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Conrad's Concept of Justice

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ABSTRACT

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Crime is a recurring theme in the fiction of Joseph Conrad, and is related to larger political and philosophical considerations. Conrad thought of the universe as ethically meaningless, and turned to man and human relations in an attempt to find a concept of justice and an ethical basis for society. Conrad has generally been considered a political conservative of reactionary, aristocratic leanings, but as Avrom Fleishman has shown, his beliefs are better described as organicist. Conrad thus found a basis for his beliefs in the organicist concept of community and human solidarity.

The significance of crime, Marlow says in *Lord Jim*, is that it is a sin against the community of mankind. Though Marlow is a narrator and cannot be entirely trusted to speak for the author, his statement can be demonstrated to be Conrad's basic belief by an examination of the author's letters, essays, and fiction. The criminal sins against community and himself by breaking the bonds that bind men together: most often love or charity, nationality or a political and social framework, the work ethic, and the sympathetic imagination. This criminal breaking of the bonds of solidarity is usually performed by someone who has only
weak bonds with others at the time of committing the crime: a man or woman morally, and often physically, isolated from others. The criminal may be redeemed by rejoining the community of mankind, but if not punishment follows. Punishment in Conrad's fiction is not the result of poetic justice or arbitrary court action, but a natural consequence of flouting the only system that can restrain that part in man which is evil, and can give the universe ethical meaning. Isolated in a meaningless world, the criminal is psychically destroyed, and as a logical consequence, is often physically destroyed: sometimes by a chain of events set in motion either by the original crime or acts caused by his psychic disintegration—and sometimes by suicide.
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Nostromo. Signet Classic


In his study of the background to romanticism, Basil Willey has pointed out the challenge to the writers of the early nineteenth century, and ever since. During the Renaissance and the medieval period, and into the eighteenth century, an artist could assume certain things about reality within the framework of the Christian tradition. There was a real universe governed by absolute laws, both of matter and men. The laws governing the relationship between men, and the state of a man's inner self, could be understood through the scriptures and such concepts as the great chain of being, wherein a man could place himself in the universe in relation to God, other creation, and his fellow men. But by the end of the eighteenth century the triumph of science and mechanical philosophy had undermined the traditional mythic syntax in which an author could write, and all men could think and live. The "new" author was left with two options: he could create a new mythology of his own (as Blake and Yeats, the two obvious examples, have done) or he could write of the direct dealings of "his heart and mind" with the visible universe, without mythic mediation.\footnote{Basil Willey, The Seventeenth Century Background, (New York: Columbia U Press, 1950), p.297.} Willey may have overstated his case. Coleridge was a
Christian apologist for much of his career (as was the later, lesser Wordsworth), and John Henry Newman and the Oxford group rediscovered Christian tradition, until Newman himself became a Catholic. German idealistic philosophy also provided what was really a mythic framework for such authors as Carlyle.

But by the end of the nineteenth century, after Darwin, to many people the syntax had indeed seemed to collapse. The line running from Arnold’s "darkling plain,/Swept by confused alarms of struggle and flight/Where ignorant armies clash by night" and Fitzgerald-Khayyam’s "A jug of wine a loaf of bread, and thou beside me singing in the wilderness" to the works of Hardy and the early modern Wasteland is too obvious to embellish here.

Joseph Conrad is one author who found himself without a traditionally ethical syntax. In a letter of 1897 he compared the universe to a giant knitting machine:

There is a,—let us say,—a machine. It evolved itself (I am severely scientific) out 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 goes on knitting. You come and say "This is all right; its only a question of the right kind of oil. Let us use this,—for instance,—celestial oil and the machine will 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....It
knits us in and it knits us out. It has knit 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.  

The statement explains much of Conrad; especially the inexorable workings of mechanical fate in the novels, such as the submerged wreck that crippled the Patna in Lord Jim and the ironic method Conrad uses to view the "remorseless process" in his best works. In two respects related to ethical ideas—the lack of an established syntax, and the absence of any "beautiful design" in the universe—Conrad sees the world from a view we call modern. Despite this, Bertrand Russell called Conrad far from modern because "Conrad despised indiscipline and hated discipline that was merely external." Russell's emphasis here would seem to be an ethical one, dealing with Conrad's ideas concerning man's relationship to himself and others. Russell would seem to suggest that to be modern one must either embrace "indiscipline" or "discipline that (is) merely external." Though Eloise Knapp Hay finds


the idea curious, there is much truth in it. The naturalistic basis for ethics found in Conrad's younger contemporary Forster, and later in Lawrence, a "follow the body" ethic, can well be viewed as indiscipline. And the political developments that distinguish the modern era (apart from the growth of democracy, which Conrad, for one, seemed to view as an indiscipline) fascism, nazism and totalitarian communism, contain much "discipline that is merely external." One thing I hope to show is that Russell is essentially right. Conrad is indeed not a "modern" in his ethical views in the senses mentioned: especially those views related to justice that is, crime and its punishment. For to Conrad social problems can be solved neither by indiscipline or arbitrary discipline.

Crime is a persistent theme in Conrad: from Willems' betrayal to Jim's desertion, from Kurtz's unspeakable horrors to Mrs. Verloc's act of murder, Conrad encompasses the whole range of human crime (except perhaps the sexual, he was a late Victorian in that regard). Among his major themes is the great crime of exploitation of human beings on a grand scale: as in the Congo of "Heart of Darkness," and the Occidental republic in Nostromo. The large-scale exploitation of humanity I will mention only briefly, as an examination of this theme belongs in a book-length

4 Hay, p.45.
study such as Hay's or Fleishman's. This study will concentrate on Conrad's conception of what crime is, and thus what its punishment should be: that is, on his concept of justice in relation to the individual.

In *Lord Jim* Marlow says that "the real significance of crime is in its being a breach of faith with the community of mankind." Marlow is a narrator and one cannot take his word for everything. But in this introduction I hope to establish that in Conrad's world, where divine commandment seems no longer a possible basis for law, it is indeed the breach with the community of mankind that is the real "significance" of crime. To do this we must examine Conrad's philosophy on community, thus part of his political theory, and the recurrent themes of isolation, moral and political anarchy, the nature of man, and the nature of the bonds that bind men together and can redeem them in a universe that appears to have no purpose. In doing this I hope to show that in Conrad's works crime, as Marlow says, is basically a sin against the fragile bonds of community and/or selflessness that protect man from the darkness. Thus the justice in his novels does not need to be that of a worldly court—which is an arbitrary thing anyway, punishing not so much those that have done

wrong as those that have been caught (no character in Conrad's fiction actually faces the bar of justice; the closest anyone comes to a trial is Lord Jim at the inquiry). In Conrad's work punishment comes through the natural consequences of the individual isolating himself from humanity by his sin against the bonds that hold men together: in short, the punishment for crime in Conrad is the logical consequence of one man cutting himself loose from the community of men in a world where only a sense of community can save: spiritual injury or death, often resulting in physical death by a complex chain of events set in motion by the original sin against community or some consequences of the sin—unless the criminal can restore his bonds with community by a later action.

To understand crime in Conrad's fiction, then, we must understand his ideas of community; that is part of his political theory. Attempting to find any system in Conrad is always a hazardous enterprise, as many of his critics have pointed out. Indeed, for a long time it seemed to be that Conrad had no real systematic ideas. Thus Forster can say of him in a passage now well known to Conrad critics:

Is there not also a central obscurity, something noble, heroic, beautiful, inspiring half-a-dozen great books, but
obscure, obscure?...These essays do suggest that he is misty in the middle as well as at the edges, that the secret cask of his genius contains a vapour rather than a jewel; and that we needn't try to write him down philosophically, because there is, in this direction, nothing to write. No creed, in fact. Only opinions, and the right to throw them overboard when the facts make them look absurd. Opinions held under the semblance of eternity, girt with the sea, crowned with stars, and therefore easily mistaken for creed.

A vapour cannot be grasped or dissected, nor even caught in a net and exhibited like Stein's butterflies. But Forster is essentially wrong, and while Conrad is no builder of elaborate philosophical systems, modern criticism has shown that his genius contains several jewels that can be mounted and displayed for examination. Among these gems are his political ideas.

Conrad was an aristocrat, and though the son of a rebel, has usually been viewed as a reactionary. Ford Madox Ford wrote that Conrad "was at heart an aristo-royalist apostle...and, at the bottom of his heart, all his writings wistfully tended towards the restoration of the kingdom of Poland, with its irresponsible hierarchy of reckless and hypersophistically civilised nobility." Leo Gurko has remarked on Conrad's anti-democratic views (which


are so obvious that I will not discuss them) expressed in letters, and claimed Conrad felt a political affinity with the "landed gentry." Gurko states that Conrad's criticism of imperialism was "not out special feeling for the native populations." In view of Conrad's claim that it was adventures in the Congo that changed his life, the latter seems rather strange, and I will indirectly dispute it in this paper, Guerard says Conrad's political ideas are those of "extreme political conservatism."^8

The view that Conrad was a reactionary has been ably attacked by Avrom Fleishman and Elôise Knapp Hay. Ms Hay sees Conrad's ideas "Less like arch-conservatism than it is like the lunatic fringe of Polish liberalism, characteristically jealous of the privilege of anarchy but conscientiously hopeful of preserving each man's rights against his neighbour."^10 Both Conrad and his father, Hay says, were liberals as "they believed, however different their method of action, in the moral and material emancipation of a whole society from the tyranny of any class within the society, as well as from any foreign oppressor."^11 Hay


11 Hay, p.48.
adequately refutes those who have found Conrad a later Metternich, but she makes little attempt to discover any systematic theory behind his beliefs. Conservative and liberal are very imprecise terms at best: is a conservative one with certain beliefs in man and society that have remained fairly constant over the past several hundred years, or merely one who defends the status quo? Most critics seem to use the latter interpretation when they speak of Conrad, and it would seem to be that interpretation that Ms Hay is attacking when she states that a belief in emancipation from the tyranny of foreigners or one social class necessarily makes one a liberal. Ms Hay's contribution, then, is to demonstrate the political content of Conrad's novels—political in that the novels deal with the individual and the community in a way that demonstrates their inseparable nature, rather than politics as simply a milieu in which characters can move. Her work is less valuable as an attempt to accurately define Conrad's political and social beliefs.

Avrom Fleishman in his *Conrad's Politics: Community and Anarchy in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad*, has attempted to define these beliefs. Fleishman realises that neither conservative nor liberal properly identifies Conrad's politics, and instead places him in a tradition Fleishman refers to as organicism. Fleishman finds no consistent
"application of first principles"\textsuperscript{12} in Conrad's thought, though he would seem to contradict himself slightly by his central argument: that Conrad was an organicist. There is another "first principle" that Conrad consistently applies, I believe—that of the inherent evil in the nature of man: a belief which makes Conrad's organicism lean to the conservative. But this can be discussed after we examine what Fleishman means by organicism, as the concept is central, I believe, to understanding Conrad's ideas on crime and punishment.

Organicism is contrasted to atomism. Atomism, an essentially liberal philosophy in the nineteenth century sense, sees man as an isolated "atom", and society as simply an "artifice to maximize individual freedom by keeping its function negative."\textsuperscript{13} This of course was the dominant belief of the nineteenth century. Contrasted to atomism, Fleishman says, is the organicist tradition: reaching back into the middle ages and the Renaissance to the great chain of being concept: a concept stressing interconnection and unified direction rather than isolation and totally independent action. In this older tradition


\textsuperscript{13} Fleishman, p.12.
the mutual responsibility of all members of the "body politic" was stressed, rather than the idea that if all do as they please, then good will result. These organicist ideas regained currency with the Romantic movement and the reaction against the French revolution, reaching their philosophic height with Burke, and continuing with the later Coleridge, Carlyle and Arnold and, among others, Ruskin, Disraeli, Dickens and George Eliot.

This tradition, Fleishman says, is basically conservative; and by this he means a defence of a status quo. The reasons for this conservatism are important in the concept of community: resting as it does on the concepts of historical tradition and human community. Thus what Fleishman says in the prevailing approach to Conrad—the emphasis on the isolated individual and the need for social roots—he places on a philosophical basis: "the primacy of the community is that which gives individual life its possibility and its values. It is his awareness of the priority of the social unit to the individual self which places Conrad squarely within the organicist tradition." I will question Fleishman's interpretation of the need for human community, for he seems to underrate Conrad's

14 Fleishman, p. 56.

15 Fleishman, p. 56-7.
concern with the evil in the individual, but more of this later.

If man must live in an organic world stressing community and the novelist is to write about the world, then it follows that the writer must write about the bonds that hold men together. To Conrad these bonds, I think (I am departing a little from Fleishman now) are three: loyalty to the nation and community, pure love or charity, and a craftsmanlike approach to duty. This can be demonstrated by examining his letters and his fictional works. Crime will essentially be a sin against one or more of these bonds.

Albert Guerard and Thomas Moser have demonstrated that to Conrad sexual passion is destructive, at least in his early novels. Thus in Conrad's earliest novels I make a distinction between pure love or caritas and sexual passion (in the later novels, as Moser suggests, sex itself becomes less of a threat). To Marguerite Poradowska Conrad wrote "For charity is eternal and universal love, the divine virtue, the sole manifestation of the almighty which may in some manner justify the act of

16 Guerard, p. 54.

creation. Whether Conrad believed in charity as an attribute of deity is of course questionable, but he unquestionably saw its need in man. The possibility of the saving power of charity and love is demonstrated mostly negatively in his fiction. Thus the inability to love in characters like Willems and Verloc is partly the cause of their undoing, while the corruption of love in such as Nostromo and Mrs. Verloc is partly the cause of theirs. Jim for a time attains salvation partly because of his love for Jewel, and at the supreme moment in "Heart of Darkness" Marlow, in an act of charity, saves himself and Kurtz's "Intended" by his saving lie.

Nationalism, based on historical continuity, was a recurrent idea of Conrad's. In the *Mirror of the Sea* he writes:

> All passes, all changes: the animosity of peoples, the handling of fleets, the forms of ships; and even the sea itself seems to bear a diminished aspect from the sea of Nelson's day. In this ceaseless rush of shadows and shades, that, like the fantastic forms of clouds cast darkly upon the waters on a windy day, fly past us to fall headlong below the hard edge of an emplaceable horizon, we must turn to the national spirit, which, superior in its force and continuity to good and evil fortune, can alone give us the feeling

of an enduring existence and of invincible power against the fates. 19

Note that Conrad is not speaking of the jingoistic type of nationalism Kipling defends—indeed he would in this very passage seem to be indirectly attacking such a concept. Conrad refers to a deeper, more spiritual idea with "force and continuity." A national, cultural tradition seems more Conrad's idea than a "God's chosen race" concept. A letter would seem to indirectly support this view:

The true greatness of a state...is a matter of logical growth, of faith and courage. Its inspiration springs from the constructive instinct of the people, governed by the strong hand of a collective conscience and voiced in the wisdom and counsel of men who seldom reap the reward of gratitude. Many states have been powerful, but, perhaps, none have been truly great—as yet. 20

The distinction between greatness and power that Conrad draws, and his terms "constructive instinct," and "collective conscience" point to something other than Kipling's idea of greatness. In another letter he goes further, as Fleishman has noted: "The idea of ceasing to grow in territory, in strength, in wealth, in influence—in anything but wisdom and self-knowledge is odious

19 Mirror of the Sea, p.94. Cited by Fleishman, p.68.

(to them) as the omen of the end.\footnote{21}

To Conrad, in fact, it would seem that nationalism is a step to internationalism. Fleishman notes this is his discussion of Conrad's pamphlet "Autocracy and War," quoting from the essay "The solidarity of Europeanism... must be the next step towards the advent of Concord and Justice; an advent that, however delayed by the fatal worship of force and the errors of national selfishness, has been, and remains, the only possible goal of our progress.\footnote{22}" Fleishman refers to this as Conrad's "new internationalism" (the pamphlet was written in 1905), but while the explicit ideas of European unity may be new, the underlying concept of community extending beyond the nation is found throughout Conrad's career. In 1897 for example, in his preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus, he sees one of the purposes of art to be to "awaken in the hearts of the beholders that feeling of unavoidable solidarity...which binds men to each other and all mankind to the visible word."\footnote{23} Just a few pages before he had been even more explicit: the


artist speaks to

The latest feeling of fellowship with all creation—to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts, to the solidarity in dreams in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which binds man to each other, which binds together all humanity—the dead to the living and the living to the unborn.24

Here Conrad stresses the total community of man, extending beyond the nation through a common lot, and including not only the living but the dead and the unborn; a common tradition of man. It is not only the state that can give value but any form of community: especially the common community of mankind.

In his preface Conrad uses the term "workman of art" (709). He does not develop this concept in the preface, but the concepts of craft and duty are essential to an understanding of Conrad and his ideas of human relationships and community. The Nigger of the Narcissus itself centers around the sailors' dutiful, craftsmanlike approach to the ship and one another, and the things that threaten these bonds. To Conrad creative work is a major element in binding men together:

From the hard work of men are born the sympathetic consciousness of a common destiny, the fidelity to right practise which makes great craftsmen, the sense of

24 Portable, p.705.
right conduct which we may call honour, the right devotion to our calling and the idealism which is not a misty-winged angel without eyes, but a divine figure of terrestrial aspect with a clear glance and with its feet resting firmly on the earth on which it was born.

And work will overcome all evil, except ignorance. 25

and again:

The fact is, however, that one becomes useful only on realising the utter insignificance of the individual in the scheme of the universe. When one well understands that in oneself one is nothing and that a man is worth neither more nor less than the work he accomplishes with honesty of purpose and means, and within the strict limits of his duty towards society, only then is one the master of his conscience, with the right to call himself a man. Otherwise... the two-legged featherless creature is only a despicable thing sunk in the mud of all the passions. 26

Fleishman says that to Conrad the value of work does not lie in work itself but in the "performance of a social obligation", which leads to certain values, including "a shared cultural imagination, high aesthetic standards, the artistic strength gained from roots in the social organism and insentimental (and non-transcendental) spiritual life." 27 The first of the above quotations from Conrad, which Fleishman uses in his argument, would certain-


26 Letters... to M.P., pp.45-6. 4 Sept. 1892.

27 Fleishman, p.73
ly seem to indicate that all the above values can indeed be attained by work, but it should be noticed that these higher values attained through work Conrad does not see as available to everybody. Of Singleton, the paragon of work and duty in *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, Conrad writes that he cannot be made aware of himself (and self awareness is a prerequisite to the higher values mentioned): "Would you really wish to tell such a man Know thyself! Understand that you are nothing, less than a shadow, more insignificant than a drop of water in the ocean, more fleeting than the illusion of a dream Would you?" Singleton, saved as he is by his sense of duty and work, would be destroyed by self-awareness. At one level, conscientious as it is, duty and work are simply social obligations forming a bond that keeps out the darkness. But I disagree with Fleishman that the value of work lies in the performance of a social obligation. I have already quoted Conrad's reference to charity, and work done with this ideal in mind Conrad finds more significant. Thus Dr. Monygham's sacrifice, performed not out of obligation but out of love and admiration for Mrs.. Gould, is one of the affirmations of the possibilities of human nature in *Nostromo*. Mrs. Gould's own work with

the hospitals, likewise a work of love, also points to what could have been accomplished in the Occidental Republic.

Fleishman further notes in this context that work for Conrad "does not exist in isolation"; work does not exist as an individual act "but only as the combined effort of an organic group—the community of labour—the crew."\(^{29}\) Nostramo and Kurtz, Fleishman adds, are destroyed largely because they work alone. This raises an interesting biographical problem, as the artist works alone, and Conrad was an artist. Should not Conrad then, if Fleishman is right, have been destroyed, at least according to his own theories? Fleishman is pushing his desire for organicism in all things a little far at this point. Monygham is perhaps more alone in his work than is Nostromo, and many of Conrad's villains, such as the rascally crew of the *Patna*, work together—even in deserting the ship. Isolation and its destructive and often *criminal* consequences are a vital theme in Conrad's works, but to say that all work must be performed as a part of an immediate social group is finding something in Conrad that, I think, is either not there or so well disguised that Fleishman needs more evidence than he provides

\(^{29}\) Fleishman, p.73.
to prove his contention.

In the elite these human bonds are re-inforced by a sense Conrad refers to as the sympathetic imagination. This sense enables one to reach out to other human beings, by empathetic identification through life or art. In his essay "Autocracy and War" Conrad attacks the impotence of journalism in bringing the reality of the Russo-Japanese war to English readers. This reality can only be presented through either personal experience or great art, Conrad writes, and to be of human use must be viewed through the faculty of sympathetic imagination. It is this faculty alone that can enable people to reach out to each other and overcome the world's evils, or as Conrad puts it "In this age of knowledge it is through our sympathetic imagination alone that we can look for the ultimate triumph of concord and justice....." The criminal mentality in Conrad's novels totally lacks this ability. Thus Kurtz feigns it, but totally spurns it in reality; Jim is unable to consider the plight of the pilgrims when he deserts the ship; and Verloc is totally unable to understand his wife's feelings. Those at the opposite end of the spectrum, on the other hand, possess sympathetic imagination to a large degree (especially those who can be considered Conrad's spokesmen--a paper could perhaps be

30 "Autocracy and War," p.84.
written on this); Thus Stein, the language professor, Dr. Monygham and Mrs. Gould, and of course Marlow, possess this faculty—and are to a degree saved in fallen worlds, and can sometimes even act as saviours. Former criminals, also, can attain salvation or atonement in one degree or another by the exercise of this faculty: as Jim does when he becomes aware of the plight of the people of Patusan, and Razumov as he comes to understand Haldin and grew closer to Miss Haldin and overcomes his guilt and isolation.

Isolation, of course, is a theme much discussed by Conrad critics. I have nothing really new to offer, but I hope to apply what has been said about isolation to show that most crimes are committed by isolated individuals, and that the criminal, unless he rejoins the community, is punished by the natural effects of his increasing isolation. With some characters there is an obvious physical isolation involved—an isolation which destroys the character when he realises (as I quoted several pages earlier), that man is nothing, and also, I hope to show, sees that much of his own nature is evil and succumbs to the evil. With other characters the isolation is more subtle—an isolation that is not physical but moral; such as that in the Verlocs. In some of Conrad's greatest work
of course, the characters are both physically and morally isolated. In virtually all cases, the criminals whose character Conrad develops lack the bonds that bind men together, or else break these bonds by their crime.

Jocelyn Baines has pointed out that isolation is the theme that unites all of Conrad's major work. Baines sees isolation appearing in two main forms. First, he says, is the isolation "imposed by an act of the person's past." In *An Outcast of the Islands* the discovery of Willems' dishonesty is in this category; in *Lord Jim* Jim imposes isolation on himself for his "cowardice"; Dr. Monygham has broken under torture; Razumov has given up Haldin and becomes a police agent; Leggatt has killed a man. All of these, Baines says, have been cut off from mankind by a stigma: sometimes the isolation being self-imposed, sometimes being imposed by society.

These ideas are, I think, somewhat of an oversimplification of the degree of the isolation in the characters. Willems I hope to show later in my discussion of the novel, was an isolated individual before he was discovered; his moral isolation is both cause and punishment of his downfall, not just the result of his being caught. Even before he commits his crime Jim is isolated both from reality by

his dreams, and from the society that provides the norm for the actions of the Patna (he would not have jumped, it seems obvious from the time it took Jim to make his decision, had an officer such as the French Lieutenant been in command of the Patna). Dr. Monygham was a "stranger in a strange land" before he was tortured—and Decoud is the most extreme example of isolation in Nostromo anyway, and he is self isolated by his cynicism, before being destroyed by physical isolation. Razumov's isolation hardly begins with his "betrayal" of Haldim; he is a character with no family or real friends, whose only real bond is a tenuous idea of nationality. The isolation is not merely something imposed for a past act, as Baines suggests, but is a moral condition that is first cause and then effect of these acts or crimes.

The second form of isolation Baines refers to is that "imposed by circumstances." Examples of this among the "criminals" are Kayerts and Carlier in "An Outpost of Progress", and Nostromo and Decoud. Again Baines underestimates the degree of isolation already existing in these characters, as I will show in discussing these works.

Baines' division of the various forms of isolation runs into further difficulty when he finds it "significant

32 Baines, p.441.
that it is the two intellectuals among Conrad's characters, Kurtz and Heyst, who become isolated by a deliberate decision. Kayerts and Carlier are just as isolated by "deliberate decision" as Kurtz. In both cases the characters choose to operate an isolated outpost; and in both cases regular contact with the outside world is broken due to the loss of the river boat. Wrong decisions about the nature of isolation are not restricted to Conrad's intellectuals. Baines is much closer to the truth, I think, when he states that even "when isolation is neither imposed nor chosen it appears almost as a necessary condition of existence." Baines sees this state of isolation primarily as either "a failure to penetrate the minds of others" or in the inability of two people to communicate. This isolation, he says, is inevitable.35

It is true that isolation to some degree is the inevitable lot of man, but as we have seen in our discussion of community, this isolation could be overcome by the individuals establishing bonds with others and to all mankind. Thus I think Baines is misleading when he fails to distinguish between characters who have bonds that keep isolation at a minimum, and those whose sense of isolation

33 Baines, p.441.
34 Baines, p.442.
35 Baines, p.442.
overpowers them because they have no real bonds—either because of their background or through criminal action severing them. Though isolation does seem to be a necessary condition of existence in Conrad's work, it does not result in tragedy, as Baines thinks; it must, if the individual is part of a community. Thus Marlow, (whom Baines excludes from Conrad's fictional world because he is a narrator, but who is actually very much a part of the world, especially in "Heart of Darkness") is hardly a tragic figure: concerned as he is with his fellow man, he is an interpreter for us lesser men, and in the climactic scene in "Heart of Darkness" demonstrates that he has earned the right to be a saviour to those who cannot face the truth. While isolation then, if untempered by human bonds, will result in self destruction or criminal action (I will not deal with physical suicide as a crime), it can also result in enlarged awareness and sense of responsibility in a man involved with duty and his fellow man. It is because of Baines failure to distinguish between the negative aspects of isolation, and the possibility of overcoming these aspects through human bonds, that he finds the fate of Découd, Winnie Verloc, Razumov, and Heyst totally undeserved, stating that "it would require a peculiar sense of nemesis to maintain that the misfortunes which
overwhelmed them were deserved.\textsuperscript{36} Without a peculiar sense of nemesis, I will maintain that given Conrad's concept of human nature and the need for human community, their fates were in a sense deserved by their flouting or breaking of human bonds. The problem is similar to that in "The Ancient Mariner": did the mariner's crime fit the punishment, or is the punishment totally out of proportion to the crime. In both authors' works the answer is that there are laws that are not immediately apparent, but which if flouted, by the nature of the human condition, bring punishment that seems out of all proportion to the crime at first, but which proves, in a sense, "just" (I am not saying that all catastrophies in Conrad are deserved, he realised as well as anybody that the "rain falleth on the just and the unjust alike", but that in the cases of the above characters their fates are nowhere near as undeserved as Baines suggests).

Isolation is dangerous because in such a condition the bonds that hold men together are threatened; and we have seen that to Conrad it is these bonds and the concept of community alone that can redeem the individual from insignificance. Isolation is also dangerous because in this condition, with the restraining bonds loose or absent, the evil innate in man comes to the fore. Paul Wiley, to whose argument the concept of evil is central, has said

\textsuperscript{36} Baines, p.440.
that Conrad believes man is "prone to evil rather than good."³⁷ Wiley has ingeniously discovered patterns of creation, fall and judgement in Conrad's work (a critical feat Baines describes as "fantastic"—in the derogatory sense³⁸), and has thus attempted to show that to Conrad man is basically a severely limited being. One does not necessarily have to believe in natural goodness, as any reader of "Heart of Darkness" will testify, but innate depravity is not the only explanation for his beliefs: dualism could equally serve. Kurtz is balanced by Marlow, Nostromo and Gould by Monygham and Mrs. Gould—some succumbing to one degree or another to the "evil" side of man (which may simply be false idealism), and some reaching to the good. But whether evil is more plentiful than good in man's basic nature or whether there is a dualistic balance, the fact remains that evil is there, and under the influence of isolation will appear as criminal action.

Related to evil, isolation, and the need for community and the relation of these concepts to criminal action is Conrad's treatment of anarchy. Political anarchy is hateful to Conrad, as *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes* obviously testify, but moral anarchy is even more a threat.


³⁸ Baines, p. 349.
It is obvious from Conrad's political views that we have discussed why he would oppose political anarchy. The concept of political anarchy is entirely opposed to the ideas of nationality and organic community that Conrad believed in. But in *The Secret Agent* the political aims of the anarchists do not appear as a real threat: the anarchists are pitiful men, with little impact on the real world. In *Under Western Eyes* Conrad presents us with a dilemma: if we attempt to read rigid ideas of nationality versus anarchy into the work, for we are presented with a "crime" that is the betrayal of an anarchist to the authority of the nation. The answer to this dilemma is that Conrad saw spiritual anarchy as a far greater threat than the small political movement. In the author's note to *Under Western Eyes*, in fact, he condemns both forms of anarchy: "The ferocity and imbécility of an autocratic rule rejecting all legality and in fact basing itself upon complete moral anarchism (my emphasis) provokes the no less imbecile and atrocious answer of a purely Utopian revolution encompassing destruction by the first means at hand." 39

In Russia, at least, moral anarchy has corrupted the concept of nationality, and so our judgement of the betrayal is

different than it would have been if the novel were based in England.

Moral anarchy, of course, is not limited to nations; it is one of the characteristics of Conrad's worst criminals, as I hope to show. The professor in *The Secret Agent* is the supreme example of moral anarchy, combined with political anarchy, and is thus, though he in fact commits no actual crime, or a relatively minor one, the supreme example of the criminal personality in Conrad's novels: a man totally isolated, without even a name, with no feeling of community, love, nationality, sympathetic imagination, or the work ethic: a man who would if he could, in the supreme criminal act, do away with these things.

Conrad's social and political ideas were an attempt to give meaning to a universe he saw as ethically meaningless. Rejecting religious concepts, his ideas were humanistic, or centered in man; rejecting natural goodness and individualism Conrad found human values to lie in interaction, or community. Community, and therefore ethical meaning, is dependent on the bonds that bind men together. Thus crime, as Marlow stated, is significant because it is a threat to the community: for it breaks these bonds, and thus undermines the only hope for a meaningful existence. Crime in Conrad's novels is thus always a crime against human
solidarity, with betrayal the crime most often dealt with—betrayal, to disagree with Guerard (who sees betrayal of the individual as the major crime in Conrad\textsuperscript{40}), that is seen primarily as a crime against community. Criminals not only sin against human bonds, but are often lacking them at the moment of committing crime; for it is the lack of a restraining ethical base or anchor that causes man to commit crime, or give way to the evil within. Though Conrad is certainly not advocating the disabandonment of human judicial systems in his fiction, punishment comes not as a result of arbitrary court action, but as a natural result of the breaking of human bonds. Lost now in a meaningless, mechanical universe (the sewing machine), the criminal must either rehabilitate and rejoin the community of man, or be overcome by the isolation he finds himself in. All this can be demonstrated by an examination of the fiction.

Guerard, p.58.
For the purpose of this discussion the novels and stories we are to examine can be divided into two sections. The first will deal with the criminal acts of Europeans in non-European societies. The second will deal with acts within European societies. This division can be made because of the central concern with isolation from community and its relationship to crime in Conrad's work; in the first section, isolation will be obvious: a man in an alien culture. In the second section the isolation is more subtle and ambiguous, and will be more moral than physical. The first section will deal mainly with *An Outcast of the Islands*, "An Outpost of Progress," "Heart of Darkness," *Lord Jim*, and, because of its relationship with the two works last mentioned, "The Secret Sharer." The second section will focus on *Nostromo* (a good transitional novel, as it is basically about Europeans in a semi-European society), "The Informer," *The Secret Agent*, and the most challenging and ambiguous work in this thematic context, *Under Western Eyes*.

The protagonist in *An Outcast of the Islands* sins against almost every bond of human solidarity we have discussed. Trust, love, community, nation, and the work ethic are totally disregarded by Willems, a character,
as many of Conrad's criminals will be, isolated by his own egoism. The novel is a continuous moral descent for Willems, replete with a symbolic council in hell (as Razumov will have later), and an ironic ending: as Willems dies as he is about to betray the woman for whom he had betrayed Lingard. Willems' death is perhaps a logical extension of his crime, but like much in the novel, is crudely handled. As is often remarked, the novel would perhaps be better if it had ended with Willems' abandonment in the jungle. Thematically, I think, Conrad had a purpose in bringing back Mrs. Willems to show Willems now prepared to betray anything. But still his fate hardly has the ring of tragic inevitability about it.

Willems is a thin character to hang a novel on. This weakness and Conrad's crude use of symbolic imagery in the novel have been the major criticisms against the work. But the thinness of Willems' character is more a flaw in Conrad's execution than in his essential view of the character of a criminal hero. Willems is in a line of characters that includes Jim, Kurtz, Nostromo, Razumov and Heyst: men who isolate themselves by their egoism--their sense of superiority. This self-isolation from the community of man and to the bonds that hold men together is not a result of Willems' actions but the cause of them,
as it will be for Conrad's greater creations mentioned. An Outcast of the Islands lacks a tragic nature, as Professor Dowden has remarked, because Willems is merely contemptible. There is no redeeming greatness as there is in Jim, Nostromo, Heyst, Kurtz, or Razumov: either of mind, deed, or simply self-knowledge. Willems dies as isolated by egoism as he lived.

The sense of egoism and the petty uses Willems puts it to are the reference point from which his decline is drawn. At first it would seem that Conrad could perhaps have created more sympathy for Willems had he filled in his background more: Willems was a semi-orphan, his childhood was spent in poverty with an overworked father trying to support a large family, he left home while very young—all elements which if developed could have created cheap sympathy, but also served as possible explanations for Willems' criminal mentality. In Under Western Eyes Razumov's egoism and isolation are at least partly the result of his isolated environment as he grew. Thus Razumov is a more humane creation, a man we may condemn, but, given the conditions of Conrad's world (and the real world), can understand. But in An Outcast of the Islands Conrad does

not draw the characters as humanely as he will later. Willems, it seems, is egoistic because he is egoistic— it is part of his nature. Similarly, he sins against the work ethic because of his basic contemptibility, even as an adolescent: "The boy was hopelessly at variance with the spirit of the sea. He had an instinctive contempt for the honest simplicity of that work which led to nothing he cared for" (25). Willems is contemptible, and, from when we first meet him, doomed for criminal action and destruction by his inherent disregard for human bonds.

The central crime in *An Outcast of the Islands* is that of betrayal of employer, protector and cultural heritage. The cause of Willems' downfall is not, as Baines suggests, because his self-respect has been undermined by his early dishonesty.\(^4^2\) Nor is it, finally, his giving way to sexual passion. The cause of Willems' downfall is, as stated earlier, his sense of egoism that isolates him from his culture and humanity in general.

His egoism has corrupted all human bonds for him. Thus his family exists not as a means of establishing human relationships or as a basis for community, but simply as an entity to re-inforce his sense of superiority.

\(^{4^2}\) Baines, p.160.
He has married a half-caste girl (he does not, at first, realise she is Hudig's daughter), and treats her and her sycophantic relatives as lesser beings; basking in what he supposes is their admiration, which "completed his existence in a perpetual assurance of unquestionable superiority" (1). The extremity of his egoism (and, as events quickly show, its falsehood) is apparent in the fact that "probably his greatest delight lay in the unexpressed but intimate conviction that, should he close his hand, all those admiring beings would starve" (2). This is a far cry from the mutual respect of the ideal ship, and is the first indication of the real nature of Willems' criminal mentality. This isolation through egoism is obviously expressed through imagery in the epiphany which Professor Dowden discusses in relation to appearance and reality: "Willems had the street to himself; he would walk in the middle; his shadow gliding obsequiously before him" (116). It is dark in the scene quoted; our picture is of a man who thinks even his shadow obeys him; but who in reality is isolated in a dark universe.

Despite his "fall" Willems carries his egoism with him into the jungle, refusing even to recognise that he had done wrong in his embezzling: "I have done with my

43 Dowden, p.25.
people. I am a man without brothers. Injustice destroys fidelity" he tells Abdulla as he prepares to betray his "saviour," Lingard (105). And we see that his earlier belief that he is above conventional morality and human relationship is still a conviction when he thinks "his clear duty was to make himself happy. Did he ever take an oath of fidelity to Lingard? No." Lingard may have twice given Willems a new start in life, but to the egoist, loyalty is nothing; his concern for an oath is merely cant.

In the jungle Willems' criminal egoism is demonstrated by a trait that was apparent but not as fully developed in the first chapter of the book: racism. Racism is one of the most basic repudiations of the concept of human community: and it is basic to Willems' character. When he begins to realise his passion for Aissa he is "disappointed with himself"—not because of any moral scruples about adultery (which are, after all, a respect for the basic element of human community: marriage vows and the family), but because he is surrendering to a wild creature" the unstained purity of his life, of his race, of his civilisation"(170). The "unstained" is fairly heavy-handed irony, but Willems seems to believe it. Similarly, when Lingard's judgement on Willems is that he be abandoned in the universe
he has morally isolated himself in, Willems does not plead for mercy on the grounds of general human compassion, but because he "is white. All white!" (204).

In spite of his racism, Willems' egoism, having morally and physically isolated him from the white community, leads him to betray Lingard. The immediate motive is "love," but is a love that is mockery of the pure love Conrad thought could save, as Moser, Guerard and Dowden have pointed out. The degradation of his passion is presented imagistically when, after meeting Aissa, he drinks of the river water and "shuddered with a depraved sense of pleasure at the after-taste of slime in the water" (164). Aissa withholds herself just long enough for the self-centered, self-isolated Willems to agree to betray Lingard, then submits and even returns his passion. But their passion is short-lived, and soon turns to hate, and is demonstrated to be as much a divisive force in personal life as it was to the community Willems repudiated. With a chance to escape with his wife, Willems thinks of "that other one....And all at once he felt he hated Aissa with

44 Moser, pp. 55-6.
45 Guerard, p. 80ff.
an immense hatred that seemed to choke him" (289).

Similarly Aissa, on learning of his plans to desert her, feels that "Hate filled the world, filled the space between them—the hate of race, the hate of hopeless diversity, the hate of blood" (268). Thus in a sense her slaying of Willems is not mere melodrama but is "just."

The motive for Aissa's killing of Willems is a corruption of a human bond: one among many Willems had corrupted in his own life. His ultimate punishment is thematically consistent: a man repudiates bonds, betrays for a corrupt passion, prepares to betray the corrupt passion, feels that passion changed to hate on both his part and his lover's, and is destroyed by acts based on this hate. Thematically Willems' death makes sense; dramatically it reeks of "poetic justice."

But his murder by Aissa is not, I think, Conrad's conception of Willems' punishment, Conrad's judgement on Willems is a critically more defensible one, if still a little crudely handled. With Lingard's judgement on his head that he remain forever in the jungle, Willems staggers away in a storm. Water beats down on him sheets while

he felt the ground become soft—melt under him—and saw water spring out from the dry earth to meet the water that fell from the sombre heaven....which gleamed
pale red with the flicker of lightning streaming through them, as if fire and water were falling together...

He wanted to run away, but when he moved it was to slide about painfully and slowly upon that earth which had become mud so suddenly under his feet....

p.214

The image is one of the world that Willems must now live in: with no foundation or points of moral reference; a hellish world in which he can only flounder in the mud, a lost soul. Wiley⁴⁷ and Dowden⁴⁸ have pointed out the parallel between the council in hell in Paradise Lost and the scene in Part II, chapter III where the native chiefs confer, and to the general religious parallels in the book: the scene quoted above is such a parallel—a watery, muddy hell of a universe in which total isolation and the repudiation of human bonds is both the cause of damnation and its punishment.

"An Outpost of Progress" is generally viewed as of little interest except as a dry run for "Heart of Darkness." Its central weakness is similar to that of An Outcast of the Islands to those who appreciate a compassionate depth of character: the characters are petty, and totally lacking in tragic stature. To the reader the main advantage

⁴⁷ Wiley, p.40.

⁴⁸ Dowden, p.22..
the short story has over the novel is that it is at least two hundred pages shorter.

The difference between the story and the novel in relation to our theme is more interesting, however. In An Outcast of the Islands Conrad gave us a definite criminal mentality that willfully and obviously chose a source of action Conrad considered criminal. In "An Outpost of Progress" the crime is partly a mistake: the killing of a man who the killer thought had a gun, but who was actually unarmed. Though we see Kayerts and Carlier develop into criminal mentalities as isolation tests their moral strength, and as they repudiate human bonds, yet the crime is not a willful action. We are moving in the direction of subtlety and ambiguity that, in our study at least, will climax in Under Western Eyes. Conrad's ability to render the complexity of man's ethical dilemma is maturing.

Carlier and Kayerts develop criminal mentalities because of their inability to develop human relationships outside of the society in which they were raised, their flaunting of the work ethic, and their lack of a sympathetic imagination. Under the influence of their isolation—they are three hundred miles from the nearest trading post—they are three hundred miles from the nearest trading post—their moral sense dwindles until they condone slavery, and murder, and fight amongst themselves.
The two men are representatives of the masses who achieve meaning and solidarity through unawareness—a society where "every great and every insignificant thought belongs not the individual but to the crowd; to the crowd that believes blindly in the irresistible force of its institutions and of its morals" (17), where the two men were forbidden "all independent thought....They could only live on condition of being machines" (118). Thus they are representatives of a culture, the culture being attacked in the story, but they are also individuals—individuals whose most notable character traits are racism and a total disregard for the work ethic.

Kayerts and Carlier are alike in their "stupidity and laziness" (19). Instructed to improve the dilapidated outpost, an act that could save them from moral disintegration (as his work on the ship is one of the things that saves Marlow), they do nothing; their only act being to straighten the cross on the grave—a ironical symbol of the nature of "Christian" colonization, as Professor Dowden has noted 49. Physically isolated from a national or social framework, intellectually incapable of forming a cultural idea of community, the men repudiate the one saving bond open to all men: the work ethic. Inferior,

49 Dowden, p.33.
criminal mentalities, these men are to Singleton what Kurtz is to Marlow.

The repudiation of the work ethic is not the only thing that leads to the criminal mentality in these characters. Soon after arriving Carlier proves himself incapable of forming bonds with the native inhabitants, considering them "Fine animals" (20). Kayerts does not demur. They read an essay on the nobility of European colonisation, but Carlier's comment expresses their real attitude.

Their inability to work or establish relationships with the natives except a smug patronisation of Gobila leads, in their isolated condition, to an inevitable moral decay. When they discover Makola has sold the other native employees for ivory they act horrified at first, but soon accept the situation and store the ivory. From their pride in spreading "progress" they move, like Kurtz, to a realisation of the "necessity of exterminating all the niggers before the county could be made habitable" (30). Repudiating humanity completely, they are in a moral position where killing over a lump of sugar is only a small step.

Punishment in the story is prevented more as a twist in the plot than as a expression of a central view of the human condition. Kayerts, awaking to the sound of the
whistle, commits suicide rather than face a trial. His death, hanging from the cross, works as a crude symbolic comment on "progress" (as Dowden has noted 50), but it adds little depth to the theme of justice. Conrad was working towards something, I think, when Kayerts "seemed to have broken loose from himself" (35), begins to go mad, and reflects that Carlier "was a noxious beast anyway" (55). A view of Kayerts' remaining isolation as his punishment—an isolation leading to madness—is almost developed. But, though the suicide can perhaps be viewed as partly the result of this madness, I think it is more Conrad's major theme of the nature of imperialism in Africa winning out over that of individual crime and punishment: the two are not yet perfectly fused.

In "Heart of Darkness" the themes of individual crime and the great crime of European imperialism in the Congo are so closely interfused that it is difficult to tell where one ends and the other begins. European imperialists react to the jungle in two ways: both of them criminal. One type of reaction is meaningless and without purpose. Ships fire meaningless shells into the forest; men dig meaningless holes; soldiers are senselessly thrown against the jungle: all with no apparent purpose. The

50 Dowden, p. 34.
second type of reaction definitely has a purpose. It is a mercenary purpose: ivory. It is the purpose of the king of Belgium, of the pilgrims, of all except Marlow and, at first, Kurtz. It is this type of purpose that most obviously indicts the criminality of "civilisation" in "Heart of Darkness." This is the purpose achieved when negroes lie in the road with bullet holes in their heads (202); when they die of "pain, abandonment and despair" (199). This is the purpose achieved, as Conrad said elsewhere, through "the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience and geographical exploration."\(^5\) It is the purpose achieved by the most efficient clerk who grumbles when the moans of the dying disturb his work. A clerk who, as Dr. Dowden points out, considers his greatest contribution to Africa to be having taught the native women how to clean his shirts properly.\(^5\) This massive criminal act is a result of a company, and representative of civilisation, that knows no tradition, faith, or human bond. This lack is demonstrated, as Paul Wiley notes,\(^5\) by Conrad's

51 *Last Essays*, p.17. Cited by Guerard, p.34.

52 Dowden, p.78.

ironical use of religious allusions. The "pilgrims," Kurtz' "discipline," the "savage litany" of the natives, and Kurtz black mass—all demonstrate the lack of a real ethical framework on the part of the imperialists: and thus wholesale crime results.

But we are retail customers concerned with the more individual aspects of crime, and thus we will concentrate on Kurtz, and somewhat of his relation to Marlow.

Kurtz, as is often noted, is a modern equivalent of one of Europe's traditional criminals of almost mythic stature: Faust. Like Faust, Kurtz is a "universal genius" (338); he has a god-like (or devil-like) power over the natives in his area; and the forces of darkness symbolised by the jungle had "sealed his soul to its own" (221) by some secret, devilish ceremony. He is totally self-centered, referring to "my Intended, my ivory, my station... everything belonged to him" (221). But Marlow realises that there is a more important question of possession—"the thing was to know what he belonged to, how many powers of darkness claimed him for their own" (221). Marlow soon answers that question in orthodox Christian terms when he exclaims that "no fool ever made a bargain for his soul with the devil" (222)—for earlier he had stated that Kurtz is "no fool." Kurtz is in many ways a traditional Faustian over-reacher, for "the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts..
the memory of gratified and monstrous passions...this alone had beguiled his unlawful soul beyond the bounds of permitted aspiration....There was nothing either above or below him, and he knew it. He had kicked himself loose of the earth" (223). The last sentence is interesting: Goethe's Faust finds redemption in establishing bonds by working for the benefit of man in draining the swamp: Conrad's, by contrast, finds damnation, by destroying man and his own capacity for establishing bonds: by kicking "himself loose of the earth" into total isolation.

Kurtz' criminality is the effect of physical isolation in a savage world on the moral isolation within him. Kurtz went to Africa with no real human bonds or real conception of them: his love for the Intended was a sham, founded as it was on unreality; his principles were also a sham, a vague idealism void of real substance or conviction, principles that "won't do....You want a definite belief" (213). And he obviously lacked the work ethic. Marlow establishes a bond with his helmsman who "had done something, he had steered. It was a kind of partnership. He steered for me, I had to look after him, I worried about his deficiencies, and thus a subtle bond had been created" (223). It is such a bond and his work that saves Marlow. Kurtz, too, must have had his helpers, as Kayerts and Carlier did, but he established no such sympathetic bond: his only bond was
similar to Willems'--the pseudo-bond of corrupted love. This lack within Kurtz explains what Guerard sees as the main problem with the story: "the chief contradiction...[is] that it suggests and dramatises evil as an active energy [Kurtz and his unspeakable lusts] but defines evil as a vacancy". It is the evil of vacancy that causes the evil of activity: as finally expressed in criminal action they are inseparable.

Kurtz' crime, of course, is against basic humanity. Establishing himself as a god (originally to lead the natives into the light, through the confidence they would have in him) Kurtz engages in wholesale murder in raiding the surrounding country for ivory—even using the skulls of the slain as intimidating decorations for the walls of his compound. He engages in "unspeakable rites" that Marlow does not even wish to know of. Critics, perhaps less wise than Marlow (suggestion after all--demanding the imagination of the reader--is often stronger than statement), have suggested that the rites included the ultimate in disregarding human bonds. Basing his argument on information on Congo religions in Frazer's *Golden Bough* Stephen Reid suggests they included human sacrifice and cannibalism. Conrad is ambiguous, but we can be sure

54 Guerard, p. 37.

55 "The Unspeakable Rites in 'Heart of Darkness'," *Modern Fiction Studies*, IX, No. 4 (winter 1963-64), 347-356.
they were not simply the taking of vows of solidarity and charity.

Whatever the secret rites were, morally and physically isolated, with the wilderness bringing out the evil within him through the hollowness of his character, Kurtz makes the final renunciation of humanity at the end of the pamphlet he had began so idealistically: "Exterminate all the brutes." For one of Kurtz' supposed ideals, and for the reader who rejects the imperialistic overtones of them but shares in their general humanitarianism, the phrase is the ultimate betrayal: not of the individual, but of the whole community of man.

A great deal of understanding of the nature and causes of Kurtz' criminal mentality can be obtained, as our discussion of the work ethic suggested, by comparing Kurtz with Marlow. The parallel between the two is continually drawn throughout the story. They are both members of the "new breed": those who have been chosen for their idealism. Throughout his journey Marlow rejects all identification of himself with the other whites he meets, and even after becoming aware of Kurtz' real nature he still identifies with him: choosing Kurtz as the lesser of the "two nightmares" he will be faithful to. Yet Marlow survives the temptations of the wilderness to become if not also a sadder, then at least a wiser man; while Kurtz succumbs to evil—why?
Partially the reason is Kurtz' failure to obey the work ethic; partially it is the hollowness of his love (though this is not central in this work—Marlow has no fiancée, or ever does); and partially it is his lack of real convictions. But his criminality is also due to the lack of a faculty that becomes of importance in Conrad's canon: the sympathetic imagination—a faculty Marlow possesses to a great degree.

We have seen that Marlow establishes a bond with his helmsman. This is not, I think, entirely attributable to the work ethic. Marlow throughout the story is able to sympathise with the plight of the natives; as his consistent ironic tone and descriptions of horrors indicate; and as occasional statements express ("I've seen the devil of violence, and the devil of hot desire; but by all the stars! these were strong lusty devils that drove men—men, I tell you" (199). This sympathetic imagination continues over into his understanding of Kurtz: his choice of the "lesser nightmare" is not a statement of condonement for what Kurtz has done, but an insight into Kurtz: a realisation that, at the last, at least this man knew himself and realised the horror of what he was and what he had done.

The greatest example of Marlow's sympathetic imagination is in his interview with the Intended. This may seem only peripherally associated with crime and punish-
ment, but I will discuss this episode at some length for two reasons. One is that it points out the importance of this concept both in Marlow's character, and thus as a saving force, and in Conrad's work—and as in the future novels we will deal with it will be conspicuous mostly by its absence, this most important demonstration of the faculty is a good time to discuss it. The second is that the lie Marlow tells is, I believe, part of the punishment Kurtz must suffer even when dead: isolation from those he knew best ever after death—through false memories.

The scene has been much condemned in criticism. Marlow had told us that "I hate, detest, and can't bear a lie, not because I am straighter than the rest of us, but simply because it appals me. There is a taint of death, a flavor of morality in lies....It makes me miserable and sick, like biting into something rotten would do." (206) Yet he lies to the Intended. Because of this contradiction, and what he calls Edgar Allan Poe elements, Leavis finds the scene a "bad patch" in the story. Moser says the lie "certainly weakens the scene" and Mudrick calls the

56 Leavis, p.181.
57 Moser, p.79.
scene "cheap double talk." Guerard almost ignores it, although briefly states that the lie is Marlow's atonement: what Marlow needed to atone for he does not state. Dowden admits the scene seems anti-climactic, but defends Conrad on the grounds that Marlow has learnt that, for such as her, illusions are necessary as a restraint to keep out the darkness.

Conrad seems to agree with Dowden. He wrote to his publisher that "the interview...locks in...the whole 30,000 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." One of the reasons this scene is so important, I believe, is the role Marlow plays in it—that of saviour. Possessed of a sympathetic imagination, he can realise that the truth is too much for the Intended. Like Dr. Relling in Ibsen's Wild Duck, Marlow practises the doctrine of the "life lie"


59 Guerard, p.42.

60 Dowden, p.82.

whereby superior individuals with greater insight can protect and provide meaning for those who cannot face the truth. Marlow achieves this status through his sympathetic, imaginative insight into the natives, Kurtz, and finally the Intended. This ability is a major difference between the saviour and the criminal, as we will also see in *Lord Jim* and *Under Western Eves*.

Kurtz' punishment is implicit in his dying statement "the horror." Marlow describes his glimpse over the precipice into Kurtz soul as "an ordeal" (234). How much worse to be at the bottom of the pit and see yourself! It is understandable that Kurtz last expression should be "of craven terror--of an intense and hopeless despair" (236)--not for any fear of the hangman (it is questionable whether Kurtz would have faced a trial anyway: the most the manager accuses him of is bad business practises), or of a last judgement--but simply of a realisation of what he was. Omar Khayyam realises that "I myself am Heaven and Hell": Kurtz realises he is half that--hell. He is, as Marlow says, "a shadow... a wandering and tormented thing" (233). Kurtz's cry is partly affirmation--but it is an affirmation only in that it is an expression of self awareness--there is no "salvation" as Guerard suggests.62 Kurtz has announced his own "judgement' upon the adventures

62 Guerard, p.36.
of his soul upon the earth"—the horror. Kurtz wished only for justice. He gives it to himself; and realising that it is too dark, Marlow continues Kurtz' judgement in protecting the Intended; except for the understanding Marlow has, Kurtz must remain as isolated in death as he became in life. But his most significant punishment was his awesome self awareness of the fulness of his psychic and spiritual degradation.

**Lord Jim** is the story of an ambiguous crime and an even more ambiguous atonement. Jim is an interesting character: he is not a glamorous, swaggering figure like Nostromo, a misanthropic philosopher like Heyst, or a universal genius like Kurtz. He is an ordinary man: "one of us." Thus Jim's ambiguous dilemma is more universal than any of Conrad's criminals with the possible exception of Razumov.

Jim's crime is against the sympathetic imagination, the work ethic, and the community he is responsible for. He deserts a ship which seems about to sink, His atonement is achieved by re-embracing the work ethic and the sympathetic imagination, his love for Jewel, and identification with community. His case is different from other criminals we have discussed, for Jim is a man who sins against the community of mankind through isolation, but who is almost able to overcome his isolation in a condition more physically
isolated than the *Patna*. Jim, also, is the closest anyone comes to in Conrad to actually facing a human court of justice. He is, finally, not punished for his original crime, but punishes himself for something even less obviously a crime than his desertion.

Jim's isolation on the *Patna* is psychological and physical. The psychological isolation is part of Jim's make-up: as is evident by the training ship episode, he is isolated from reality by his romantic dreams and illusions. This psychological make-up is partly the cause of Jim's failure to recognize the work ethic; he is a little like Willems in that he thinks of the sea more as a place of romantic glory than struggle and hard work. As Guerard has suggested, Jim on signing on the *Patna* would seem to be heading for "softer and softer berths" like the degenerate sailors Conrad dismissed earlier. Jim had shared Conrad's disdain but "there grew up slowly another sentiment; and suddenly, giving up the idea of going home, he took the berth of chief mate on the *Patna*" (12). The mysterious sentiment is unnamed, but it is obviously a repudiation of Conrad's microcosmic ideal ship concept, as our introduction to the captain and other officers soon shows us: a group that can see a band of faithful, Moslem pilgrims only as "cattle."

63 Guerard, p.128.
Through this basic repudiation of the work ethic, Jim isolated himself from the community that could have saved him from his fall. (There are other examples of Jim's violation of the work ethic, though Marlow does not comment on them. Jim, as first mate, would be responsible for seeing the boats were in order; yet as the frantic efforts of the crew to escape testify, the job had not been done for a long time). It is obvious from the fact that, though led by his overvivid imagination to believe that the ship is in imminent danger of sinking, Jim only jumps at the last minute—that had an officer like Allistoun or the French Lieutenant been in command, Jim would have done his duty. But lacking a normative example of duty, and incapable of realising the plight of the pilgrims and sympathetically responding to it, Jim jumps. As Marlow comments, Jim's act is not so much a "crime" in the legal sense, for the ship does not sink, but is a "more than criminal weakness" (33). In this respect Jim is like many of Conrad's criminals—especially Razumov. Crime is finally something more than written law, but as Marlow says later, is a breach of faith with the community of mankind. Thus Marlow in part explains why punishment in Conrad cannot be administered by a human court. The object there, of which the court of enquiry is a close example, is "not the fundamental why, but the superficial how..." for "You can't expect the constituted
authorities to look into a man's soul" (43).

Marlow, of course, does see into a man's soul, if but dimly and through rents in the mist. He gives Jim, through the agency of Marlow and Stein, "another chance." In Patusan Jim finds a leaderless people who are the victims of two organizations. He works for their betterment, overpowering the sheriff Ali and improving their agriculture and trade. This is not an act of pure egoism, though an element is present (an element that causes his final failure): Jim actually establishes emotional bonds with the natives: notably with Jewel and Dain Waris. These bonds of love and friendship are reinforced by his sense of working for the community of Patusan, and Marlow is able to pronounce that Jim has "survived the assault of the dark powers" (177). By establishing these bonds Jim discovers the work ethic, and it is "the work which gave him the certitude of rehabilitation" (178). Through establishing human bonds, Jim has submitted himself to the destructive elements and has, temporarily, triumphed.

The triumph is temporary because of the incident with Gentleman Brown, where Jim's attempt (prompted more by guilt and egoism than compassion) to give Brown another chance misfires. But it should be noted that this incident is separate from the original crime. This can be seen in the form of the novel. Marlow, at the end of his monologue,
informs us that at the point of Jim's triumph he is redeemed from his original crime. It is several years later, as we learn from the letter, that Jim fails. The failure is in part a failure to totally identify with the community of Patusan, which sees only a helpless band of marauders who should be killed; but in view of Jim's background, or any background, the action could hardly be considered criminal. Jim himself realises that he has not fully identified with community when he gives Doramin the ring, and watches it fall on the floor; for as Karl has noted, the ring is a symbol of human solidarity. But this failure is not the result of a criminal mentality. Jim is under a cloud at the end of the novel not for his original sin of desertion, but for his decision to die with little reason.

The captain in "The Secret Sharer" makes a decision which is, on the surface, much like Jim's. At what seems like the risk of destroying community, he gives a murderer another chance. Viewed as the story usually is—a psychological allegory in which the young captain descends into his unconscious and recognises Leggatt as his other self—the story does indeed seem to undermine the concept of community. Thus Guerard calls the captain's act "lawless sympathy," and says that the story "dramatises a human

64 Karl, p.123.
relationship and individual moral bond at variance with the moral bond to the community implicit in laws and maritime tradition."\(^6^5\) In view of the fact that the captain thoroughly benefits by his experience, then if what Guerard says is true it would seem that the individual relationships opposed to society are more important than community.

The answer to this problem is similar to that in *Under Western Eyes* (as has been noted, the central situation here is a reversal to that in the novel). Because of the nature of the community Leggatt sins against, the captain is here more true to the bonds of overall human community and solidarity by sheltering the criminal than if he had turned him over to "justice." Guerard says Leggatt is a questionable figure, partly because of the passage "he wasn't exactly the sort for the chief mate of a ship like the *Sephora*" (675). Guerard takes this statement as a serious criticism of Leggatt, \(^6^6\) but this statement is meant to be taken ironically. It is spoken by Archbald, captain of *Sephora* (Guerard does not mention this) --a captain who takes his wife on his voyages, and who can only whimper while Leggatt saves the ship (681). The

\(^{6^5}\) Guerard, p.23.

\(^{6^6}\) Guerard, p.23.
point that Leggatt is not "the sort" for the Sephora is that he is too good; his murderous act is the result of losing his temper under intense strain—while attempting to save the ship—something which, if the Sephora were a tight ship, a Narcissus, would not have happened.

The young captain realises this; as he attempts to point out to Archbald, Leggatt saved the ship. It is noteworthy that it is Archbald who in this scene is described as "a criminal making a reluctant and doleful confession" (673). Of Leggatt the captain can say "the same strung-up force which had given twenty four men a chance, at least, for their lives, had, in a sort of recoil, crushed an unworthy, mutinous existence" (681). The captain does not excuse Leggatt ("...Providence was, I suppose, denied to his guilt" (681), but through the exercise of his sympathetic faculties he sees the ambiguity of Leggatt's situation, identifies with him, and gives him another chance. To do this he risks his own immediate community, his ship, as Jim has risked Patusan. But his decision is not a bond with something less than community, as Jim's was, but one that embraces a bond beyond immediate community. The captain does not repudiate maritime tradition, but stays faithful to a man who, under the worst conditions, was the only crewman on board the Sephora who remained true to the task of the seaman. Choosing this man (a "lesser nightmare"?)}
over the contemptible Archbald, and with the insight into himself that is often discussed in criticising this work, the captain can achieve total command of his community; having been faithful to both the individual and to general community, he knows himself and his own immediate community.

Leggatt has not escaped justice. He will, like Cain, "be a fugitive and a vagabond on the face of the earth" (698). Unlike Cain, he will have "no brand of the curse on his forehead to stay a slaying hand" (698). He is to be marooned on an island (690), for he must not "come to life again" (687). He will be dead to the western world, totally isolated from society, with all the implications this has in Conrad's world view. Leggatt, when he leaves the ship is "taking his punishment" (699), and "striking out for a new destiny." Whether this destiny will be psychic disintegration, like Kurtz', or possible atonement, like Jim, we do not know—for the story is finally about the captain. The importance of crime in this story in relation to our theme is thus that this tale is not, as it may seem at first, a recommendation for the repudiation of solidarity and community.

The stories we have discussed are linked by the relation between man and setting, Europeans are presented in alien settings, often alone--some succumb to this isolation because they lack human bonds, and by committing
criminal action sing against these bonds, which sin further isolates them. Two, Marlow and Jim, are able to overcome isolation through work and human relationships. One criminal, Leggatt, we do not know enough about to deal with—but we can see that the same principles of human community is in operation in the story. Justice, which can be overruled by atonement, comes as a consequence of the criminals "kicking themselves loose of the earth" or human bonds. Madness, horror-stricken self-awareness, or isolation in a hostile universe constitutes their punishment. Human courts cannot see into their souls, neither can an inexorable universe. Their punishment is that if they deny themselves the only light that can disperse the darkness within and without, they must live in darkness.
The second group of works we are dealing with—

*Nostromo,* "The Informer," *The Secret Agent,* and *Under Western Eyes*—is about Europeans in European society; and the criminals are not as obviously isolated as they are in the first group. Conrad is bringing his theme closer to home: his concern is not, or ever was, just with the strange reactions of whites to exotic situations. This group of works show that Conrad's concepts of isolation and the importance of human bonds, and the nature of criminal action, is as relevant in European society as it is in isolated posts.

Costaguana is not exactly Europe. As a society it occupies a transitional area between those we have been dealing with and the scenes in *Under Western Eyes* and *The Secret Agent,* a European clique in a semi-European society. The main, or least most obvious criminal, Nostromo, is an Italian who is identified throughout the novel as a "man of the people." Gould is a native of Costaguana, but still an Englishman in his habits. Thus the main characters fit, but do not exactly fit, into the society in which they live.

Nostromo is isolated more by his vanity than by his nationality, however. He is a hero, adored by the people. He seems to respect community and human bonds; he is trusted
completely—'a man above reproach' as Mitchell puts it (26); he seems to obey the work ethic—Mitchell says he is 'a prodigy of efficiency' (49); and he seems to respect duty and the community so much that he risks his life several times during the riots, and even manages to rescue the deposed President from the mob. He is totally uncorrupted by material interests, as is evidenced, as Dowden points out, 67 when he allows the girl to cut off the silver buttons on his coat. But in all his apparent respect for human solidarity there is an ulterior motive: Nostromo lives for reputation. Decoud realises that Nostromo, for all his sacrifices, is no patriot (l60), as does the old Garibaldino's wife in her last interview with him. Nostromo's sense of community grows out of his own sense of self-importance.

This self-importance and thus his sense of community is destroyed, and his moral isolation revealed to us and himself, in Conrad's greatest scene of physical isolation: the night in the boat on the placid gulf. In the gulf Nostromo begins to question exactly what he is getting out of his heroics, but we are not presented with any indication of any deep inner change. When he wakes up after swimming ashore, however, we are. As Professor Dowden has noted,

67 Dowden, p.96.
the sky under which he wakes is described in terms of dark and blood imagery. And he is reborn: "he stood...with the lost air of a man just born into the world" (330). This birth, however, is more like a death, like "the end of things"; for he wakes in a ruined fort watched over by a vulture (331). He feels lonely, abandoned, and a failure (333). His entire conception of himself and his community has collapsed. When the opportunity arises, though he is not yet fully aware of it, he is ready to steal the silver. When he steals the silver he is, of course, repudiating the bonds he once had: trust, duty, the work ethic, and community.

Nostromo's punishment, more than that of anyone else in Conrad, is a natural extension of his crime. Indeed, in part his punishment is his crime. The silver begins to devour Nostromo psychologically: "he suffered most from the concentration of his thought upon the treasure" the narrator relates before Conrad's most explicit statement on crime and punishment in his novels:

A transgression, a crime, entering a man's existence eats it up like a malignant growth, consumes it like a fever, Nostromo had lost his peace; the genuineness of all his qualities was destroyed. He felt it himself, and often cursed the silver of San Tome....he hated the feel of the ingots.

Dowden, p. 98.
Nostrero cannot, of course, give the silver up, and so it becomes a "tyranny" to him (420), and he walks around with "silver fetters" (433). He is as securely imprisoned as if he had been caught and tried.

His death may also be seen as his punishment, in that it is a logical, natural consequence of his corruption. This may seem a rather radical statement. As pure drama, without symbolic interpretation (and if a great novel cannot stand without symbolic reading it is flawed), the ending has almost been universally criticised: almost all critics agreeing with Guerard that Nostromo's death is a melodramatic "grand opera effect." Critics who defend the scene do so only because of its symbolic overtones: Dowden because it presents the "theme writ small" of the eventual destruction of the Occidental republic; Moser because it presents the killing of Nostromo by a "true republican" while the lighthouse, the symbol of material interests for which Nostromo has betrayed the cause, looks on; and Fleishman, who has an elaborated class-oriented interpretation of the scene that is "like a myth

69 Guerard, p.204.
70 Dowden, p.102.
71 Moser, p.87.
of radical politics." Viola is a class-conscious old radical who cannot see Nostromo because he is a representative of the new proletariat. Myth is a good word to describe such an interpretation, I think.

As I said, the accidental slaying by Viola of Nostromo is a logical result of Nostromo's corruption and violation of human bonds. Specifically, it is the result of the corruption of love by the silver. Nostromo loves Giselle, the younger of Viola's daughters; but it has long been expected that he will marry the older Linda. The old Garibaldino and his daughters live on the island, close to where he has stored the stolen silver. When Nostromo is asking for Giselle's hand of her father he is suddenly stricken with dread and he cannot mention her name. Viola assumes he is asking for Linda, utters her name, and gives his approval. Nostromo does not protest. Nostromo's death is a consequence of this action, for he must now visit Giselle secretly, at a time when the old man is on the look-out for a former suitor of Giselle's that he despises. Furtively visiting Giselle, Nostromo is shot.

Why did Nostromo not inform Viola he actually wanted Giselle? It is in the answer to this question that we see that his death was in fact a result of his corruption by

72 Fleishman, p.175.
the silver. Nostromo is afraid that Viola may refuse to give him Giselle, because of the long understanding that he would marry Linda. He is not afraid of losing Giselle, he will take her—even if refused, but of losing his excuse to visit the island:

He was afraid. He was not afraid of being refused the woman he loved—no mere refusal could stand between him and the woman he desired—but the shining spectre of the treasure rose before him, claiming his allegiance in a silence that could not be gain said. He was afraid, because, neither dead nor alive, like the gringos on Auzera, he belonged body and soul to the unlawfulness of his audacity. He was afraid of being forbidden the island. (422).

As Nostromo himself can exclaim: the silver killed him (443). These last scenes are very important symbolically, but though their presentation is not up to much of the rest of the novel, they are not melodramatic. Nostromo’s death is a natural consequence of his disintegration. It can thus be viewed as part of his punishment.

The apparent theme of both The Secret Agent and "The Informer" is political anarchy. Conrad hated anarchy, of course, but the political movement is only a background against which Conrad examines moral anarchy and the lack of meaningful human relationships. The anarchists achieve, or attempt, little or nothing—they are politically and socially impotent. Such a background Conrad found ideal for a portrayal of spiritual malaise.
There are three main criminals in The Secret Agent: Verloc, his wife Winnie, and the Professor. It is interesting that the most criminal mentality, the Professor, commits the least crime in the strictly legal sense; while the least innately criminal, Mrs. Verloc, commits the worst crime—murder.

The story actually centers around Mrs. Verloc, Conrad says in his Author's Note (ii). She is unknowingly married to a "secret agent"—a man who makes money betraying people. Her marriage is barren. This is more symbolic than a real concern for Mrs. Verloc—for she showers all her maternal affection, indeed all her affection, on her retarded brother Stevie. When Stevie is slain while being used by her husband in a bombing attempt, Winnie loses the only bond in her life. Discovering the truth, she murders Verloc. This is her crime.

Verloc is throughout the work a criminal mentality. He rationalises his treacherous profession by a pseudo-belief that he is protecting society. But the fact that he is ordered to plan the bombing by his employer invalidates that claim. He violates fundamental human relationships when he uses his adoring brother-in-law, Stevie, in the bombing attempt; unwilling to take the risk himself, and realising that, at the least, Stevie will be arrested. Stevie trips with the bomb, and...
blown up. This is Verloc's crime.

The Professor's crime, in the strictly legal sense, is merely that he illegally supplies explosives to Verloc and others. Yet, as we will see, he is the greatest criminal mentality in Conrad's works. He wants not just to "exterminate the brutes"—but to destroy all that gives a meaningless universe human meaning.

Winnie's fate—murder and suicide—is tragic but, given the conditions of Conrad's universe, not unexpected. Winnie is a self-isolated human being surrounded by moral anarchy. She marries Verloc not out of love, but for security for herself and her brother. Her philosophy that "things don't bear looking into" (198) isolates her from the real world and the real nature of her husband until it is too late. The only time before the murder Winnie leaves the store is, ironically, to further isolate herself: when she accompanies her mother in their nightmarish cab ride to her mother's new lodging (she had been living with the Verlocs). Her only bond now is her intense love for her brother. With Stevie on what she thinks is a holiday, just before she learns of his death, her state without him is foreshadowed: "she looked around thoughtfully, with an air of mistrust in the silence and solitude of the house. This abode of her married life appeared to her as lonely and unsafe as though it had been
in the midst of the forest" (168). With her only human bond absent, Mrs. Verloc lives in an outpost of progress in the very heart of London—an outpost that she soon learns will be her permanent dwelling place. We are seeing in depth what was suggested at the end of "Heart of Darkness." Learning of Stevie's death, she feels herself "free from all earthly ties" (203) and in this isolated condition, spurred on by Verloc's egoistic insensitivity to her suffering ("what you need is a good cry") she murders him. This act, of course, only isolates her further, and as she leaves the shop only the flower in her hand marks her presence. In her last attempt to overcome her isolation she reaches out for help to Ossipon, who puts her on a boat-train to France and robs and deserts her. Totally isolated and overcome by madness and despair, sitting alone in the darkness, she commits suicide by jumping overboard. Lost, without bonds that give her life meaning, she can no longer live.

Verloc is a contemptible individual, similar to Willems. His life is one of constant betrayal: of anarchists, of Stevie, and, if he had lived, of his employers (202). The full horror of his total insensitivity to human relationships is seen in his treatment of Stevie. Stevie is the one character in the work who possesses a sympathetic imagination. He can feel sorry for the cab driver and the
horse, and wishes he could console them. He cannot think but "he felt with greater completeness and some profundity," something Mrs. Verloc cannot "pretend to" (146), and Verloc totally lacks. Stevie adores Verloc, "he would go through fire for you" (155) Mrs. Verloc says truthfully.

But Verloc, with his total disregard for human bonds (he only marries for egoistic reasons—the thought of being loved [214], only uses this truth as a spring-board to an idea—use Stevie for the dangerous bomb attempt. Even though he knew the boy would be arrested, it would be safe: Stevie worshipped him so much, he would not implicate Verloc if so instructed (191).

Verloc is so totally insensitive that his psyche is not destroyed by crime, yet his "punishment," his death at the hands of his wife, is ironically just—for it is a result of the same faculty that caused him to commit his crime: his total insensitivity to human relationships. Though he is aware that his wife knows he is responsible for Stevie's death, he totally misunderstands her feelings. His wife must adore him, thus all she needs "is a good cry" (199) and she will be allright. As Guerard notes, it is Verloc who takes the initiative in each important step of the murder.73 Mrs. Verloc is brought to murder by Verloc's

73 Guerard, p.230.
total inability to understand her, his obvious callousness towards Stevie's death, and his interest in only his own fate. When he hypocritically mentions his "fondness" for her she is suffocated by the "disaccord with her mental condition the words produced." This leads her, when Verloc talks of visiting Europe, to forgetfully ask "and what of Stevie," This then brings her to an awareness of her isolation, and also her freedom—she no longer has to live with Verloc. With this sense of freedom and isolation, she is once more reminded of Stevie's fate when Verloc exclaims that he wishes he had never seen Greenwich Park. A picture of Stevie being blown into pieces springs into her changed mind, and she murders Verloc. Thus Verloc's death, like Nostromo's, is caused by his corruption; it is ironically just.

The Professor is the greatest, or worst, criminal mentality we meet in Conrad. He appears briefly in "The Informer" as well as The Secret Agent. To someone concerned with both works, the short story may somewhat undercut the brilliant last paragraph of the novel in which the Professor walks among the London streets with his time bomb in his pocket—for in the story we learn he was killed while still searching for the perfect detonator. But the story was written before the novel, and the character in The Secret Agent is a development ever that
in "The Informer." I think Conrad would prefer us to think of the Professor walking through the streets of London like a pest, than in pieces on a laboratory floor. Though his fate is another example of ironic justice, it is far less dramatic, or symptomatic of the threat of a criminal mentality to humanity.

The Professor wishes to overthrow all human relationships. He is the perfect anarchist: not just an impotent bomb-thrower, but a man without political, social, emotional, or moral bonds—and a man who wishes to destroy all those of others. He has no humanity—the weak, he feels, are the source of all evil, and must be exterminated (246). His moral order is based not on life, historical facts, and tradition, as he says society's moral order is, but upon death—the great reality. This, he says, is a superior basis, as the police's fear of his time bomb proves (67). His total inhumanity strips him of humanity; and at the end of the novel we see him only as a "force"—"a pest in a street of men." Totally self-isolated, he has become vermin, leading a life of misery (257). If we ignore his death in "The Informer"—which we can do as Conrad killed him off before realising the potentialities of his character that he develops in The Secret Agent—we see that Conrad has left him alive as a horrifying warning: a warning of what the ultimate criminal repudiation of
human bonds means to the individual and society: a sub-
human, miserable existence.

Under Western Eyes is, I think, Conrad's greatest
exploration into the problem of crime and its relation
to human solidarity in an alien universe. This greatness
is mostly due to the moral dilemma that the novel presents.
The work has often been unfavourably compared with
Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment, and much of the unfavour-
able criticism has centered on the comparative slight-
ness and motivation of Razumov's crime. Though Crime and
Punishment is certainly the greater novel, the crimes are
not valid measuring sticks in comparing the two books.
In fact, I believe that Razumov's crime represents a greater
artistic achievement than Raskolnikov's crime. Raskolnikov's
murderous act is obviously criminal—there is no attempt
in Dostoevsky's novel to explore any ambiguous moral dilemma;
he is concerned with rationalisation of crime, guilt,
confession, and redemption—and on these grounds the great-
ness of his novel is assured. Conrad also deals with these
themes, not as well as Dostoevsky, but he is also much
concerned with the moral dilemma in which Razumov is placed:
a dilemma in which he must choose between individual and
national bonds: both major aspects of human solidarity. The
answer to the dilemma, if there finally is one, is an
indictment of an entire society based on criminal premises.
This theme takes on further significance when we realise that in the novel Russia has the attributes of the lawless universe. Man in Russia is like man in the universe-as-a-sewing-machine; he must establish bonds that are not present in the society that exists. Thus in this novel we not only see the problem of man in a lawless society, but also man in the universe.

A revolutionary comes to Razumov's room and asks for help after assassinating a leading government official (and, what is often ignored, several innocent bystanders). Razumov, in a turmoil, first attempts to help the man, Haldin, and then reveals his presence in his room to the authorities. Is this a crime? It is normally interpreted as such. Guerard says that unless he has "violated the deepest human bond...the novel is meaningless."\(^{74}\) Karl says that Razumov has tried to "pry himself from human solidarity in order to go his own way."\(^{75}\) Zabel says he seems "a man designed to live by self law."\(^{76}\) These critics are all aware of the difficulty that Razumov is in, but assume from his guilt that what he had done was definitely a crime against human solidarity, and one that

\(^{74}\) Guerard, p. 243.

\(^{75}\) Karl, p. 211.

he should not have committed. An unfavourable comparison between Razumov and the captain in "The Secret Sharer" is often drawn.

But Razumov's situation is altogether different from the captain's. Leggatt had committed his crime while doing his duty, and had saved the lives of all on board except the man he killed. Haldin's act in killing de P. is far less defensible and the slaying of the innocent bystanders could only be defended by the most hardened terrorist. Even then, Razumov first attempts to help, until his background affects his decision.

Razumov is a man as isolated as any of Conrad's hermits. He is illegitimate, without guardian or friend, as "lonely as a man swimming in a deep sea" (11). As we have seen, unless a man establishes bonds, he will be destroyed. Haldin's arrival presents Razumov with a choice: Haldin and revolutionary activity or Russia and nationality. As he tells Haldin, his "tradition is historical," and he chooses Russia.

It is the wrong choice, perhaps, but it is an understandable one. His decision to choose nationality is made after he has been thwarted in his attempt to help Haldin by rousing Ziemianitch. First he feels the "hard ground of Russia" beneath his feet, and then looking up he
The snow had ceased to fall, and now, as if by a miracle, he saw above his head the clear black sky of the northern winter, decorated with the sumptuous fires of the stars. It was a canopy fit for the resplendent purity of the snows. Razumov received an almost physical impression of endless space and of countless millions.

He responded to it with the readiness of a Russian who is born to an inheritance of space and numbers. Under the sumptuous immensity of the sky, the snow covered the endless forests, the frozen rivers, the plains of an immense country, obliterating the landmarks, the accidents of the ground, levelling everything under its uniform whiteness, like a monstrous blank page awaiting the record of an unconceivable history. (26)

This mystic vision converts him to a belief in autocracy and nationality, and "grace entered into" him (27). Razumov's choice is based on a vision of Russia. In the very imagery that Conrad uses to present this vision the choice is questioned, for the earth of mother Russia is "without a fireside, without a heart!" (26), and the nation is seen in terms of the cosmos, which we know to Conrad was anarchic and offered no security or salvation. The grace, we feel and later know, is a false grace. But at this time can we call Razumov's act a crime, or simply a wrong decision?

It is not, I think, a crime on the order of the others we have been examining; and this does not in any way lessen the novel, or the element of crime in it. The true crime
Razumov commits is not in his "betrayal" of Haldin but what he does afterwards; and I hope to show later that with this understanding some critical misapprehensions concerning the novel can be cleared up. Razumov's choice of Russia and autocracy was a wrong decision, and if not a crime in itself, leads him to commit some; by becoming a secret agent.

The criminal nature of this activity is presented through the analogy which Conrad uses to describe the second meeting with Mikulin, in which Razumov agrees to infiltrate revolutionary groups and betray them: not as a citizen, but as a hired agent who seeks out trust to betray. We are told that "to the morality of the Western reader" (and we are meant to examining this world "under western eyes") the scene would appear like the old tales when "the Enemy of Mankind is represented holding subtly mendacious dialogues with some tempted soul" (257). That Razumov has indeed been corrupted is soon shown: he has the foolish Kostia steal from his father to provide money that Razumov does not need, and does so "with a feeling of malicious pleasure" (264). He does not want the money, and casts it out on the snow muttering "For the people"—a phrase that refers to the money, but also seems a rationalisation of his destruction of Kostia. Conrad cannot resist an imagistic comment on Razumov's claim:
for as Razumov speaks and stares out the train window at the money the scene is "without a sign of human habitation" (266). The demonic nature of his new profession can also be seen in his own description of what he intended to do to Miss Haldin: he was to "steal her soul," which he admits would be "the unpardonable sin"—both terms used to describe the activities of disciples of the devil: terms which are never used to describe his "betrayal" of Haldin.

_Under Western Eyes_ is not a story of crime and punishment but of crime and atonement. Through his love for Miss Haldin Razumov establishes a real human bond and cannot proceed with his plans to steal her soul. His confession to her that it was he that betrayed Haldin is thus a natural development within the story: and after it, walking in the storm, and with plans to further confess to the revolutionaries that he is a police spy, he can say that he is "washed clean!" (301).

The first confession is much praised by critics, but the second has been condemned. The second confession Guerard says, is "rhetorical, arbitrary, untrue." And Karl says that the second confession is a "clear breach

77 Guerard, p.240.
of the dramatic inevitability of the plot," and that after Razumov's confession to Miss Haldin, "the rest of the novel is anti-climactic." 78 But if what I have said is true, then the second confession is very much a natural part of the plot: Razumov's major crime had been his continuing betrayal of the revolutionaries as a spy— to truly repent, he must confess to them, also.

The result of Razumov's atonement—deafness and crippling—is not, I think, to be interpreted as total pessimism on Conrad's part: Conrad is not saying that crime cannot be atoned for. Wiley claims Razumov is more isolated at the end of the novel than at the beginning; 79 he seems to ignore Tekla. His crippling is, like the original dilemma that Razumov found himself in him, a judgement on the Russian government. Razumov was not deafened by "enraged anarchists" as several critics have suggested: but by one of what he had been—Nikita, the police spy. As Dowden has remarked, the end of the novel can be viewed optimistically as each of the Russians returns to his country in peace: some of them befriending Razumov. It is obvious that without the representative of Russian autocracy present, Razumov would not have

78 Karl, pp. 226-227.

79 Wiley, 124.
suffered as much. But to view the end as completely optimistic is inaccurate, I believe. I do not think that his deafness symbolises his "attainment of inner peace." Earlier, Razumov had stated that he is "not converted" to revolutionary causes, though an apostate from autocracy, and therefore "perdition is [his] lot" (304). As neither an autocrat nor a revolutionary, Razumov has no place in Russian society. He is able to establish a few personal bonds, but that is all—only personal bonds are possible in Russia; a fact that accounts for the mistake he made in "betraying" Haldin. His deafness, I think, symbolises not inner peace but his perdition; he can never belong to any real, extensive human community, he can never fully communicate with others, because Russian autocracy, in the form of Nikita, has destroyed that opportunity. As Conrad states in the preface, Russian autocracy is based on "moral anarchy" and thus cannot allow meaningful communal bonds. As Razumov's original dilemma suggests, it is autocracy that is the real criminal in the novel. Russia is like Conrad's view of the universe: an anarchistic chaos in which the individual cannot survive alone—as he must establish individual and communal bonds in the universe to keep out the darkness, so must he establish and respect whatever

80 Dowden, p. 131.
bonds are possible in Russia. The universe cannot be changed: To Conrad it will always remain a sewing machine. In this sense Conrad is a pessimist. But human society can be changed, and if man establishes and respects human bonds, the he can be saved. Few characters do it in these novels, and they are partly thwarted by those who will not. But there are enough indications in these works that criminal action and autocratic society are not the inevitable lot of man, to say that there are at least a few gleams of optimism in these, perhaps the darkest, of Conrad's works.
Selected Bibliography

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