Lingard and Edith about opera, which comes when Lingard and Edith are discussing their first visit to Belarab's

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<sup>294</sup> Ironically Edith is finally led out of Belarab's settlement in 'triumphal exit' on d'Alcacer's arm, rather than on the arm of the romantic Man of Fate as d'Alcacer had previously supposed, (Cf. *Re* 329, 362).

<sup>295</sup> And also into the 'hearts' of the reader, vide supra.

settlement.<sup>296</sup> The confusion of fiction and reality here is pivotal and is to be understood in the light of Edith's term, 'fatal inanity'. Edith's continual association of the lagoon's geography and action with operatic theatre, and her jealous *sotto voce* quip that operas are the equivalent of fairy tales and that these revolve around princesses, indicate that she finds Lingard's world unreal to the extent of being childishly inane. It is a world, like every world she experiences, in which she cannot 'forget herself'. This belief in the inanity of Lingard's world is fatal for those aboard the exploded *Emma*: Edith's refusal to invest any *real* value in the romantic prop of the emerald ring and this misprision of the symbolic nature of the personal affect, as with Desdemona's handkerchief, is disastrous not only for those aboard the *Emma* but also for 'one that loved not wisely but too well.'<sup>297</sup>

However, Lingard too is made complicit in his fate through this confusion. For his forgetfulness at the theatre prefigures his forgetfulness and enervation on encountering his grown-up princess, Edith. That Edith has the same power over him that the Melbourne opera had is immediately evident in his gaze: Edith's refusal to meet Lingard's eye is like the actor's refusal to acknowledge the audience's presence beyond the proscenium, which allows the audience to involve itself voyeuristically in the actor's show of veracity.<sup>298</sup> Likewise his conviction of her existence, through

<sup>296</sup> "How it must have jarred on your sense of reality," said Mrs Travers....

"... It must have appeared to you like the very defiance of all truth. Would real people go singing through their life anywhere except in a fairy tale?"

"These people didn't always sing for joy," said Lingard, simply. "I don't know much about fairy tales."

"They are mostly about princesses," murmured Mrs Travers.

'Lingard didn't quite hear ... "Fairy tales are for children, I believe," he said. "But this story with music I am telling you of, Mrs Travers, was not a tale for children. I assure you that of the few shows I have seen that one was most real to me. More real than anything in life."

'Mrs Travers remembering the fatal inanity of most opera librettos, was touched by these words ... "I suppose you forgot yourself in that story, whatever it was," she remarked in a detached tone.

"Yes it carried me away. But I suppose you know that feeling."

"No. I never knew anything of the kind not even when I was a chit of a girl."...

'What pleased him most was her not looking at him; for it enabled him to contemplate with perfect freedom ... And her whole person was an impossible, an amazing and solid marvel which somehow was not so much convincing to the eyes as to something within him that was apparently independent of his senses. Not for a moment did he think of her as remote. Untouchable – possibly! But remote – no. Whether consciously or unconsciously he took her spiritually for granted. It was materially that she was a wonder of the sort that is at the same time familiar and sacred.

"No," Mrs Travers began again, abruptly. "I never forgot myself in a story. It was not in me. I have not even been able to forget myself on that morning on shore which was part of my own story." (248-249)

<sup>297</sup> Shakespeare, William. *Othello* V.ii.347, *Complete Works*. p.1153.

<sup>298</sup> Elsewhere Daman breaks the tacit agreement between actor and audience by standing, while the rest of the audience sits, and therefore drawing the gaze of the 'actors', in particular Lingard, during the first negotiations for d'Alcacer and Travers within Belarab's settlement. Thus Daman threatens to

something 'independent of his senses', as both 'impossible' and 'a solid marvel' captures exactly the way in which theatre operates to propose a reality behind the proscenium through a schema of unreal props and poses.<sup>299</sup> Lingard mistakes Edith as the real embodiment of an unreal romance. The inanity of such a mistake is equally fatal as Lingard himself acknowledges when he admits to Edith 'that if you had given me that ring it would have been just the same' (*Re* 379).

But there is a final twist. In conversation with Lingard within the stockade d'Alcacer's describes a certain kind of woman (of whom Edith is, of course, one):

They decorate our life for us. They are gracious figures on the drab wall which lies on this side of our common grave. They lead a sort of ritual dance, that most of us have agreed to take seriously. It is a very binding agreement with which sincerity and good faith and honour have nothing to do. Very binding. Woe to him or her who break it. Directly they leave the pageant they get lost.

... They wander [in a maze] lamenting over themselves. I would shudder at that fate for anything I loved. Do you know, Captain Lingard, how people who are lost in a maze end? ... They end by hating their very selves, and they die in disillusion and despair. (*Re* 337)

Here there is no comfort, as in *Arden*, that 'we are not all alone unhappy:/This wide and universal theatre/Presents more woeful pageants than the scene/Wherein we play in.'<sup>300</sup> Such a recognition is dangerous in that it acknowledges the illusion of the scene, and in d'Alcacer's vision it becomes apparent that choosing no illusion at all is as fatal as choosing the wrong one. This is no fraternity of players, each is bound alone to 'the scene/Wherein [they] play'. Lingard and Edith are threatened with 'disillusion and despair' precisely because in choosing the wrong, or no, romantic drama they have broken the binding agreement of their originating 'pageant'. We

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disrupt Lingard's romantic drama as he had earlier disrupted the tawdry Ibsen-esque drama aboard the *Hermit* (*Re* 239).

<sup>299</sup> The prop does not function with the same effect beyond the proscenium (one couldn't get drunk on the apple juice that appears as whisky) but is apprehended by that something independent of the senses in the audience that recognizes the meaning of the prop as it recognizes the letters, brackets and symbols of mathematics.

<sup>300</sup> Shakespeare, William. *As You Like It* II.vii.136-139, *Complete Works*. p.266.

recall again the magician's 'revels' warning Aurelius against deliberately misconstruing the implications of Dorigen's challenge. Now we can see that the very fact of the magician's illusion, that it appears as an illusion, symbolizes the danger of deconstructing the meaning of Dorigen's language. Furthermore, the 'rokkes blake' too, become an image for the danger of language, a danger that is hinted at from the start in the confusion of naming Britaine and Briteyne. Edith, too, should be warned by her inverse *trompe l'oeil*, and be wary of reading too knowingly the unreal visions conjured up out of an *unheimlich* geography. But, like Aurelius, Edith deliberately deconstructs the signification of the ring whilst at the same time desiring the commander of that signification.

These fatal trade offs between reality and unreality embody a tension between realist and romance narrative schemas. In his essay 'The Rescue and the Ring of Meaning' Caserio explores this tension in economic terms of gift giving, exchange and trade, symbolized by the emerald ring.<sup>301</sup> For Caserio the romance Malay gift giving culture of exchange is destroyed by the white imperialist culture of arbitrary trade. For the Malay romance culture and for Conrad 'representation' must be motivated by aesthetic and ethical good faith, whilst the imperialist trade allows for arbitrary substitution in the place of representation. Thus Caserio argues,

'[i]n Conrad's view literary representation is faithful to reality understood as one or another incontrovertible human *donnée* or given. This *given* the novelist discovers or comes upon, but does not fabricate. He then gives back to the reader this *donnée*, which is already in the reader's awareness. Such a sense of representation is imbedded in and shapes *The Rescue*, which in effect claims representation itself as a primal romance no realism can dispense with.'<sup>302</sup>

Caserio argues from this standpoint that,

<sup>301</sup> Caserio, Robert. 'The Rescue and the Ring of Meaning', *Conrad Revisited: Essays for the Eighties*, ed. Ross C. Murfin, Alabama: University of Alabama Press 1985. pp.125-149.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid. pp.126-127.

'*The Rescue* – not overtly but implicitly – extends the preface [to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*] and constitutes a dramatized *ars poetica* of the novel. ... the procrastination of *The Rescue* may be the result, below the conscious difficulty of an unconsciously cunning delay of an *ars poetica* until the novelist had long tested – and long been tested by – his art. The result for Conrad is a justification of the romance element present in his work since *Almayer's Folly*. This justification turns on the probability ... that romance is the sign of Conrad's defense of the representational nature of his novels and of their truth to the world.'<sup>303</sup>

Caserio soon modifies his account so that '*The Rescue* becomes a tale of the withdrawal of novelistic representation from the world – and the author asks us to feel the withdrawal as an outrage.'<sup>304</sup> However, this account, even with the latter modification, reads romance all too easily as an unproblematic positive undermined by an aesthetically and ethically wrong imperialist empiricism.

By equating romance and realism with a straightforward dialectic of east and west, good and bad, Caserio is unable to accommodate the matrix of romance and realist tendencies that enmesh all the protagonists. Caserio does not differentiate between the Malays' representation of themselves in terms of a culture of exchange and, in particular, Lingard's reading of the Malays' behaviour as a culture of exchange. Robert Hampson points out Lingard's misunderstandings in this context and Hassim's similar mistakes in reading Lingard, Travers and d'Alcacer, according to his own culture. Hampson finds that just as Lingard '[t]hrough his egotism ... reads [the Wajo's] passivity as trust, as an appeal to him to involve himself in their plight' so 'Hassim draws on the political practices of the archipelago to attempt to understand the European situation' (cf. *Re* 70).<sup>305</sup> What Hampson's comments point up is the similar fictionalizing techniques put into play by both the westerners and the Malays.<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid. p.126.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid. p.127.

<sup>305</sup> Hampson, Robert. *Cross-Cultural Encounters in Joseph Conrad's Malay Fiction*, Basingstoke: Palgrave 2000. p.166. Cf. p.170-171.

<sup>306</sup> Cf. also the Wajo description of Lingard's rescue of Hassim and Immada (*Re* 79-80).

Lingard is caught betwixt and between the westerners and the Malays. Different from both, his reading of them is equivalently, and at times dangerously, misguided. In this respect Lingard's fatherly love for Immada is not simply a suppression of sexual desire so as to throw Lingard's passion for Edith into greater relief (cf. *Re* 135). This paternal relationship unwittingly complicates Lingard's role: as patron and begetter Lingard concurrently maintains and dissolves racial, economic, political (and narrative) differences. If Lingard maintains the difference necessary to his role as patron he also dissolves that difference by participating in their (anti-imperialist) concerns; if, however, Lingard elides racial difference as begetter, he is also racially associated, as a westerner, with the begetting of those problems that he involves himself in as patron.

There is a further problem with Caserio's reading of *The Rescue* and this is the very use he makes of the term 'romance'. Caserio fails to acknowledge that those who operate within an economic culture of romance gift giving would not identify their culture as romantic. The ethical and aesthetic revolution that Caserio pins to Scott as romantic is indeed a return to the past to remind the present of its origins: '.... The rescue event or action ... represent[s] a necessary recourse against the new imperialism, on the part of persons who have become victims of modern ungenerous authority. ... [This] lawlessness is the re-presentation of the attack on authority that is the origin and guarantee of modernity's improvement on the past.'<sup>307</sup> This being the case a romance culture is always a past culture to be rescued or retrieved. More bluntly a romance culture is always a lost culture.

If we return to Caserio's initial claim that *The Rescue* expands upon and embodies an aesthetic of romance representation first articulated in the preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*, we find that the claims for presence and sensory immediacy in the preface are poorly served by the representation of romance. Indeed the preface comes closest to romance when Conrad speaks of the artists task to 'hold up unquestioningly ... the rescued fragment'.<sup>308</sup> This rescue work, rather than giving back to the reader a *donnée*, reveals the metonymic fragment that indicates its lost whole. Certainly the reader must recognize the metonymic fragment but essential to that recognition is a perception of its loss. Conrad briefly, even nervously, in the

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<sup>307</sup> Caserio. p.134.

<sup>308</sup> Conrad, Joseph. 'Preface', *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*, New York: W.W. Norton and Company 1979. p.147.



preface indicates the abyss of absence over which art is perched. 'Conrad's goal', claims Said, 'is to make us see, or otherwise transcend *the absence of everything but words*, so that we may pass into the realm of vision beyond words.'<sup>309</sup> If in *The Rescue* Conrad, as Caserio claims, is expanding upon an aesthetic of romance, first articulated in the preface, it is surely this one. For, certainly, romance's speaking of a lost past, a present absence, finds a parallel for its narrative in the metonymy of the 'rescued fragment'.

Conceived of thus, our original trade off between reality and unreality can be redescribed as one between the arbitrary presence of realism and the lost purpose of romance. With these terms we need not divide *The Rescue*'s narrative and protagonists up as distinctly and assuredly as Caserio. A matrix of relations occurs in which the westerners appear as an arbitrary presence in the Wajo's romance of a lost past and yet the occurrence of Malay politicking disturbs the romance of the sailing-master's guide book which assures him (in pidgin English), 'Natives friendly all along this coast!' (*Re* 117). Travers's stern sense of realism is as much annoyed by the interruption of 'this rough man, looking as if he had stepped out from an engraving in a book about buccaneers' as the Wajo and Illanuns are annoyed by the appearance of the whites, when '[e]vil would follow in their footsteps' (*Re* 111, 187). For Edith, Lingard's tale, 'as startling as the discovery of a new world' inspires, appeals, and charms so long as it is 'far away from her, truth or fiction, presented in picturesque speech, real only by the response of her emotions' (*Re* 138, 139).<sup>310</sup> Yet it also involves her 'helplessly' (*Re* 139); agitates, disturbs and appals her with the thought that his story 'was a fact of her own existence ... [and] belonged now to her life' (*Re* 139-140); imposes upon her until 'she felt that staggering sense of utter insecurity which is given one by the first tremor of an earthquake' (*Re* 140). Moreover, Lingard not only struggles to balance the realist and romance in the Malay culture but also in the western. His misguided romancing of both leads to the deconstruction of each by the arbitrary realism of the other. His Malay adventure is disturbed and enervated by

<sup>309</sup> Said, Edward. *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, London: Faber and Faber 1984 p.95. My italics.

<sup>310</sup> Compare, 'All art, therefore, appeals primarily to the senses, and the artistic aim when expressing itself in written words must also be to make its appeal through the senses, if its high desire is to reach the secret spring of responsive emotions.' Conrad, Joseph. 'Preface', *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*. p.146. I have corrected the Penguin edition's misprint 'truth of fiction' to the first edition's 'truth or fiction', since the Penguin version does not make sense, whilst the original text emphasizes, at this early point, Edith's problematic confusion of fiction and reality.

the appearance of the westerners, his passion for Edith is finally blown up in Malay politics.

The friction between the worlds of Lingard's romance heroine and Edith's romance hero were very real in terms of travel and text when Conrad commenced *The Rescue*. Increased western travel in the Far East was lamented by some as sounding the death knell for buccaneering adventure. Eastern adventure need no longer be *lived* but rather could be experienced and catalogued as a leisure pursuit by wealthy men such as Travers.

This altered too the adventure literature of the Far East. Patrick Brantlinger, in *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism 1830-1914*, documents the 'upsurge in romance writing toward the end of the [nineteenth] century' and explains how this upsurge was modified by new literary genres, such as sci-fi, and historical imperialist concerns, such as invasion.<sup>311</sup> Relevant here is Brantlinger's citation of Andrew Lang, whom he calls 'the most enthusiastic defender of the new fashion for romances'.<sup>312</sup> He records Lang's belief that 'realism in fiction should coexist with romanticism just as the rational, conscious side of human nature coexists with the unconscious' and Lang's preference for 'adventure stories written for boys'.<sup>313</sup> This was because romance appealed 'to the barbarian buried inside the reader' and was thus 'more fundamental, more honest, more natural than realism', explains Brantlinger.<sup>314</sup> In early letters to Garnett, Conrad expresses intentions in keeping with Lang's literary values: 'my yacht people the artificial, civilized creatures ... are to be brought into contact with the primitive Lingard'.<sup>315</sup> A year later he writes, 'I want to make it a kind of glorified book for boys'.<sup>316</sup> Moreover in its completion *The Rescue* addresses exactly those hopes and concerns Lang expressed for literature when he wrote that:

As the visible world is measured, mapped, tested, weighed, we seem to hope more and more that a world of invisible romance may not be far from us. ... The ordinary shilling tales of 'hypnotism' and mesmerism

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<sup>311</sup> Brantlinger, Patrick. *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism 1830-1914*, New York: Cornell University Press 1988. p.231ff.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid. p.231.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid. p.231.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid. p.232. This argument is repeated in the Dadas' attractions to the primitive.

<sup>315</sup> Joseph Conrad to Edward Garnett, 22 July 1896. *LJC*:1 290.

<sup>316</sup> Joseph Conrad to Edward Garnett, 8 October 1897. *LJC*:1 392.

are vulgar trash enough, and yet I can believe that an impossible romance, if the right man wrote it in the right mood, might still win us from the newspapers, and the stories of shabby love, and cheap remorse, and commonplace failures.<sup>317</sup>

With its stories of 'love,' 'remorse,' and 'failures' *The Rescue* succeeded in winning an audience (so much so that Conrad hoped a Nobel prize might come of it). Its serialization in *Land and Water*, in the U.K. and *Romance*, in the U.S. indicate the balance it struck between the public's fickle tastes for romance and realism. In a letter to Blackwood Conrad expresses a desire to fulfil the challenge, articulated by Lang, in 'The Supernatural in Fiction', some eight years later:

Of course the paraphernalia of the story are hackneyed. The yacht, the shipwreck, the pirates, the coast – all this has been used times out of number; whether it has been done, that's another question. Be it as it may I think rightly or wrongly I can present it in a fresh way. At any rate I wish to obtain the effect of reality in my story....<sup>318</sup>

Yet *The Rescue* is not a rescue of the romance genre through the medium of realism.<sup>319</sup> Lingard's success in rescuing the westerners comes at the price of the explosion of his eastern 'pageant' and 'disillusion' in his western romance. Furthermore, as with Shakespeare's second Henry trilogy, we already know the tawdry sequence of events that follow in *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands*. Any hope we might feel at the end of *Henry V* or *The Rescue* is always already dissipated by their previously written sequels. *The Rescue* is a 'Shallow' romance in which realism and romance mix dangerously, each threatening to deconstruct the other.

And here we may return briefly to look at why Conrad chose to introduce the trope of theatre so prominently as he began to write again after a gap of some fifteen years. Conrad's adaptation of *The Secret Agent* for the stage was begun around the

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<sup>317</sup> Lang, Andrew. 'The Supernatural in Fiction', *Adventures among Books*, London: Longman 1905. Qtd in Brantlinger. p.240.

<sup>318</sup> Joseph Conrad to William Blackwood, 6 September 1897. *LJC*:1 381.

<sup>319</sup> Conrad went so far as to ask Fisher Unwin to send him a Malay dictionary so that he could be 'correct'. Joseph Conrad to T. Fisher Unwin, 22 April 1896. *LJC*:1 276-277.

time that *The Rescue* was being completed. This return to drama itself followed a fifteen-year lull after the adaptation of 'To-Morrow'. In the meantime the development of Conrad's close friendship with Galsworthy led to his attending and avoiding the attendance of several of Galsworthy's plays. Furthermore, around the time that Galsworthy's *Strife* was first produced Conrad asked Pinker to retrieve from McClure's the typescript for *The Rescue*, which he expressed a determination to finish.<sup>320</sup>

Conrad's comments to Ada Galsworthy at this time and to Garnett (concerning Galsworthy's previous play *Joy*) about the theatre can shed light on the trope of theatre as it is used in *The Rescue*. In a letter to Ada Galsworthy about *Strife* he comments, in a vein at times reminiscent of Edith, 'I don't understand much of the theatre; my own imagination is so tyrannical that the stage can never attain for me to the necessary force of illusion.' He continues that Galsworthy's 'deep humanity of the conception rises superior in its indifferent nobility ... above all the miserable artifices of the actor's craft.'<sup>321</sup> In his letter to Garnett he confesses a similar 'morbid horror of the theatre' as a 'place of abominations. It is not the horror of the plays: it is the horror of acting.'<sup>322</sup> In the same letter to Ada Galsworthy he identifies his dislike of acting as a dislike of 'Barkerism', that is to say a 'subdued' and 'ironic' style of acting propounded by Harley Granville-Barker, ('a far cry from the grand romantic tradition' comment Karl and Davies in their footnote).<sup>323</sup> And here we reach the crux of the matter: for Conrad, the actor ruins the play because he can never attain to the imaginative reality originally intended in the text. Thus the stage, which can never give 'the necessary force of illusion' due to the inadequacy of its actors, provides a perfect metaphor for the failing of romance narrative under the weight of realism and a scrutiny of the illusion. And just as the faults of the stage lie with too-knowing actors so too the demands for realism and the scrutiny of illusion come from within *The Rescue* itself.

Lingard's claim that the betrayal of his word has brought 'the world down about my ears' must be answered in one sense by Marlow's recognition that '[t]he heavens do not fall for such a trifle' (HD 147). Yet in another sense it *is* the breaking

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<sup>320</sup> Joseph Conrad to J.B. Pinker, 21 January 1909. *LJC*:4 189. *Strife* opened at the Duke of York's Theatre 9 March 1909, Conrad saw it at the Haymarket on either 17 or 24 March 1909 (cf. Joseph Conrad to Ada Galsworthy, 25? March 1909. *LJC*:4 207).

<sup>321</sup> Joseph Conrad to Ada Galsworthy, 25? March 1909. *LJC*:4 208.

<sup>322</sup> Joseph Conrad to Edward Garnett, 31 March 1908. *LJC*:4 69-70.

of the binding agreement, the rending of the backcloth to his pageant of romance in the wake of intruding, ironic actors. *The Franklin's Tale* ends with the protagonists releasing each other from their binding agreements (Aurelius sends Dorigen back home, the magician lets Aurelius off his thousand pounds debt) motivated by the desire to 'doon a gentil dede' (FT 871, 939). However, this is no easy ending: the invasion of reality by the magician's conjuring calls into question the stable difference between the *Tale* and the world of its teller and audience. Indeed, the Franklin, as the conjurer of the *Tale*, explicitly dissolves this difference by asking the audience to judge, 'Which was the mooste fre, as thinketh yow?' (FT 950). This question requires the audience to go further than suspending disbelief but to enter into the narrative ethically as if it were true. However, the magician's conjuring indicates that this *Tale* can only ever *seem* to be true and thus it deconstructs, as fiction, any response the audience might make to the Franklin's question. That the Franklin is unaware of the deconstructive principle inherent in his narrative is made clear by the value he himself places on gentillesse in 'The Franklin's Prologue'.<sup>324</sup> This deconstructive principle, then, introduced by the magician, works itself from the inside outward to intrude upon the audience's aesthetic and ethical reality with pervasive ironic illusion.<sup>325</sup>

Returning to the viscosity that Conrad originally struggled so hard to attain, as witnessed by his letters at the time, we find that it appears in the end only to be shattered as an illusory perspective onto an already lost romantic geography.<sup>326</sup> Lang's phrase, 'impossible romance', becomes in *The Rescue* the impossibility of romance and indeed Conrad himself understood that *The Rescue* 'in its concentrated colouring and tone will remain the swan song of Romance as literary art.'<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> LJC:4 208.

<sup>324</sup> A term he applies equally to characters inside and outside the tale, FT 4, 22, 37, 855, 871, 902, 936, 939.

<sup>325</sup> In this the magician comes close to Emig's trickster!

<sup>326</sup> Conrad's problems with the composition of *The Rescue* are not only well attested by his letters but form the basis for much theorizing of the novel from Moser on. For example cf. Geddes, Gary. 'The Rescue: Conrad and the Rhetoric of Diplomacy', *Mosaic*, 7:3 1974 p.108.

<sup>327</sup> Joseph Conrad to J.B. Pinker, 15 February 1919, cited in LJC:1 382.

## *The Rover*: Reconciliation of Sorts

Throughout Conrad's writing career, and particularly in his later work, he had used romance narrative as a style and a motif. Glancing amongst contemporary reviews of his books we find that his fiction is admired for its depiction of picturesque characters in adventurous, if believable, settings. The growth in popularity that came in particular with *Chance* was due in part to its accommodation of popular tastes, and was augmented by better quality serialization (in the *New York Herald*) than his work had previously received: 'lavish' illustrations by L.A. Shaffer, as well as high quality paper and full page reproduction.<sup>328</sup> *The Rescue* as a 'swan song of romance' would appear to cut out that fruitful mode for his fiction, near the end of his career.<sup>329</sup> Furthermore, the demise of romance embodies the demise of the struggle for faith by his protagonists in Conrad's fiction. Edith's vision of an empty universe is what undoes the romance narrative of *The Rescue*. She introduces consciousness, like the too knowing actors on Barker's stage, and that consciousness is of the arbitrary nature of the narratives humans live by. At the end of *The Rescue* it becomes apparent that whatever teleology we conjure up for ourselves will undo itself because it is only a fiction and that this reality is the reality of a world in which God is absent.

In *The Rover* Conrad constructs a post-romance landscape peopled by characters straight out of a romance narrative who continue to exist after the narrative that gave them purpose as characters has been removed. Peyrol has returned from his varied life at sea, a life that echoes that of Lingard in what little we discover of his time as a 'Brother of the Coast'; Catherine lives a life of restraint and denial after her early infatuation with a priest; Michel lives on after the death of his only companion,

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<sup>328</sup> Knowles, Owen and Gene Moore. *Oxford Reader's Companion to Conrad*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001. p.188. Sid Reid, in an unpublished paper given at the 'Conrad and Territoriality Conference', University of British Columbia, 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> August 2002, explains that earlier serialization of Conrad's work often had the material sharing pages with other fiction, poetry and articles. These were frequently of what would now be deemed an inferior quality to Conrad's work. Whilst other, now little known and little valued authors were reproduced on high quality insert paper with colour illustrations Conrad's work was frequently relegated to poorer paper with monochrome illustrations of uneven quality.

<sup>329</sup> Certainly the plot of *Suspense* rehabilitates a romance mode and yet what it echoes in Scott's *Redgauntlet* in particular is a gothic fascination, for example in the implications of incest. Conrad had toyed with gothic tones from the beginnings of his writing career, in short stories such as 'The Idiots' and *The Arrow of Gold*'s precursor, *The Sisters*; however he rarely considered successful those works that are most coloured by gothic, such as 'The Return'. Where Conrad's use of gothic is most effective is in the political novels where the political seriousness of the protagonists is at once undermined and shown to be horribly fatal through a blackly humorous and ironic gothic tone.

his dog; Scevola, Arlette, and Réal are drawn (back in Arlette's case) to the Escampabor farm after the bloodbath of the revolution. All they are left it seems is the power of observation. In this the novel echoes the emphasis placed on the visual in *The Rescue*. However the visual in *The Rover* differs from that in *The Rescue* at least in the fact that it is not complicated through the same association with language and communication. Whilst Edith's visions occur out of an aural incomprehension the visual in *The Rover* is a matter of silent surveillance. The absence of a purposive meaning for the lives of the protagonists is not a revelation to them so much as something they live with daily. If Edith recalls May in *Footfalls* the protagonists of *The Rover* are much closer to *Godot*'s Vladimir and Estragon.

Moreover, whilst Edith watched the Wajo world as if it were a drama or opera in which people might at least move *The Rover* depicts a 'petrified landscape' in which the characters are always on the verge of turning to stone.<sup>330</sup> When Peyrol first arrives in Pesquiers Michel's dog, still alive, 'apparently changed into stone at his master's heel' (*Ro* 26). And when Peyrol arrives at Escampabor he finds it amongst 'the unchangeable rocks at the extreme end of the peninsula' where 'time seemed to have stood still and idle while the group of people poised [there] had gone about their ceaseless toil, winning bread and wine from a stony-hearted earth' (*Ro* 50). This description of Escampabor indicates the absence of God from its world: time no longer moves the protagonists toward an age without toil through divine providence; bread and wine are just that and to be won from the petrified earth rather than received through the grace of divine love. The absence of change through a purposeful narrative such as divine providence could give is reiterated by Bolt's description of the place as 'the sort of spot that nothing could change. He made bold to say that it would be just the same a hundred years hence' (*Ro* 68). There is an irony here at Bolt's expense for what he remembers of the farm is of it being a friendly, royalist, wholesome place, where things indeed might grow and flourish and where Catholicism was practiced. The farm *has* changed yet in such a way that the reader himself would now swear with (and against) Bolt that it 'would be just the same a hundred years hence' for quite different reasons.<sup>331</sup>

<sup>330</sup> The term 'petrified landscape' is borrowed from Hugh Epstein's illuminating unpublished paper, 'The Rover: if not skepticism what?', given at the 'Conrad and Territoriality Conference', University of British Columbia, 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> August 2002.

<sup>331</sup> The pun in Bolt's very name indicates this play between change and stasis: bolt meaning either to run away unexpectedly or to hold something firm in the same position.

Not only the animals and the landscape appear petrified, even the vigorous body of the ageing Peyrol is liable to the process. Peyrol's clean shaven face is 'like a carving of stone', and later immobile 'like a head struck on a medal' (*Ro* 116, 123); when conversing with Réal he maintains 'stony immobility' an 'uncanny living-statue manner' and a 'stone-effigy bearing', he swings his head 'as if to make sure that his neck had not been turned to stone', and again turns 'suddenly into stone, as if by enchantment' (*Ro* 132-133, 135); when Arlette attacks him aboard the tartane his head receives 'the two blows as if it had been made of marble' (*Ro* 276). Arlette and Réal appear 'changed into stone' and as 'enchanted lovers bewitched into immobility' as they embrace at the door to his room (*Ro* 249). Even those who are not turned to stone are characterized by an immobility of feature: Scevola's face resembles a 'painted mask' (*Ro* 93); Catherine's 'walnut' face 'might have been a carving in the marvellous immobility of its fine wrinkles' (*Ro* 93); Michel first greets Peyrol with a 'stony surprise' and is characterized by 'his habitual amiably vacant face' which acquires 'a sort of dignity from the utter and absolute blankness that [comes] over it' (*Ro* 22, 157); even Symons body appears to Peyrol and Michel, '*incredibly rigid*' when they lay it on the cabin locker (*Ro* 142 *my italics*).

The very language of Peyrol and the others seems apt to petrify through repetition, as for example Michel and later Peyrol (through indirect reported speech) refer to things 'years and years and years ago', and Arlette to 'Days and days and days' ahead of her and Réal (*Ro* 25, 45, 249). These attempts to indicate linear stretches of time fall back on themselves through repetition so that the years or days become indistinguishable and static rather than eventful and changing. Furthermore the language itself solidifies: the conjunction 'and' implies that a different word will follow the previous one, and yet here the same one recurs erasing difference-through-conjunction by way of a conjunction. Thus 'years' or 'days' ossify, closing down the grammar so that the words remain like fossils rather than purveyors of meaning, indicating the space where meaning once was. If, as Hugh Epstein claims, 'Characters become items' in *The Rover* so to do their words.<sup>332</sup>

Strangely, this petrification does not necessarily indicate a petrification of the mind or the emotions so that when Arlette and Réal have awakened to each other and embrace it is then that they appear 'bewitched into immobility.' In the case of Peyrol

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<sup>332</sup> Epstein *ibid*.



it implies a melding of the man to his homeland from which he has been gone for so long. Indeed at times it seems that characters turn into stone at the moment the observer recognizes that he might have been like that other. For example the 'stony character of [Michel's] stare' is followed in the next line by Peyrol's 'thought that if he had remained at home he would have probably looked like that man' (*Ro* 22). More obliquely Peyrol's stony appearance in conversation with Réal occurs as Réal is plotting his deception of the *Amelia*. Réal seeks the advice of Peyrol and in doing so recognizes the seamanship of that man whom he knows to have been a 'Brother of the Coast' and therefore at odds with the navy system he embodies. These moments of recognition are like that in which the captain recognizes the 'other' man in Ransome, in *The Shadow-Line*. They are recognitions of the other man as utterly different from oneself, and in spite of, even because of that, they show alternative possibilities to one's own life.

Indeed Peyrol is 'haunted' by these possibilities, 'ever since he had put his foot on his native land' and each is attended by a form of ossification (*Ro* 113). The farmhand, who carries Peyrol's chest into the inn on his first night out of Toulon, mouths his words 'slowly as if unused to speech' to which Peyrol's thoughts respond, 'If I had stayed in this country ... I would be talking like this fellow' (*Ro* 16). This unfamiliarity of speech, like the repetitive speech noted earlier, turns words into objects and communication itself into something to be grappled with physically, so to speak. The other figure of recognition for Peyrol is the cripple. His wasted legs and deformed back prompt Peyrol's 'slight shudder at the thought: "Suppose I had been born like that"' (*Ro* 113). The cripple tells Peyrol that he was born with his deformities and implies that had he himself had a child so deformed he might have killed it: 'I don't know what I would have done in their place. Something very different. But then, don't you see, I know what it means to be like I am' (*Ro* 109). Thus he reminds Peyrol of man's 'birth astride of a grave'.<sup>333</sup> His 'pendulum motion', as he moves on his crutches across the strand to the tartane, is an image of time and therefore of death (*Ro* 107). The cripple's osteopathy embodies the purposeless ossification of life on this lonely peninsula.<sup>334</sup> However, it also embodies the contrasting sense that this ossification indicates an awakening in the observer:

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<sup>333</sup> Beckett, p.89.

The rover had seen staggering deformities, dreadful mutilations which were the cruel work of man: but it was amongst people with dusky skins. And that made a great difference. But what he had heard and seen since he had come back to his native land ... reached his sensibility with a particular force, because of that feeling that came to him so suddenly ... that he belonged there, to this land, and had escaped all those things by a mere hair's breadth. (*Ro* 110)

Through and because of their physical and experiential difference Peyrol recognizes in the cripple that 'which would make a chum one would like to have alongside one in a tight place' (*Ro* 112-113).

Peyrol's comparison of the cripple's deformities to those he had witnessed as a sailor in far off countries points up the tension for Peyrol between his roots on 'the other side of the world' and in the stony Giens peninsula.<sup>335</sup> When for example he firsts meets Michel he asks why Michel stares: 'I haven't got a black skin, have I?' but soon changes the roles so that Michel becomes 'a savage' (*Ro* 25, 27). Michel readily admits that 'We are all savages here,' and yet his meaning is in some ways different from Peyrol's. For whilst Peyrol's use of the word is to designate a racial and cultural identity, Michel's involves a social and ethical identity, marked by the violence of the revolution. In fact, Michel's use of the term turns it against Peyrol in a Swiftian manner by contrasting the savages 'here' with the 'master up there', Scevola. In his description Scevola begins as a 'real patriot' who 'first became busy purveying the guillotine when they were purifying the town' until he ends as 'one of the best' of those 'that got the name of drinkers of blood' (*Ro* 27). Since Scevola is placed in contrast to the savages 'here' he is held up as a mirror to Peyrol who had originally addressed Michel as 'a savage'. The activities of empire, legal or otherwise, as purveyed by men such as Peyrol are tacitly and ironically condemned as no different from the blood drinking savagery of the sans-culottes.<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> I use the term 'osteopathy' here in the diagnostic sense of the word, i.e. a disease of the bones.

<sup>335</sup> 'A voice cried out, "Where do you come from, citizen?" "From the other side of the world," Peyrol boomed out' (*Ro* 9).

<sup>336</sup> The classical allusions of Scevola's name underline this irony and also ironize Scevola's own image of himself as saviour and paragon of citizenship. When the Etruscan, Lars Porsena, besieged Rome in 509 B.C. one Gaius Mucius entered his camp to murder him but mistakenly murdered Porsena's secretary instead. He became known as Scaevola (left hand) after he placed his right hand in the fire to which he had been sentenced, to show his unrepentance. Impressed by his bravery, Porsena had him released from the flames. The later Scaevola's of the Republic were predominantly Consuls and

The comparisons Michel's comments lead to show the other side of the coin that Peyrol had played in the port office of Toulon. Here Peyrol claims that 'we practised republican principles long before a republic was thought of; for the Brothers of the Coast were all equal and elected their own chiefs' (*Ro* 11). Indeed they are comparisons Peyrol uses when he plays the coin again with Scevola himself: 'You showed no mercy, you other sans-culottes, to the enemies of the Republic at home, and I killed her enemies abroad far away' (*Ro* 36). In these cases Peyrol fuses the activities of his homeland and 'the other side of the world' but such fusion is uneasy as the sceptical responses of the port officer and Scevola show. Even Michel's acceptance undermines Peyrol's meaning.

In the first five chapters of the novel Conrad is at pains to underline Peyrol's estrangement from his homeland. He is introduced as, 'a rover of the outer seas; he had grown into a stranger to his native country ... he felt like a navigator about to land on a newly discovered shore' (*Ro* 8-9); and later Conrad repeats, quietly reinforcing the petrifying aspect of repetition that he uses throughout, almost to the word, 'an utter stranger in his native country the landing on which was perhaps the biggest adventure in his adventurous life' (*Ro* 19); later still he finds himself in 'his revolutionized native land ... more of a stranger than anywhere else in the world' (*Ro* 44). The tone of adventure is emphasized by comparisons between 'his native country' and exotic locations, in which, for example, the former is 'more foreign to him than the shores of the Mozambique Channel, the coral strands of India, the forests of Madagascar' (*Ro* 21).

It is with such comparisons that Conrad continues to remind his reader of Peyrol's estrangement far into the novel. For example, Peyrol's characterization of Michel as 'a savage' is quietly repeated when he is followed down the beach to the tartane 'by the staring women and children: a phenomenon and a wonder to the natives, as it had happened to him before on more than one island in distant seas' (*Ro* 97). Similarly the cripple's 'story of the Revolution' is like 'the tale of an intelligent islander on the other side of the world talking of bloody rites and amazing hopes of some religion unknown to the rest of mankind' (*Ro* 108). When Peyrol examines his

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Pontifexes. Thus, the former Scaevola implies that Scevola's republican activities were at least misguided, the latter Scaevolus provide a contrasting paradigm of apparently upright citizenship. And yet the implication, noted above, that the activities of Empire are in fact no better than blood drinking savagery, throws the parallels back on the republican Scaevolus. The excesses of French republicanism become charges against its paradigm, Roman republicanism.

feelings for Arlette he firstly acknowledges that 'his country-women were to him less known than any other kind' before concluding '[f]rom his experience of many different races ... that women were very much alike everywhere' (*Ro* 102). Likewise in the company of Réal he 'discoursed with gusto of Englishmen as if they had been a strange, very little known tribe' (*Ro* 126).

The effect of these later comparisons, as with his earlier sensations of adventure, is to characterize Peyrol's responses to his homeland in terms of the greater part of his life at sea: Peyrol experiences his birthplace as he had previously experienced those lands 'on the other side of the world.' However, these responses are in part a fiction as his relationship with the cripple highlights through the haunting thought that he might have been 'born like that.' For since Peyrol felt the 'attraction of the land', to use Captain Vincent's phrase,

any woman, lean and old enough, might have been his mother; he might have been any Frenchman of them all, even one of those he pitied, even one of those he despised. He felt the grip of his origins from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet while he clambered on board the tartane as if for a long and distant voyage. As a matter of fact he knew very well that with a bit of luck it would be over in about an hour. (*Ro* 113)

The cripple recognizes too that despite the tartane being fit to take Peyrol right across the Mediterranean his voyage will not, in fact, be a long one (*Ro* 111). The distance Peyrol must travel whilst he sails to Escampabor is in his mind, from 'the other side of the world' to his homeland and the place where he was born astride the grave so to speak. Peyrol's characterization of his compatriots and homeland as 'other' becomes a double haunting: the face of every old woman becomes his mother's, every ageing man's face a mirror to his own, ghosts of 'other' lives that might have been his; and yet he is haunted too by the exotic others that reappear on the Giens peninsula as village women and fishermen, those 'haunts of his lifetime ... in another world altogether' (*Ro* 44).

Peyrol's double haunting is akin to Arlette's. She too sees beyond those in her physical company, as if to a mob of attendant shades (*Ro* 28). Arlette's other life in

Toulon as a member of Scevola's blood drinking band of sans-culottes returns with the blood on the hems of her skirt to Escampabor. Conrad is explicit:

her clear, black eyes ... had been smitten on the very verge of womanhood by such sights of bloodshed and terror as to leave her in fear of looking steadily in any direction for long, lest she should see coming through the empty air some mutilated vision of the dead. (*Ro* 59)

Whilst Arlette initially seemed to be looking at 'a mob of shades' that are not there, in fact, in Peyrol's words, she is 'trying not to see something that was not there' (*Ro* 59). Peyrol's ability to name her experience indicates his understanding of it and tacitly acknowledges his own experience of the phenomenon. The double negative of Arlette's sight and the double haunting of Peyrol's are further examples of the fossilization that occurs at Escampabor. Both kinds of vision ossify around something now absent, an exotic or familial or murderous other, a presence that gains meaning through absence, indicated by an indent, like the seat mark of the Prime Minister in Mrs Dalloway's small room.

Arlette and Peyrol share more than double visions or rather their double visions are a result of other similarities between them. Neither knows their real name but they take their name from the land. In Arlette's case she takes the name of the Arles region, from which her mother came. Whilst Peyrol's name is in fact the name of the farmer for whom he and his mother worked, it is given to him when he uses it to explain where he is from. Thus both names are designations of geographical belonging as much as social belonging. Neither returns to the land that is their namesake but in Escampabor they find their childhood memories overlaid with their experiences of violent republicanism. It is, in part, the lack of individuation from the claims of their elders, indicated by their geographical appellations, that allows them to experience the 'Brotherhood of the Coast' and the fraternity of the sans-culottes without intellect. It is in the petrified setting of Escampabor that their experiences return as echoes among the rocks in the 'silent world of aftermath'.<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> Epstein.

In the second half of the novel Peyrol and Arlette are haunted by physical presences. In the case of Peyrol his discovery and nursing of Symons, or Testa Dura as he was known amongst the Brothers of the Coast, brings back memories of that life 'on the other side of the world'. Arlette is haunted by the gaze of almost every other protagonist but Michel; she becomes the object of surveillance for Peyrol, Catherine, Scevola and Réal. Both instances have a crucial effect on Peyrol by reinforcing his state as *disparu*. The term is first used by Réal quoting Peyrol's naval records:

there is no record of desertion ... [y]ou stand there as *disparu*. I believe that after searching for you a little they came to the conclusion that you had come by your death somehow or other. (*Ro* 122)

This new status provokes in Peyrol a similar response to Nostromo's when he tells Monygham that 'there is no Capataz!' When Réal claims that he wants 'to talk to the gunner Peyrol', he responds that 'He isn't there. He is *disparu*' (*Ro* 123). Despite this outburst, which appears intended to provoke a reaffirmation of his present existence from Réal (and is successful as such), Peyrol slowly recognizes his disappearance from the world of the Brotherhood of the Coast and the life of Escampabor, and Arlette in particular.

The case of Symons is the more obvious. Whilst Peyrol recognizes a former Brother, Symons fails to recognize his mentor Peyrol. Peyrol originally congratulates himself for his physical health on the grounds of his ability to 'creep stealthily like an Indian and with his trusty cudgel ... fell [a man] like a bullock' but Symons's description of the event puts Peyrol's physicality into question: 'Call yourself a man, walking on air behind a fellow's back and felling him like a bullock' (*Ro* 139, 147). Symons's description not only attempts to deride Peyrol's machismo by implying he did not fight fairly but also figures Peyrol as not a man but a ghost, one who can walk on air, and perform the superhuman task of flooring Testa Dura.<sup>338</sup> Symons's denial of Peyrol, 'I don't know you, you white-headed villain' combines the disappearance of Peyrol from his memory with another nullification of his person through the application of a stereotype. These insults are trumped by Symons's astonishment at the presence of the tartane in 'a pool that seemed no bigger than my hand' coupled

with an almost immediate dismissal of its interest (*Ro* 148ff). The tartane, which had allowed Peyrol to entertain the possibility of returning to the sea life and thus reassured him of his own sea worthiness, is now as unexpected as 'an elephant' and augments Peyrol's own growing physical insignificance.

Thus when Symons 'escapes', as Peyrol allows him to do, Peyrol has 'a strange notion that those English boats had carried off something belonging to him, not a man but a part of his own life, the sensation of a regained touch with the far-off days in the Indian Ocean' (*Ro* 225). Peyrol's loss is of the audience, which both Kurtz and Leggatt sought, that can do justice to the story of one's life. Firstly he disappears out of interest at the naval office in Toulon, here he disappears from the recognition of Symons. Of course he could have reminded Symons who he was, although this would have jeopardized his plot, and this is what he has lost to the *Amelia* with Symons's escape, the chance to be *recognized*. Peyrol does not remind Symons who he is because of Symons initial response to him. Symons's characterization of Peyrol as 'a white-headed villain' shows to Peyrol the discrepancy between his former self as a Brother of the Coast and his present ageing self. To reveal himself would be to disillusion Symons both of the 'white-headed villain' before him and of the swarthy mentor of the Indian Ocean. Although Peyrol need not worry about Symons, that disillusion would rebound reaffirming for Peyrol his difference from his former self. In other words in order for his identity as a Brother of the Coast to live on he must abandon it to the *Amelia*, allowing it to live on in Symons's memory disconnected from his present self.

Peyrol's presence has disappeared from the naval records and from the Brothers of the Coast, lingering only as a memory abstracted from his physical being at Escampabor. However, on the farm he does have a presence that is physically significant to those around him, or at least to begin with. When he first arrives Arlette 'finger[s] the lapel of his coat' and Catherine describes his effect as arousing in her some 'sentiment' as well as the propensity to talk (*Ro* 30, 190-191). It seems to Peyrol that Catherine 'did not disapprove of his presence at the farm, where, it was plain to him, she had a far from easy life' and she herself is struck 'by his massive aspect, his deliberation suggesting a mighty force' (*Ro* 102, 165). For Scevola, Peyrol's presence offers the opportunity to 'exchange a few words from time to time' after his years

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<sup>338</sup> Incidentally Symons's repetition of Peyrol's phrase, like a bullock, exemplifies the negating

spent with the silent women of Escampabor (*Ro* 36). And for Michel, Peyrol is “notre maître” and the only thing he has (*Ro* 281). Conrad comments that ‘[s]ince he had become Peyrol’s henchman [Michel] had lost the habit of thinking altogether’ (*Ro* 281). Even Réal ‘developed a liking for old Peyrol, the only man who had nothing to do with the Revolution’ and finds his ‘sincere lawlessness ... refreshing’ (234).

Yet even at Escampabor Peyrol becomes *disparu*. This disappearance is a result of the growing affection between Arlette and Réal at the expense of her relationship with Peyrol. Réal’s presence at Escampabor provokes the jealousy, murderous at times, of both Scevola and Peyrol. Both men feel themselves replaced by Réal, Peyrol in her affections, Scevola in his role as suitor. As with Symons, Peyrol associates his relegation with his age and as before this is reinforced by Arlette’s appellations for Peyrol: ‘Papa Peyrol, old gunner’ (*Ro* 197); ‘You frighten me with your white hairs’ (*Ro* 198); ‘that old man’ (*Ro* 274); and lastly ‘my dear old friend’ (*Ro* 276). Peyrol’s recognition of his increasing age is symbolized by the conversely decreasing English razor blades with which he cleans his face of ever more grey whiskers:

And there [the blade] was, nearly worn out. The others too. That steel!  
And here he was, holding the case in his hand as though he had just  
picked it up from the floor. Same case. Same man. And the steel worn  
out. (*Ro* 259)

As symbols of masculinity and also as loot from his time as a Brother of the Coast the disappearing blades represent Peyrol’s disappearance as a man active in the lives of others.

It is clear to the reader and even to Peyrol that he has come to Escampabor to die. If the reader had thought that Peyrol’s desire for ‘an obscure corner out of men’s sight where he could dig a hole unobserved’ was related to a need to bury that treasure which is revealed to him only a page earlier, he is disabused of his illusion somewhat when Peyrol confesses to wanting to stay at Escampabor ‘for ever’ (*Ro* 19,28). And yet for a while at least all seem to think that it is Réal who has received his ‘sign from death’ (*Ro* 195). Not only do Catherine and Peyrol say and think as much, but the

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repetitions touched on earlier.



language of disappearance clings to him as death clings to Arlette's skirts (*Ro* 195, 228, 258). Peyrol tries to provoke him with comments, such as, 'it wouldn't matter to anybody if you were to disappear for years in an English hulk' (*Ro* 229); he retreats from society when back in Toulon (*Ro* 236); and when he and Arlette finally embrace he thinks himself 'lost' (*Ro* 248). Réal is so consumed by love that he almost disappears, from others and from himself.

But Réal does not disappear and the sign of death in *The Rover*, the pitchfork, marks out those from Escampabor who handle it rather than Réal for whom Scevola intends it. Scevola, Peyrol and Michel all handle the pitchfork and are brought together by it to face death aboard the tartane. The anomaly of Symons, who uses the pitchfork as a staff to assist his escape, is best explained by Peyrol's sense of loss when Symons returns to the *Amelia*. Thus although Symons himself survives, the pitchfork, which had assisted his departure, assists too in the severance of Peyrol from that part of his life spent as a Brother of the Coast.

The pitchfork is an appropriate sign for the deaths of Michel, Peyrol and Scevola. For whereas the more usual harvest implement, the scythe, is used to cut down the living plant the pitchfork is used to gather together that which the scythe has already cut short. By the time they set sail each of the trio has come to recognize that one way or another they have been dead for some time. Michel has felt himself 'the last of men' from early in the novel and concurs with Peyrol that he has 'left nothing and nobody behind' (*Ro* 95, 281). Although we do not hear it from Scevola himself, and in spite of his fear of death by water, Peyrol assures Catherine that 'I had a long talk with [Scevola] quite recently. You two women can manage him perfectly; and then, who knows, perhaps he has gone away for good' (*Ro* 254). It is Peyrol himself who seems least sure and yet most aware of his own death, as is tacitly indicated by the alternatives he presents to Catherine about Scevola. If Peyrol is still unsure whether he intends to sail the tartane himself the options he assigns to Scevola are also his own: either he and Scevola stay and Réal leaves, or vice versa.

Yet even if Peyrol is unsure as to what course of action to take, how to receive his death so to speak, his sense of himself as *disparu* turns outward and encompasses the world around him. Concurrent with his realization that he is disappearing from the lives of others is a realization that the world is disappearing from himself. This is not a physical blindness, such as Whalley's, but an 'intimate inward sense of the vanity of all things, the doubt of that power within himself' and a 'feeling ... that life was a

dream less substantial than the vision of Ceylon lying like a cloud on the sea. Dream left astern. Dream straight ahead' (*Ro* 195-6, 259). Moreover, not only is he lost to the world and the world lost to him, but like Réal, he also catches himself, 'losing' himself (*Ro* 159).

We cannot compare this to Whalley's crisis of faith because for Peyrol religious thinking is an anathema. He elides the political thinking of the republicans with the religious thinking of those peoples he had encountered on the Indian Ocean, and is unable to 'remember having seen a bishop in his life' (*Ro* 89, 26). His characterization of French republicanism and eastern religions recalls Marlow's scathing characterization of colonialism:

I have heard of and seen more gods than you could ever *dream* of in a long night's sleep, in every corner of the earth, in the very *heart* of the *forests*, which is an *inconceivable thing*. Figures, stones, sticks. There must be something in the *idea*.... (*Ro* 89 my italics)

Escampabor and its inhabitants live both literally and figuratively in a time after faith. Both the churches and the zeal of republicanism have gone. Even for Peyrol and Michel the fraternity of the Brotherhood or a dog has disappeared. Peyrol's crisis of faith, therefore, is not in a transcendent notion but, like Lingard's, in the real. And just as Lingard's disillusionment comes in the form of affection for a compatriot made other by time and space apart, so too Peyrol's (de)realization comes to him slowly through the agency of Arlette and Symons. Their eventual responses are similar too: Lingard sets sail in the opposite direction to the *Hermit* and Peyrol sets sail, never to return to Escampabor. But whilst Lingard continues in *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands* to play Prospero before eventually retiring back to Britain, Peyrol's last voyage is his last pretension to Prospero-like manipulations.

In fact Peyrol's suicide accords with Septimus's in its successful and fatal attempt to reintergrate with the real. Peyrol's real life, so to speak, has been the sea life and a salty sea life at that. In *The Rover* it is the tartane and the sea itself that provide the aperture through which Peyrol can realize himself, finally: 'Under that grey sky there was nothing for him but the swish of breaking sea and the ceaseless furious beating of the tartane's foresail' (*Ro* 298). Like a star Peyrol shines out after he has disappeared before vanishing forever.

If *The Rescue*'s ending is undercut by its previously written sequels, the successful plotting of *The Rover* is likewise undone by the events of history. Despite the British finding and believing in the false documents, prepared by Réal and carried by the tartane, history tells that Nelson was finally victorious and not in the East where the documents were meant to lead the British. There is little reason to believe that Conrad did not intend this deconstructive twist beyond his tale's end since there is no other explanation for including the interview between Vincent and Nelson in the final chapter. The undermining of the historical plotting by later events is rather meant as a specific contrast to the other ending of the final chapter.

In this other ending there is not the same deconstructive element. In fact, the ending is surprisingly and convincingly positive, for a Conrad novel. Réal and Arlette are married and Catherine returns to church. Importantly, Catherine's return to church is not as a member of a congregation but to 'an empty nave' a space in which an absent presence may be believed in through faith. And it is in this empty space that she prays for the spirit of the *disparu* Peyrol and the *disparu* spirit of Arlette. For, although Catherine 'did not get rid of her involuntary awe of her niece as a selected object of God's wrath until towards the end of her life', it is evident that in Peyrol's absence Arlette has left her blood tainted life behind (*Ro* 313). The return of faith at the end of *The Rover* and Conrad's writing career is only possible in the aftermath of scepticism. It reappears in the space left by coruscating deconstruction. The figure of Catherine in the empty nave is the figure of the trickster in the gap, the figure of Dada and imagist aesthetics, standing at the aperture through which Peyrol disappeared.

There is a further and final return of faith in *The Rover* and that is faith in narrative itself. Peyrol returns, 'as though he had come back to live again amongst them', in the conversation of Escampabor (*Ro* 315). Moreover this return is prompted by the very real find of Peyrol's treasure at the bottom of a well. As Réal recognizes even to Peyrol it was a mystery why he put it there, yet its very mystery fulfils the formula of fairy tale that the hidden treasure embodies (*Ro* 315). If there is a reason at all it is that the hidden treasure integrates the two aspects of Peyrol's life that haunted him at Escampabor: the land and people from which he sprung and the land and people amongst whom he adventured, 'on the other side of the world.' Peyrol brings the living experience of hidden treasure all the way from the Indian Ocean to be savoured right at the end of the Giens peninsula.

The hidden treasure revives the reality of Peyrol's life through experience and, more importantly, narrative. At Escampabor Peyrol realized the disappearance of his romantic life as a Brother of the Coast, a disappearance akin to the dissolution of romance in *The Rover*'s precursor *The Rescue*. He remained, like a fossil, indicating in his physical and psychological shape the thing he was at another time. Only by completely absenting himself can he reappear in the conversation that fills the space he has left behind. In his absence Peyrol finds that audience he had been unable to rely on from Symons and Arlette in life. As with Catherine's faith the return of faithful narrative comes out of abnegation, an abnegation of narrative that *The Rescue* in its (de)construction and *The Rover* in its sparse, indeed petrified, language inflicted on the staple of romance. Here is Conrad's aesthetic aperture: the reappearance of the possibility of meaningful ethical narrative in 'the petrified landscape', the 'silent world of aftermath'.<sup>339</sup> It is tentative, it is fragile but it is possible.

Of all the inanimate objects, of all men's creations, books are the nearest to us, for they contain our very thought, our ambitions, our indignations, our illusions, our fidelity to truth, and our persistent leaning toward error. But most of all they resemble us in their precarious hold on life.<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>339</sup> Epstein.

<sup>340</sup> Conrad, Joseph. 'Books'. p.5.

## Conclusion

In an unlikely way Conrad's *The Rover* appears to be one of his most theological novels. It is a mystical and negative theology in which absence provokes presence. In *The Rover* and in *The Rescue* Conrad seems less at pains, than he was in *Nostramo* for example, to satirize and undermine theology and in particular divine purposive narrative as exemplified by the Bible. In *The Rescue* we find an expression of despair in narrative and in *The Rover* the development of a new faith out of the ashes of romance literature. This is embodied in the stark third person narrative technique, in which the luscious descriptions of Conrad's earlier material, particularly his Malay fiction, are blanched, so that although the foreground remains evocative it is also what Auerbach calls 'fraught with background'.<sup>341</sup> By maintaining a simple narrative style free of meaning-loaded description and with a minimum of free and indirect speech Conrad represents in the landscape of his style the psychological and physical landscape of his protagonists. And yet out of this narrative landscape appears a plot of hidden treasure, secret identities, war, deception and love. Likewise, his protagonists originally appear as stock romance characters bereft of their romance setting, left, as it were, in the aftermath of *The Rescue*'s 'swan song of romance'. And yet, by renouncing their romance identities, they are revived to the romance of their lives' plot.

It is not merely Catherine's return to the empty spaces of the Church that indicates the theological undertow of *The Rover*. Already as they set sail Peyrol, Michel and Scevola form an unlikely trinity of first man, last man and messiah, who must absent themselves from Escampabor before the trio left behind, surrogate mother, groom and bride, can be revived to the romance of life. Michel had characterized himself as 'the last of men' when introducing himself to Peyrol for employment near the beginning of the novel and at the end he reiterates this role.<sup>342</sup> This characterization draws on the image of 'the last man', in popular circulation at

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<sup>341</sup> Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard Trask, Princeton University Press 1991. p.12.

<sup>342</sup> Cf. 'He was the last of men. Somebody must be last. There was no place for him in the *life* of the village.' (*Ro* 95-96 my italics). "If I had gone away by myself, I would have left you marooned on this earth like a man thrown out to die on a desert island." ... He connected Peyrol's words with the sense of his own insignificant position at the tail of all mankind, and, timidly, he murmured with his clear, innocent glance unclouded, the fundamental axiom of his philosophy:

"Somebody must be last in this world." (*Ro* 281-282).

the end of the nineteenth century and stemming from the social implications of the second law of thermodynamics.<sup>343</sup> Michel is not in fact 'the last of all men' but rather the last noble savage of the village, the last to remain innocent (Cf. *Ro* 207).<sup>344</sup>

In his innocence Michel is also like 'the first man', and Peyrol who in some ways embodies Adam. Peyrol is named after the 'soil from which he had sprung' and is innocent to innuendo such as the cripple's sarcasm and even to superstition (*Ro* 18, 108-109). In this and his lifetime spent in paradissally exotic locations, living according to the egalitarian values of the Brotherhood of the Coast, Peyrol also appears to be prelapsarian, or rather to have had a prelapsarian existence at some point prior to his life at Escampabor. His recognition that this existence is gone remains an endearingly innocent recognition. Scevola, too, retains the innocence of the fanatic, but it is one that points up the danger of innocence. Scevola understands himself to be a saviour, a purifier of society, one whose job was cut short by 'moderation' (*Ro* 187).<sup>345</sup> Yet Peyrol points out to him that he too is a 'last man' one for whom it is 'no use declaiming here or anywhere for that matter. You wouldn't find anybody to listen to you – you cannibal' (*Ro* 187). Peyrol continues to explain that 'The time when your own people up La Boyère way ... trembled at the idea of you coming to visit them with a lot of patriot scallywags at your back is past. You have nobody at your back; and if you start spouting like this at large, people would rise up and hunt you down like a mad dog' (*Ro* 188). The time of the last and one true patriot Scevola is gone.

It is the disappearance of this unlikely trinity of isolated men, for whom life has already past, 'Papa Peyrol', Messianic Scevola as Son, and Michel as Holy Ghost, that creates the aperture within the novel both for reader and the remaining protagonists. The physical death of these men is crucial to the resolution of the plot,

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<sup>343</sup> The lonely isolation of 'the last man' is at odds with the rather triumphal associations of 'the survival of the fittest' which also implies an eventual reduction of life to the singular.

<sup>344</sup> Michel corresponds in some ways with Nietzsche's 'last man':

"What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star?" thus asks the Ultimate [last] Man and blinks.

'The earth has become small and on it hops the Ultimate Man, who makes everything small. His race is as exterminable as the flea; the Ultimate Man lives longest.' Nietzsche, Friedrich. 'Zarathustra's Prologue' 5, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. p.46.

Yet his innocence and characterization as a noble savage set him apart from Nietzsche's 'last men' who are lazy, subtle, and determinedly mediocre.

<sup>345</sup> Cf. 'We patriots held our hand too soon. All the children of the ci-devants and all the children of the traitors should have been killed together with their fathers and mothers. Contempt for civic virtues and love of tyranny were inborn in them all. They grow up and trample on all the sacred principles. . . . The work of the Terror is undone!' (*Ro* 187).

creating a space for those left behind to reanimate their lives; for the reader, their death crystallizes the fact that Peyrol, Scevola, and Michel have been dead to the world, in their various ways, for most of the narrative; furthermore, the strange mixture of exhilaration and expiration, noise and silence, that characterizes their death, exposes the reader to a moment of literary satisfaction that is uninterpretable, indeed, that satisfies for the very reason that it exceeds interpretation. Indeed, this satisfaction is tied in to and given expression in the final exchange between Réal and the cripple, concerning Peyrol:

“But the only certain thing we can say of him is that he was *not* a bad Frenchman.”

“*Everything* is in that,” murmured the cripple, with fervent conviction, in the *silence* that fell upon Réal’s words and Arlette’s faint sigh of memory. (*Ro* 317 my italics)

Even when recalled to life in the living memory of others, Peyrol is characterized by what he was ‘not’. Moreover, this description, which empties itself with ‘not’ at the same time that it fills itself with the recollection of Peyrol, is ‘everything’. These two extremes of content, what is ‘not’ and what is ‘everything’, mingle, like ‘sighs of memory’ in ‘silence’, and exemplify the aperture offered to the reader, which presents ‘everything’ through a fiction of what is ‘not’. Interpretation becomes an action of withholding, of saying what is absent, and in the space left by interpretation, in the spaces of what is ‘not’, appears the satisfying ‘everything’ of the fiction.<sup>346</sup>

Peyrol has an additional theological typology in his relationship with Arlette and Réal, which emerges from Catherine’s name for him, Jean, (*Ro* 313). For this name is also that of the Baptist and that other Conradian absenter of roles, Gian’ Battista – Nostromo. Peyrol, like John the Baptist and Nostromo is definitively not the man and yet Peyrol at least, unlike Nostromo, ushers in the man, who is Réal. This is indicated through their interaction with Arlette: Peyrol is the man who works the ‘miracle’ of bringing Arlette to speech (*Ro* 191); furthermore to Arlette he had originally seemed ‘the man himself’ (*Ro* 245). Of Réal Arlette continues to explain

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<sup>346</sup> Compare: What, then do we experience of *Thou*?  
Just Nothing. For we do not experience it.  
What, then, do we know of *Thou*?

that he was 'expected' and yet his coming takes her by surprise (*Ro* 244, 242). Réal transforms Arlette's vision of the world 'altogether' with a renewed sight that recalls Mr. Lucas's transformed sight in the tree trunk. Peyrol, therefore acts as one who comes to announce the arrival of another in his place, as had John the Baptist.

Implicit in this announcement is the subtle interchange of presence and absence, *disparu* and *Réalité*. The new romance of the real, embodied in Réal, once again throws us back upon far earlier romance fiction, and in particular Scott's *Redgauntlet*. For just as in *The Rover* the larger than life male romance characters must vanish in order to make room for a new narrative that springs from aftermath, absence, dissipation, so in *Redgauntlet* it is the pragmatic Alan Fairford who finally appears as the new romance hero, winning the girl and a future out of the texts of letter, diary, ballad, and so on, that had threatened to mutually deconstruct their purposive narrative and enact a textual dissipation equivalent to the that of the Jacobite plot around which they circle. The new purposive narrative that Réal and Alan embody is a romance of reality that springs from a psychological and physical landscape of liminality and aftermath.

This analysis of *The Rover*'s implications for theological and literary narrative exemplifies a pattern of revival that can be traced throughout the works of all the artists that have been considered here. These modernists set out to escape the anthropocentrism and solipsisms that were the inheritance of early nineteenth century romanticism's usurpation of divine creativity, and that polluted sentimental, late nineteenth, and early twentieth, century romantic literature.<sup>347</sup> Yet the same

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Just everything. For we know nothing isolated about it anymore. Buber. p.11.

<sup>347</sup> Exemplary of the kind of poetry against which the Modernists were writing are Herbert Trench's 'O Dreamy, Gloomy, Friendly Trees!' and Arthur Shearly Cripps's 'A Refrain':



modernists returned, after the first world war, to a romantic, and particularly Wordsworthian, valuation of plain speaking and the worth and weight of words themselves. The way in which this concern for language and narrative manifested itself was at times a far cry from anything contained in *The Lyrical Ballads*, or the plotting and constructions of Scott's fiction. And yet, the paradigm of care for the thing itself, presented as a moment of aperture that engages the boundless response characterized by *The Shadow-Line's* captain, is a Wordsworthian one.

Yet the religious implications of this development in the arts are not reflected in contemporary British theology. Buber's *I and Thou* comes close to articulating a theological version of Conrad's ethical 'boundless response'; Karl Barth's *Epistle to the Romans* describes a reliance on Grace that echoes modernist moments of aperture; Kierkegaard's thought voices that sense of crisis felt and addressed by the modernists here, and is generally acknowledged as the first articulation of existential angst; and yet none of these European theologians was taken up popularly in the British Churches until the Second World War. Instead the Churches devoted much of their efforts to practical developments such as reform of the Prayer Book, Ecumenism, and under William Temple, social welfare. In a period of economic recession, social and political unrest, and declining Church attendance, the Church no doubt felt that a mystical and negative theology would be of less use (and less attractive) than pious engagement in worldly affairs for the practical benefit of humanity. It was therefore left to the artists of the period to express the ethical possibilities inherent in their aesthetic engagement with the notion of divine absence, even where these engagements did not reinstate a divine presence.

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'Oh Dreamy, Gloomy, Friendly Trees!'

Oh Dreamy, Gloomy, Friendly Trees,  
I came along your narrow track  
To bring my gifts unto your knees  
And gifts did you give back;  
For when I brought this heart that burns –  
These thoughts that bitterly repine –  
And laid them here among the ferns  
And the hum of boughs divine,  
Ye, vastest breathers of the air,  
Shook down with slow and mighty poise  
Your coolness on the human care,  
Your wonder on its toys,  
Your greenness on the heart's despair,  
Your darkness on its noise.

Both taken from *Poems of To-Day: First and Second Series*, London: Sidgwick & Jackson 1924.

'A Refrain'

Tell the tune his feet beat  
On the ground all day –  
Black-burnt ground and green grass  
Seamed with rocks of grey –  
"England," "England," "England,"  
That one word they say.  
  
Now they tread the beech-mast,  
Now the ploughland's clay,  
Now the faëry ball-floor of her fields in May.  
Now her red June sorrel, now her new-turned hay,  
Now they keep the great road, now by sheep-path stray,  
Still it's "England," "England,"  
"England" all the way!

For novelists such as Woolf and Conrad the interest in and value of the real was not one that reached back clearly to an absent divine presence. There is no theological transcendence spoken of by the reality embodied in their fiction. The apertures they offer are constructed out of reality and are windows on to reality. Their ethic of boundless response to others, finds its closest theological parallel in Buber's paradigm of the 'I-Thou' relationship, in which the difference of the other must be respected.<sup>348</sup> But whereas for Buber the primary type of this relationship is to be found in man's relation to God, even as God is manifest in the tangible world, for Woolf and Conrad this relationship remains atheistic, focused on the boundless response as an ethical and psychological, rather than a theological, one. So, Woolf develops her imagistic technique in her later fiction in order to reach deeper into the machinations of individual and social psyches. These are represented not through linear purposive narrative but the extended boundless response of 'stream of consciousness' narrative and the moment of aperture that physical mental objects present to the mind.

Woolf bound her aesthetic aim to an ethical one in her non-fiction, and in particular *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*. In these texts, the synonymy of masculinity and public life in history is connected to linearity in fictional and factual narrative. Masculine history and fiction, she claims, concern themselves with external, public, causally connected narratives. Woolf counters this masculine culture, embodied in her own life by her father, Leslie Stephens, and his work for the Dictionary of National Biography, with an alternative, feminine culture. This culture has been and is, intimate, private, and to that extent ahistorical.<sup>349</sup> In *A Room of One's Own* Woolf argues that women require an equality through which they can shed their distinctive, 'feminine note',<sup>350</sup> and begin to produce literature, unconscious of their sex.<sup>351</sup> The androgynous authorship that she aims at in *A Room of One's Own* is resexualized in *Three Guineas*, where women are cast as equal to men through difference rather than similarity. Here the 'feminine note' is something to be prized,

<sup>348</sup> Cf. 'Only silence before the *Thou* – silence of *all* tongues, silent patience in the undivided word that precedes the formed and vocal response – leaves the *Thou* free, and permits man to take his stand with it in the reserve where the spirit is not manifest but *is*.' Buber. p.39.

<sup>349</sup> Interestingly, taken together, *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* indicate many of the major critical fields of interest that have developed in the past thirty years, in particular, feminism, post-colonialism, and cultural studies.

<sup>350</sup> As identified and critiqued by Forster in 'The Feminine Note in Literature', a paper given to both the Apostles and to the Bloomsbury 'Friday Club' in October and December, 1910, respectively.

<sup>351</sup> Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own/Three Guineas*, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1993. p.84.

something that can work alongside masculinity without synthesis of the two. And it is right at the end of *Three Guineas* that we find an articulation of feminine ethics that simultaneously sums up feminine motivations for aesthetic innovations, such as those of *Mrs Dalloway*:

Even here, even now your letter tempts us to shut our ears ... to listen not to the bark of the guns and the bray of the gramophones but to the voices of the poets ... assuring us of a unity that rubs out divisions as if they were chalk marks only; to discuss with you the capacity of the human spirit to overflow boundaries and to make unity out of multiplicity. But that would be to dream – ... the dream of peace, the dream of freedom....

... But ... the answer to your question must be that we can best help you to prevent war not by repeating your words and following your methods but by finding new words and new methods. We can best help you to prevent war not by joining your society but by remaining outside your society but in co-operation with its aim.<sup>352</sup>

For Conrad the blessing for which he wrestles is the possibility of community in spite of absolute isolation and narrative, and in spite of the demise of western culture as upheld by the archetypes of historical purposive narrative.<sup>353</sup> This appears only when isolation and deconstruction are accommodated and lived with, as demonstrated by *The Shadow-Line* and *The Rover*. Conrad figures this struggle primarily in the deconstructive architectural principles and the evasive characters of his protagonists that trouble his fiction up to and including *The Rover*.

Others found themselves moving out of the space, which they had marked through their work as the absence of God as meaning, towards specific, social and cultural, purposive narratives. Pound, notably, although there were others such as Aldington, was lured by the attractions of fascism. Indeed, as the Futurists in Russia

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<sup>352</sup> Ibid. pp.271-272.

<sup>353</sup> For Conrad, too, the figure of his father looms large in his experience of those archetypes: his father's revolutionary romanticism had pinned its hopes on messianic dreams for a liberated Poland that failed both Poland and Conrad's family. The exile into which Conrad's family were sent as a result of his father's intriguing, led to the premature death of both his parents, his mother, aged thirty-two, then his father, aged forty-nine, three years later, when Conrad (himself named after the romantic, patriot, hero of Adam Mickiewicz's poem, *Dziady*), was only eleven years old.

and Italy had shown, the desire for purification of language and a Nietzschean enthusiasm for the future was a sure route to the totalitarian reinforcement of 'new traditions'. H.D., like Woolf, was more drawn to patterns of individual psychology and classical archetypes, structuring her later poetry around her experiences of therapy and her interest in Greek literature and mythology.

Many of the German Dadas, such as Huelsenbeck and others who spent time in Berlin, had already flirted with communism during the war. After the war communism and surrealism sprung up as the ethical and aesthetic paradigms by which they ordered new purposive narratives of life. Both aesthetically and ethically the development of surrealism, spearheaded by Tzara's rival Breton, once again yoked art to psychological realism, refining Dada techniques for instigating non-verbal/representational meaning.

There are five noteworthy dissidents from this particular pattern: Emmy Hennings and Hugo Ball, T.S. Eliot, E.M. Forster and Marcel Duchamp. Hennings, Ball and Eliot, all returned to the Christian fold: Hennings and Ball left Zürich before the end of the war in 1917. Ball felt that Dada did not do justice to the individual:

We tend to have scruples only about the performance, about the work, and to disregard life and the individual as incurable. That, however, means reducing the artist himself to decoration, to ornament. People cannot be worth less than their works. We must take the artists at their word, that is at their externalized symmetries.

It is perhaps not a question of art but of the uncorrupt image.<sup>354</sup>

Ball and Hennings gradually migrated to Agnuzzo where they settled into an ascetic life, Ball chronicling the life of saints in *Byzantisches Christentum* (1923), after a brief indulgence of his anti-German political thinking, published as *Zur Kritik der deutschen Intelligenz* (1919). Ball and Henning's return to Christianity was through a mystical and negative theology that Ball frequently explored not only in his published articles and books on saints and mystics, but also in his diaries of the time (published just before his death in 1927). These diaries are in part notebooks for his published

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<sup>354</sup> 19 May 1917. *Fl* 115.

work on saints and mystics: they are filled with quotes from the Church Fathers, descriptions and discussions of their theology. These notes are woven in amongst matter-of-fact incidents, reports of and responses to events in the news, church attendance, philosophical and poetic musings, as well as quotations from philosophers, poets, friends such as Herman Hesse, as well as his wife. The mystical and negative theology that Ball develops in his diaries is exemplified by two passages, one of Ball's own, the other quoting Hennings:

Als das Leben uns verdorben,  
sind wir völlig abgestorben.

We did not flee from life; we sought it out. This too is a way to renunciation. The inner profusion of disappointments automatically brings alienation along with it. One needs isolation to find oneself again and to understand what has happened, what is to befall.<sup>355</sup>

Today Emmy read me the beginning of a new book. It starts as follows:

'Praised be all the names that harbor life. Praised be all naming that aims at the birth of the unnamable.

'Let fulfillment live in every word that longs for wordlessness. . . .'<sup>356</sup>

Eliot's Christianity is also expressed in his poetry and prose, fiction and non-fiction. He too, expressed his faith in negative theological terms, for example in 'Ash Wednesday' and *Four Quartets*.<sup>357</sup> Eliot's fascination, in *Four Quartets*, with the moment of present absence, the endless return of past and future to present, harks back to early Christian writings, such as the works of the desert fathers and at the

<sup>355</sup> 11 March 1921. *FI* 198-199.

<sup>356</sup> 15 April 1921. *FI* 200.

<sup>357</sup> Cf. 'Ash Wednesday' V:

'If the lost word is lost, if the spent word is spent

If the unheard, unspoken

Word is unspoken, unheard;

Still is the unspoken word, the Word unheard,

The Word without the word, the Word within

The world and for the world;' ll.1-6ff. Eliot, T.S. *Collected Poems 1909-1962*. p.102.

same time to the petrified landscape of aftermath that Conrad presents as the place of aperture in *The Rover*. Thus Eliot, and Hennings and Ball, used the innovations of modernism's exploration of the absence of God as techniques for communicating faith in his absent presence.

Forster, as has already been noted, ceased to write fiction for publication having earlier renounced his faith. But he did not give up on an ethical purposive narrative for life, adopting Humanism as a member of a society and as a personal philosophy. Furthermore he continued to publish and broadcast his ethical beliefs in essays, most of which are now collected as *Abinger Harvest* and *Two Cheers for Democracy*. By contrast Duchamp renounced his art in completion of the nihilism that determined his work and did not have recourse to any purposive narrative other than nihilism. Duchamp's renunciation enacts most completely the Dada aesthetic of inviting and repelling interpretation. Duchamp had always constructed art negatively: the removal of purpose from a latrine; the removal of sense and even words from language; the removal of completion by the use of glass as a basis for the work of art so that it is always in the process of completion through the agency of its surroundings, and that may even disappear when regarded from a certain angle (as with *The Great Glass*). Thus his final work of art becomes the absence of art altogether (in favour, as it happens, of chess). There is a sense then, in Duchamp, of complete abnegation and at the same time complete affirmation. For as Wittgenstein claims at the end of the *Tractatus*, 'What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence', the silences of Duchamp's art, like the silences of the Giens Peninsula and the silences of Genesis 22, are apertures on to something before and beyond comprehension, beyond language and yet there to *be* passed over.

Thus, although the modernists were motivated by, and addressed, essentially the same absence of God in narrative and language, for some that absence gave space for ethical and aesthetic rejuvenation, such as we find in Woolf's aesthetic of aperture and Forster's humanism. Such rejuvenation was secular yet it allowed for the return of a worldly spirituality into art and life. For others God's absence made room for alternative objects of faith, such as Pound's fascism and Huelsenbeck's flirtation with communism. In this instance, divine providence was replaced by a secular and worldly, organizing framework. God's narrative for history, ending in the salvation of mankind's souls, was replaced by man's narrative for history, ending in the salvation of mankind's bodies. For others still a space to divine that absent presence of God was

perceived in the moment of absence. Such is Eliot's 'drained pool' in 'Burnt Norton', and the source of mystical faith for Ball and Hemmings. And for a few, like Duchamp, H.D. and at times Conrad, the absence of God in their arts indicated the limits of language, narrative and visual presentation beyond which there is only oral, aural and visual silence.

## *Mrs Dalloway* Appendix:

### Verbal Echoes and Quotations

This collection of quotations juxtaposes passages from *Mrs Dalloway* with others from 'Heart of Darkness' and *The Waste Land* in order to illuminate Woolf's borrowings. The principles of association by which the passages may be compared are linguistic, visual (i.e. Woolf borrows images) and conceptual. The linguistic and the visual are the more obvious of the three and many have been included in the main chapter: "'Heart of Darkness', *The Waste Land* and *Mrs Dalloway*: The Modernist Quest Repeated'. The conceptual borrowings are, by their nature, less distinct. They include the correspondence between Kurtz's and Miss Kilman's extremism, which rests on the tacit correspondence between extremist politics and modern history; another instance is the correspondence between Mrs. Dalloway's and Tiresias's aged androgyny indicated by breastlessness and wrinkled breasts.

The examples collected here are not exhaustive and exclude Woolf's other literary borrowings, not only from other writers such as Shakespeare, but also from Eliot and Conrad themselves, such as the appearance of *Lord Jim* namesakes 'Jim' and 'Brierly' at Mrs. Dalloway's party. The examples given are not intended to indicate a lack of originality in Woolf or an overbearing influence from Eliot and Conrad. On the contrary, they are given to demonstrate the variety of uses to which Woolf deftly put Eliot's aesthetic of fragmentary quotation, as exemplified in *The Waste Land*, incorporating it within her own aesthetic of aperture.

MD 43:        Everything had come to a standstill. The throb of the motor engines sounded like a pulse irregularly drumming through an entire body.

WLFS 216-218:        when the human engine waits  
Like a taxi throbbing waiting,  
I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives

MD 52:        Horror! Horror! She wanted to cry.



HD 137: 'The horror! The horror!'

MD 55: shrivelled, aged, breastless

WLFS 219: Old man with wrinkled female breasts

MD 59: 'Oh this horror!' she said to herself.

HD 137: 'The horror! The horror!'

MD 71: and three great emotions bowled him over; understanding; a vast philanthropy; and finally, as a result of the others, an irrepressible, exquisite delight... He had escaped! was utterly free

WLWTS 432-433: Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.  
Shantih shantih shantih

MD 74-76: The grey nurse resumed her knitting ... In her grey dress ... she seemed like the champion of the rights of sleepers, like one of those spectral presences which rise in twilight in woods made of sky and branches. The solitary traveller ... looking up suddenly, sees the giant figure at the end of the ride.

... Such are the visions which carelessly float up, pace beside, put their faces in front of, the actual thing; often overpowering the solitary traveller and taking away from him the sense of the earth, the wish to return, and give him for substitute a general peace, as if ... all this fever of living were simplicity itself; and myriads of things merged in one thing; and this figure, made of sky and branches as it is, had risen from the troubled sea ... as a shape might be sucked up out of the waves to shower down from her magnificent hands compassion, comprehension, absolution. So, he thinks, may I never go back to the lamplight; to the sitting-room; never finish my book ...

rather let me walk straight on to this great figure, who will, with a toss of her head, mount me on her streamers and let me blow to nothingness with the rest.

Such are the visions. The solitary traveller is soon beyond the wood; and there ... is an elderly woman who seems ... to seek over the desert, a lost son ... to be the figure of the mother whose sons have been killed in the battles of the world. So, as the solitary traveller advances down the village street where the women stand knitting ... the figures still; as if some august fate, known to them, awaited without fear, were about to sweep them into complete annihilation.

...

He woke with extreme suddenness, saying to himself, 'The death of the soul.' ... The words attached themselves to some scene, to some room, to some past he had been dreaming of. It became clearer; the scene, the room, the past he had been dreaming of.

HD 56-57: I slipped through one of these cracks, went up a swept and ungarnished staircase, as arid as a desert ... Two women ... knitting black wool ... one got up and walked straight at me – still knitting with downcast eyes – and only just as I began to think of getting out of her way, as you would for a somnambulist, stood still, and looked up. Her dress was as plain as an umbrella-cover ... An eerie feeling came over me. She seemed uncanny and fateful. Often far away there I thought of these two, guarding the door of Darkness, knitting black wool as for a warm pall, one introducing, introducing continuously to the unknown, the other scrutinising the cheery and foolish faces with unconcerned old eyes. *Ave! Old knitters of black wool. Morituri te salutant.* Not many of those she looked at ever saw her again – not half, by a long way.

HD 130-132: As soon as I got on the bank I saw a trail – a broad trail through the grass ... The grass was wet with dew ... The knitting old woman with the cat obtruded herself upon my memory as a most improper person to be sitting at the other end of such an affair ... I thought I would never get back to the steamer, and imagined myself living alone and unarmed in the woods to an advanced age.

... The night was very clear: a dark blue space, sparkling with dew and starlight, in which black things stood very still.

... He rose, unsteady, long, pale, indistinct, like a vapour exhaled by the earth, and swayed slightly, misty and silent before me; while at my back the fires loomed between the trees, and the murmur of many voices issued from the forest. ... 'You will be lost,' I said – 'utterly lost.' ....

... There was nothing either above or below him, and I knew it. He had kicked himself loose of the earth ... He was alone, and I before him did not know whether I stood on the ground or floated in the air. I've been telling you what we said – repeating the phrases we pronounced – but what's the good? They were common every day words, - the familiar, vague sounds exchanged on every waking day of life. But what of that? They had behind them, to my mind, the terrific suggestiveness of words heard in dreams, of phrases spoken in nightmares. Soul! If anybody had ever struggled with a soul, I am the man.

*MD 77:*        She had some queer power of fiddling on one's nerves, turning one's nerves to fiddle strings, yes.

*WLWTS 377-378:*    A woman drew her long black hair out tight  
And fiddled whisper music on those strings

*MD 82:*        He knew the meaning of the world, he said.

... He lay on the sofa and made her hold his hand to prevent him from falling down, down, he cried, into the flames! and saw faces laughing at him, calling him horrible disgusting names, from the walls, and hands pointing round the screen. Yet they were quite alone. But he began to talk aloud, answering people, arguing, laughing, crying, getting very excited and making her write things down.

... Septimus, the lord of men, should be free ... he Septimus, was alone, called forth in advance of the mass of men to hear the truth ... which now at last, after all the toils of civilisation – Greeks, Romans, Shakespeare, Darwin, and now himself – was to be given whole to. . . . 'To whom?' he asked aloud, 'To the Prime Minister,' the voices which rustled above his head replied. The supreme secret must be told ... he muttered, gasping, trembling, painfully drawing out these profound truths which needed, so

deep were they, so difficult, an immense effort to speak out, but the world was entirely changed by them forever.

... It was horrible, terrible....

HD 135-137: Kurtz discoursed. A voice! a voice! It rang deep to the very last. It survived his strength to hide in the magnificent folds of eloquence the barren darkness of his heart. Oh, he struggled! he struggled! The wastes of his weary brain were haunted by shadowy images now – images of wealth and fame revolving obsequiously round his unextinguishable gift of noble and lofty expression....

Sometimes he was contemptibly childish. He desired to have kings meet him at railway-stations on his return from some ghastly Nowhere, where he intended to accomplish great things. “You show them you have in you something that is really profitable, and then there will be no limits to the recognition of your ability,” he would say. ‘Of course you must take care of the motives – right motives – always.’

... In the afternoon I saw him. He was lying on his back with closed eyes, and I withdrew quietly, but I heard him mutter, ‘Live rightly, die, die . . .’ I listened. There was nothing more. Was he rehearsing some speech in his sleep, or was it a fragment of a phrase from some newspaper article? He had been writing for the papers and meant to do so again, ‘for the furthering of my ideas. It’s a duty.’

... I saw on that ivory face the expression of sombre pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror – of an intense and hopeless despair. Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during that supreme moment of complete knowledge? He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision – he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath –

‘The horror! The horror!’

Cf. Kurtz’s report too. HD 110.

MD 83: That’s an old man playing a penny whistle by the public house, he muttered....

But he himself remained high on his rock, like a drowned sailor on a rock. I leant over the edge of the boat and fell down, he thought. I went under the sea. I have been dead, and yet am now alive, he thought, but let me rest still, he begged (he was talking to himself again – it was awful, awful!); and as, before waking, the voices of

birds and the sound of wheels chime and chatter in a queer harmony, grow louder and louder, and the sleeper feels himself drawing to the shores of life, so he felt himself drawing towards life, the sun grew hotter, cries sounding louder, something tremendous was about to happen.

*WLFS 257-262:* 'This music crept by me upon the waters'

And along the Strand, up Queen Victoria Street

O City city, I can sometimes hear

Beside a public bar in Lower Thames Street,

The pleasant whining of a mandoline

And a clatter and a chatter from within

*MD 84:* raising his hand like some colossal figure who has lamented the fate of man for ages in the desert alone ... and now sees the light on the desert's edge which broadens and strikes the iron-black figure ... and with legions of prostrate men behind him he, the giant mourner, receives for one moment on his face the whole -

*WLWTS 367-372:* Murmur of maternal lamentation

Who are those hooded hordes swarming

Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth

Ringed by the flat horizon only

What is the city over the mountains

Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air

*MD 88:* He was a thorough good sort; a bit limited ... Whatever he took up he did in the same matter-of-fact sensible way; without a touch of imagination, without a spark of brilliancy, but with the inexplicable niceness of his type. He ought to have been a country gentleman – he was wasted on politics. He was best out of doors....

Seriously and solemnly Richard Dalloway got up on his hind legs and said that no decent man ought to read Shakespeare's sonnets

HD 92: He was an improved specimen; he could fire up a vertical boiler. He was there below me, and, upon my word, to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on his hind-legs. A few months of training had done for that really fine chap ... He ought to have been clapping his hands and stamping his feet on the bank, instead of which he was hard at work, a thrall to strange witchcraft, full of improving knowledge.

MD 92-93: the voice of no age or sex, the voice of an ancient spring sprouting from the earth....

ee um fah um so  
foo swee too eem oo,

...

Through all ages – when the pavement was grass, when it was swamp, through the age of tusk and mammoth, through the age of silent sunrise – the battered woman - ... stood singing of love – love which has lasted a million years, she sang, love which prevails, and millions of years ago, her lover, who had been dead these centuries, had walked ... he had gone; death's enormous sickle had swept those tremendous hills, and when at last she laid her hoary and immensely aged head on the earth, now become a mere cinder of ice, she implored the Gods to lay by her a bunch of purple heather, there on her burial place which the last rays of the last sun caressed....

... still, though it issued from so rude a mouth, a mere hole in the earth, muddy too, matted with root fibres and tangled grasses, still the old bubbling burbling song, soaking through the knotted roots of infinite ages ... streamed away in rivulets over the pavement and all along ... fertilising, leaving a damp stain.

WLBD 1-7: April is the cruellest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
Memory and desire, stirring  
Dull roots with spring rain.  
Winter kept us warm, covering

Earth in forgetful snow, feeding  
A little life with dry tubers.

WLWTS 384-387: And voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells.

In this decayed hole among the mountains  
In the faint moonlight, the grass is singing  
Over the tumbled graves, about the chapel

MD 101: But even Holmes himself could not touch this last relic straying on the edge of the world, this outcast, who gazed back at the inhabited regions, who lay like a drowned sailor, on the shore of the world.

WLBD 47: the drowned Phoenician Sailor  
Cf. WLDW 312-321.

MD 102: 'You brute! You brute!' cried Septimus, seeing human nature, that is Dr. Holmes, enter the room.

HD 110: 'Exterminate all the brutes!'

HD 137: 'The horror! The horror!'

MD 106: Worshipping proportion, Sir William not only prospered himself but made England prosper, secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalised despair, made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views until they, too, shared his sense of proportion....

But proportion has a sister, less smiling, more formidable, a Goddess even now engaged – in the heat and sands of India, the mud and swamp of Africa, the purlieu of London, wherever in short the climate or the devil tempts man to fall from the true belief which is her own – even now engaged in dashing down shrines,

smashing idols, and setting up in their place her own stern countenance. Conversion is her name and she feasts on the wills of the weakly, loving to impress, to impose, adoring her own features stamped on the face of the populace

HD 52:        They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force – nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others ... It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind – as is very proper for those who tackle a darkness. The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea – something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to . . . .

MD 108:       he had to support him police and the good of society, which, he remarked very quietly, would take care, down in Surrey, that these unsocial impulses, bred more than anything by the lack of good blood, were held in control.

HD 108-109: with solid pavement under your feet, surrounded by kind neighbours ready to cheer you or to fall on you, stepping delicately between the butcher and the policeman, in holy terror of scandal and gallows and lunatic asylums

MD 125:       Her knowledge of modern history was thorough in the extreme.

HD 141:       ‘He would have been a splendid leader of an extreme party.’ ‘What party?’ I asked. ‘Any party,’ answered the other. ‘He was an – an – extremist.’

MD 135:       Forgetfulness in people might wound, their ingratitude corrode, but this voice, pouring endlessly, year in year out, would take whatever it might be; this vow; this van; this life; this procession, would wrap them all about and carry them on, as in a rough stream



HD 106:       The man presented himself as a voice ... the gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness.

MD 141:       The brute with the red nostrils was snuffing into every secret place! ... Where were his papers? the things he had written?  
... Diagrams, designs ... circles ... sea pieces with little faces laughing out of what might perhaps be waves: the map of the world. Burn them! he cried. Now for his writings ... Universal love: the meaning of the world. Burn them! he cried.

But Rezia laid her hands on them. Some were very beautiful, she thought. She would tie them up (for she had no envelope) with a piece of silk.

WLWTS 343-344:   There is not even solitude in the mountains  
But red sullen faces sneer and snarl

HD 136:       One morning he gave me a packet of papers and a photograph, - the lot tied together with a shoe-string. 'Keep this for me,' he said. 'This noxious fool' ... 'is capable of prying into my boxes when I am not looking.'

MD 156:       Why seek pinnacles and stand drenched in fire? Might it consume her anyhow! Burn her to cinders! Better anything, better brandish one's torch and hurl it to earth than taper and dwindle away ... Why always take, never give? Why not risk one's little point of view? ... Life was that - humiliation, renunciation.

WLFS 308-310:     Burning burning burning burning  
O Lord thou pluckest me out  
O Lord Thou pluckest

WLWTS 401-405:   *Datta*: what have we given?  
My friend, blood shaking my heart

The awful daring of a moment's surrender  
Which an age of prudence can never retract  
By this, and this only, we have existed

HD 138:        Better his cry - much better. It was an affirmation, a moral victory paid  
for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions. But it  
was a victory!

MD 175:        Are we not all prisoners? She had read a wonderful play about a man  
who scratched on the wall of his cell, and she had felt that was true of life - one  
scratched on the wall. Despairing of human relationships (people were so difficult),  
she often went into her garden and got from her flowers a peace which men and  
women never gave her.

WLWTS 411-414:    *Dayadhvam*: I have heard the key  
Turn in the door and turn once only  
We think of the key, each in his prison  
Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison

HD 79:        it is impossible to convey the life sensation 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

MD 176:        'What does the brain matter,' said Lady Rosseter, getting up,  
'compared with the heart?'

                  'I will come,' said Peter, but he sat on for a moment. What is this terror? what  
is this ecstasy? he thought to himself. What is it that fills me with extraordinary  
excitement?

                  It is Clarissa, he said.

                  For there she was.

WLWTS 401-404:    *Datta*: what have we given?

My friend, blood shaking my heart

The awful daring of a moment's surrender

HD 136-137: It was as though a veil had been rent. I saw ... the expression ... of craven terror - of an intense and hopeless despair ... He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision, - he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath -

‘The horror! The horror!’

## Bibliography

The bibliography is divided between 'Works Cited' and 'Works Consulted'.

Abbreviated texts are listed with abbreviations at the front of the thesis, and are also listed here under works cited (without abbreviation). Any method of division in a bibliography is bound to be arbitrary at times, however, the method of division used here is chosen over divisions of 'Primary' and 'Secondary' texts, in order to emphasise inclusivity. This method of tabulation is in keeping with the thesis's overall concern to consider the fictional and non-fictional texts of the authors under examination as mutually informative.

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