

UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES: CHARACTER AND SELF-
KNOWLEDGE IN CONRAD AND SCHOPENHAUER

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ABSTRACT

That Conrad was familiar with Schopenhauer's philosophy has been proposed by literary scholars and seconded, in passing, by philosophers. This has resulted in one-way studies of literary influence. This thesis is instead a two-way study in the philosophy of literature. It shows how Schopenhauer's philosophy can illuminate Conrad's fiction and how the fiction can become an analytical tool for exploring the philosophy. There are two strands in Schopenhauer's philosophy. One is uncompromisingly concerned with salvation and will-denial. The second focuses on self-knowledge and character, which leads to self-fulfilment and accommodation with the world. It is the latter strand, with character at its core, where the interests of the philosopher and creative writer coincide. My methodology is different from previous studies in that I propose Conrad's direct source for Schopenhauer was not *The World as Will and Idea* but his essays, which are directed more towards the worldly strand of his philosophy. I argue that the use by literary scholars of Schopenhauer's *magnum opus* as Conrad's direct source has diverted them from his main area of interest in the philosophy, namely its approach to self-knowledge and character, and that this misplaced focus has tended to distort interpretations of his fiction.

Dedicated to the memory of my parents Lucy and Harry

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INTRODUCTION

1.

That Conrad's fiction was influenced by his reading of Schopenhauer has become almost a critical orthodoxy. Literary scholars laid the foundations by interpreting Conrad's fiction in the light of Schopenhauer's philosophy. Johnson (1971 p.45) wrote that "Much of Conrad's work" was "a tribute" to the influence of Schopenhauer's thought. Bonney (1980 p.9) said that an understanding of Schopenhauer's work was "necessary for any comprehensive response to Conrad's fiction" and Panagopoulos (1998 p.16) agrees. Wollaeger (1990 p.32) sees "important affinities" between Conrad's and Schopenhauer's writing on art. Madden (1999 p.42) sees Conrad as owing a "debt" to Schopenhauer while Edward Said claimed that the relationship was one of "veneration" on the novelist's part. (Mallios 2005 p.290) Philosophers frequently include Conrad in their lists of creative artists said to have been influenced by Schopenhauer; for example Jacquette (1996 pp.1-2), Magee (1997 p.413) and Neill (2008 p.179). Diffey (1996 p.229) and Young (2005 p.234) both quote Magee's list. When evidence of this influence is cited it comes, in a form of academic division of labour, from literary scholars. Magee (1997 p.409) cites Kirschner and Bonney in support of his claim that Conrad was "significantly influenced by Schopenhauer". Both Young (2005 p.236) and Magee (1997 p.409) quote the same passage, from

Cedric Watts' introduction to a volume of Conrad's letters, (CLG p.25) ¹ as establishing the connection and its nature, which is said to be their shared pessimism.

I also believe that Conrad's work was influenced by Schopenhauer's philosophy but in a different way, and by different means, than those proposed by the majority of literary scholars. My contention is that Conrad's primary interest lay in Schopenhauer's philosophy of character. I also argue that Conrad's direct source for Schopenhauer was not *The World as Will and Idea*, which appeared in a three-volume English translation by Haldane and Kemp between 1883 and 1886, but his essays which were immensely popular in English translation in the late nineteenth century. My aim, however, is not to produce a one-way study in literary influence but, instead, a two-way study in the philosophy of literature. I plan to show not only that understanding Conrad's response to Schopenhauer's thought helps in a critical exegesis of his fiction but that the fiction, in turn, can be used as an analytical tool for exploring the philosophy.

In claiming that there is an important connection between Conrad's fiction and Schopenhauer's philosophy I am committed to oppose views, such as those of the great Conrad scholar Zdzisław Najder, that the connection is actually nothing more than one of the "accidental analogies" that occur when scholars analyze "Conrad's philosophical views". (Najder 1997 p.227) In his collection of essays *Conrad in Perspective* he relegates the whole issue to a brusque endnote:

¹ A full list of abbreviations used both for Conrad and Schopenhauer's works can be found at the beginning of the bibliography, pp. 328-331.

For example, his affinity with Schopenhauer has been exaggerated: Conrad shared neither his ethics nor his epistemology, the two notable elements of Schopenhauer's thought.

(Najder 1997 p.227 n.3)

Not only does Najder ignore Schopenhauer's metaphysics and aesthetics, both surely "notable elements" of his philosophy, but he also implies that if Conrad had an interest in Schopenhauer's thought then he must have "shared" his views. This is not the case. Conrad could have been actively engaged with Schopenhauer's philosophy without endorsing it or agreeing with it either in whole or in part. It would be possible for his fiction to be influenced in a purely negative way – as a reaction against the philosophy. In fairness to Najder, he is rebuffing a view that is common in literary scholarship; that Conrad *did* endorse Schopenhauer's ethics of compassion and the metaphysics of will in which it is grounded. In that respect I agree with Najder; while Conrad's fiction reveals an engagement with Schopenhauer's ethics, and his notion of denial of the will-to-live, I argue that he accepted neither of them.

Najder, like other literary scholars, has overlooked the importance of character in Schopenhauer's philosophy, which is what I believe to be Conrad's chief interest in Schopenhauer's thought. Its importance has also been generally undervalued by philosophers; with the notable exception of John Atwell's *Schopenhauer: The Human Character*. (1990) Some of Atwell's

most important arguments will be critically examined in Chapter 1. More recently, Matthias Kossler has sought to redress the balance. In tracing the genesis of Schopenhauer's thought from his early manuscripts, Kossler (2008 p.236) argues that Schopenhauer's "metaphysics of will was developed as consistent with and out of the doctrine of character as its premise".

Anyone proposing that Conrad was influenced by Schopenhauer's thought has to acknowledge that evidence for both its extent and its nature, does not come from any pronouncement of Conrad's. He never mentions Schopenhauer in the nine volumes of collected letters, his essays and journalism, or in his two volumes of autobiography. The only direct reference for the connection is in his friend John Galsworthy's valedictory essay of 1924 "Reminiscences of Conrad" in which he wrote: "Of philosophy he had read a good deal, but on the whole spoke little. Schopenhauer used to give him satisfaction twenty years and more ago". (Galsworthy 2008 p.91) His comment is a fragile foundation on which to erect a critical edifice. It tells us tantalizingly little and raises more questions than it answers. Which of Schopenhauer's writings did Conrad read? Did his choice affect his understanding of the philosophy? What issues interested Conrad? Did he agree with all or some of Schopenhauer's views and which ones?

For answers to these questions we have to turn to Conrad's creative work, his novels and short stories. Conrad does not tell us which of Schopenhauer's works he read, but he was normally just as reticent about other authors whose ideas interested him. He did, however, make literary

forensic work easier through his predilection for allusion. Irwin distinguishes between allusions and direct references: while both must be intentional and detectable in principle (Irwin 2001 p.289) the indirectness of allusion requires the reader to make connections that are “necessary for correct and complete understanding” of the work in hand. (Irwin 2001 p.292) That is true of the many allusions to Schopenhauer in Conrad’s fiction. Discovering and interpreting them correctly is necessary for a comprehensive understanding of his work. It is also a pre-condition for the reciprocal process of using Conrad’s fiction as an aid to interpreting Schopenhauer.

Kirschner (1968 p.182) said Conrad’s work “teems with literary allusions”, while Hawthorn (2007 p.163) sees some of Conrad’s fiction as being so “packed with intertextual allusions” as to produce a “subtextual symphonic force”. As an example let us take Conrad’s novel *Victory* – a novel of “extraordinary allusiveness”. (Hervouet 1990 p.133) Commentators have found allusions to: the Bible (Purdy 1984pp. 109-150); Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (Sherbo 1953 pp. 492-493) and *The Tempest* (Lodge 1964 pp.195-199). Added to that are Anatole France’s novel *Le Jardin d’Epicure* (Kirschner 1968 pp. 232-235) and Maupassant’s *Fort comme la mort* (Kirschner 1968 pp. 193-198); Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (Kalnins 2004b p.330), Conrad also uses lines from Milton’s *Comus* as an epigraph; the myth of Acis and Galatea (Saveson 1972 pp. 59-62.); even Jack the Ripper’s murders. (Hampson 2001 pp. 243-245) The novel’s allusions to Schopenhauer’s philosophy have been noted by Kalnins (2004a pp. xxiii-xxv) (2004b p.324, p.326), Panagopoulos (1998 pp.165-197) and Watts (1994 pp. xv-xvi). Magee (1997 p.410) claims

that the father of the novel's protagonist Axel Heyst is "modelled on Schopenhauer".

There are many more allusions to Schopenhauer's philosophy in the novel and throughout Conrad's fiction. What allusions to Schopenhauer one discovers will depend in part upon which of the philosopher's works one believes to have been Conrad's source. My methodological decision to take Schopenhauer's essays to be Conrad's direct source has yielded a much larger crop of allusions than have been discovered previously by literary scholars. It is not just a matter of quantity, but also of discovering allusions that are integral to the subject matter of a fictional work. In some of Conrad's fiction there are multiple allusions to a particular Schopenhauer essay, and these form part of the thematic structure of that work. For example, allusions to Schopenhauer's essay "On Women" occur in Conrad's novel *Chance* in this way, as part of its examination of gender roles and the relationship between the sexes.

2.

The majority of literary scholars who claim that Conrad was influenced by Schopenhauer's thought cite the latter's *magnum opus*, rather than the essays, as the source of that influence. Wollaeger claims that the Haldane and Kemp translation of Schopenhauer's major work was the one "which Conrad would have read". (Wollaeger 1990 p.31) Johnson (1971 p.29) says that "it is not at all misleading to say that Conrad is never far from the

implications of Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Idea*." Panagopoulos (1998) frequently cites Schopenhauer's major work when making connections with Conrad's fiction. Watts (1993 p.96) gives *The World as Will and Idea* as the source of Schopenhauer's "influence". I believe that the choice of *The World as Will and Idea* as Conrad's direct source; the claim that Conrad endorsed Schopenhauer's ethics of compassion, and the metaphysics of will in which it is rooted; and the failure to see character as Conrad's main source of interest in Schopenhauer's thought, are connected. This last omission is particularly surprising since all Conrad's novels, and many of his short stories, have character, unsurprisingly, as their focus. The connections between these three factors will be considered during the course of this Introduction.

One reason why I favour Schopenhauer's essays as Conrad's direct source is that they would be a more plausible avenue of approach for him, a man of letters but not a professional academic, than would *The World as Will and Idea*. In a paper on Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Owen Knowles, a notable exception to critical orthodoxy, found it unlikely that there was any "sustained grappling on Conrad's part with the sometimes tortured abstractions of *The World as Will and Idea*", adding:

I cannot believe that Schopenhauer's *magnum opus* was ever likely to have been the focus of Conrad's habitual or prolonged study, still less one of his bedside books.

(Knowles 1994 p.78)

Knowles adds that it “seems indisputable” that the philosopher’s “more popular essays” are “directly echoed in Conrad’s dark letters of the late 1890s”. (Knowles 1994 p.77) Having made this concession, and even giving an example of allusions to Schopenhauer in Conrad’s letters, he does not mention the possibility that they are also echoed in Conrad’s fiction. This may be because his paper focuses on “the *indirect* manifestations of Schopenhauer” in late nineteenth century culture. (Knowles 1994 p.78) These include Maupassant’s 1883 short story “Beside a Dead Man”, where the dead man is Schopenhauer, and Wallace’s 1890 biography of Schopenhauer. Knowles makes a convincing case for Conrad’s knowledge of these secondary sources. It is strengthened, as we shall see in Chapter 6, by further allusions to some of them which I have found in *Victory*, a novel which was outside the scope of Knowles’ paper.

Given the vagueness of Galsworthy’s statement, however, I cannot categorically rule out *The World as Will and Idea* as Conrad’s source for Schopenhauer – but the question of plausibility arises again. For instance, I agree with Madden (1999 p.49) that: “In both *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* Conrad uses Marlow’s narration as a means of interrogating Schopenhauer’s ethical system.” But he claims that to prepare for this task Conrad needed to have read both *The World as Will and Idea*, in English, and Schopenhauer’s *On the Basis of Morality* in an 1891 French translation, since one in English

had not been made at the time.¹ (Madden 1999 p.60) I claim that the allusions to Schopenhauer's ethics in these two works can be accounted for by Conrad reading a single essay "On Ethics". It was available to Conrad complete in an 1891 English translation by Bax in his volume *Selected Essays of Arthur Schopenhauer* (SE pp. 195-239) and, edited and reordered into several themed sections, in Bailey Saunders' translation in the volume *On Human Nature* (HN), published in 1897. Applying Ockham's razor we can reduce Conrad's reading from Madden's four volumes to about fifty pages. My approach assumes that the essays were Conrad's direct source for Schopenhauer. I have not found anything to contradict this methodological assumption, for example an allusion which could only refer to *The World as Will and Idea* rather than an essay or a secondary source of the kind Knowles mentions. For example, Madden (1999 p.46) claims that there is a "more than fortuitous" connection between Kurtz's deathbed cry "The horror! The horror!" (HD p.178) and Schopenhauer's use of the word in a passage in *The World as Will and Idea* about the wicked person's recognition of their cruelty which begins: "Consequently the inward horror of the wicked man at his own deed". (WWI 1 pp.472-473)

Possibly so, but I would argue that it is also applicable to Schopenhauer's use of "horror" in the essay "On Ethics" where he considers a report on slavery in America. The report is, he says, "one of the heaviest indictments of human nature", and: "No one will lay it aside without horror". (SE p.208) If "we keep human badness before our mind's eye", as has been

¹ An English translation by Arthur Broderick Bullock, entitled *The Basis of Morality*, was not published until 1903 (London: Swan Sonnenschein) while *Heart of Darkness* was completed in 1899.

done in the essay, adds Schopenhauer, we will “feel inclined to be horrified at it”. (SE p.214) The essay’s catalogue of man’s inhumanity to man reveals that: “There really resides in the heart of each of us a wild beast which only waits the opportunity to rage and rave in order to injure others” (SE p.211), which certainly applies to the activities of Kurtz in the novel. The parallel between slavery in America and the imperialist exploitation of native Africans in the Belgian Congo – the real-life inspiration for *Heart of Darkness* – would not have been lost on Conrad. Bailey Saunders, in his translation of the essay, added a footnote to Schopenhauer’s mention of the 1841 report on American slavery. Writing in 1896, six years after Conrad’s trip to the Congo and two years before he began writing the novel, Bailey Saunders added this footnote: “If Schopenhauer were writing to-day, he would with equal truth point to the miseries of the African trade.” (HN p.18) Knowles’ (1994 p.78) discovery of allusions to “On Ethics” in Conrad’s letters, which were written while he was working on *Heart of Darkness*, also adds to the *prima facie* case for the essay being a more likely direct source for Conrad than *The World as Will and Idea*. I will be examining the relationship between Schopenhauer’s philosophy and *Heart of Darkness* in Chapter 2.

A possible objection to my proposal that the essays were Conrad’s direct source would be one which claimed that Schopenhauer’s philosophy can only be grasped by reading his major work. That is true for academic and scholarly purposes, but Conrad could have gained a working knowledge of its essentials by reading the essays. Young (2008 p.321) argues that these should not be dismissed as “entertainments” in contrast with Schopenhauer’s

“main work” but seen “in general, as *continuous*” with it. For non-academics the essays may be a more approachable source for his thought, since: “Schopenhauer will often give bolder expression to a particular idea in his essays than he has done in his main work – less tentative, less qualified, more clear-cut.” (Magee 1997 p.245) The essays originally appeared in the two volumes of *Parerga and Paralipomena* in 1851 but there were plenty of published selections of them, in English translations, available to Conrad in the 1890s. Conrad’s French and English were fluent but although some of his school lessons at St Anne’s Gymnasium in Cracow were in German, and he had some conversational German (CL 9 p.209), it was not sufficient to allow him to read Schopenhauer in the original language. In 1917 he declined to review a book because “I don’t even know any German – not enough to understand the text.” (CL 9 p.209)

Schopenhauer’s ethics of compassion, and the metaphysics of will, are explained in the essay “On Ethics”. Knowledge of Schopenhauer’s aesthetics can be gained from the essays “On the Metaphysics of the Beautiful and Aesthetics” in Bax’s volume, and “On The Comparative Place of Interest And Beauty in Works Of Art”, which appeared in Bailey Saunders’ 1896 volume *The Art of Controversy* (AC). His pessimism and world rejection, and the metaphysics which underpins them, is explained in the Bailey Saunders’ volume *Studies in Pessimism: A Series of Essays* (SP) of 1898. His misogynistic attack “On Women” also appeared in that volume and in Mrs Rudolf Dircks’ 1892 volume of English translations *Essays of Schopenhauer* (ES). In my analysis of Conrad’s novels *Chance* and *Victory* I

aim to show that Conrad critically examines Schopenhauer's metaphysics of sexual love. His knowledge of this could be gained through Dircks' volume which includes a slightly abridged version of "The Metaphysics of Sexual Love", Chapter XLIV of his major work. (WWR 2 pp. 531-560) Renamed by Dircks "The Metaphysics of Love", it retains all the essential arguments. (ES pp. 168-208) Again this seems a more likely source for Conrad, than *The World as Will and Idea*. The Dircks' translation was, for example, the source for D.H. Lawrence's knowledge of this aspect of Schopenhauer's thought. Brunsdale (1978 p.121) says that Lawrence underlined and made marginal notes in a copy of that volume in 1908.

The popularity of these volumes of essays testifies to the wide dissemination of Schopenhauer's thought in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain. The seven volumes translated by Bailey Saunders were aimed not at a purely academic readership but a wider audience. They eventually appeared as part of George Allen & Co.'s "The Philosophy at Home Series". *On Human Nature* was reprinted five times by 1913, and widely reviewed in mainstream publications. The end-matter of *Religion A Dialogue and other Essays*, reprinted five times between 1889 and 1910, includes reviews from the *Manchester Guardian*, *Scotsman*, and *Literary World* and other newspapers and magazines.

3.

The decision to opt for *The World as Will and Idea*¹ affects how literary scholars judge what Conrad's main interest in Schopenhauer was, and this in turn affects their interpretation of his fiction. Whilst Young was right to emphasize the continuity of Schopenhauer's thought between the main work and the essays there is an important difference of *emphasis* between them. They reflect, in terms of content and, to lesser extent authorial tone, two elements in Schopenhauer's philosophy which I term "salvationist" and "worldly". A more detailed picture of what these terms involve will emerge as we look at Schopenhauer's philosophy, and Conrad's fictional examination of it, in more detail. A sketch of each will suffice for now.

Schopenhauer says that human beings are like puppets operated by internal clockwork; and the "untiring mechanism" which drives us relentlessly on is "the will-to-live" manifesting itself in us. (WWR 2 p.358) The will-to-live is the "*thing-in-itself*", the kernel not only of human beings but *everything* in the universe, which is merely the "phenomenon, the visibility, the *objectivity*" of the will-to-live. (WWR 1 p.110) As thing-in-itself it is "the one will outside time" (WWR 1 p.265) and is "only a blind, irresistible urge." (WWR 1 p.275) The world as representation is our world, which is the "the mirror" of the will-to-live. (WWR 1 p.275) Schopenhauer pictures the world as "the battleground of tormented and agonized beings" each of which is an objectification

¹ When quoting from Schopenhauer's main work (unless there is a specific textual point to be made by using another edition) I use the familiar, and readily available, Payne translation – *The World as Will and Representation*, in two volumes. (WWR 1 and WWR 2)

of the will-to-live, “who continue to exist only by each devouring one another”. (WWR 2 p.581) This happens because “the will must live on itself, since nothing exists besides it, and it is a hungry will”. (WWR 1 p.154) Since all things are a manifestation of this one will, they are, at the most profound metaphysical level, identical, so that: “Tormentor and tormented are one”. (WWR 1 p.345) The nature of the blind, endlessly striving will, and the battle for survival between its individual manifestations, make this the “*worst* of all possible worlds”. (WWR 2 p.583)

The world exists because of the affirmation of the will-to-live. Essentially “*all life is suffering*” (WWR 1 p.310) and the salvationist element of Schopenhauer’s philosophy tells us there is only one, permanent, way to be “removed from all the burdens and sorrows of life” (WWR 1 p.90) – complete denial of the will-to-live. Denial can come either involuntarily, through “the excessive pain felt in one’s own person” and “great misfortune” or voluntarily, through “knowledge of the suffering of the whole world”. (WWR 1 p.393) Salvationism’s heroes and heroines are the “overcomers of the world” (WWR 1 p.90) the saints, ascetics and mystics for whom the world is “nothing”. (WWR 1 p.412) Half-measures, like the Stoicism of ancient Greece, will not do for the salvationist. (WWR 1 pp.90-91) What is needed is “a complete transformation of our nature and disposition, i.e., the new spiritual birth, regeneration, as the result of which salvation appears.” (WWR 2 p.604) Death does not guarantee a way out. All that perishes is “my personal phenomenal appearance”, my individuality, not “my true inner nature” i.e. will. (WWR 2 p.491) Schopenhauer is hampered by the fact that

the language of philosophy cannot communicate how the death of the will-denier and that of the will-affirmer will differ – what salvation ultimately is:

In the hour of death, the decision is made whether a man falls back into the womb of nature, or else no longer belongs to her but –: we lack image, concept, and word for the opposite, just because all these are taken from objectification of the will, and therefore belong to that objectification; consequently, they cannot in any way express its absolute opposite; accordingly this remains a mere negation.

(WWR 2 p.609)

Salvationism would be content with nothingness as being better than life.¹

Schopenhauer's major work is essentially salvationist; the first volume leads up to the final word of Book IV, "nothing"; which is what "this very real world of ours with all its suns and galaxies" is for the one in whom "the will has turned and denied itself". (WWR 1 p.412) In the second volume the salvationism becomes strident and Schopenhauer's tone hectoring in its praise of asceticism and "mortification of our will" which will eliminate "the delusion that holds us chained to the bonds of this world". (WWR 2 pp.638-639) Salvationism sees life as merely "a process of purification" and "the

¹ Schopenhauer wrote that "*Kant's greatest merit is the distinction of the phenomenon from the thing-in-itself*" (WWR 1 p.417) and employed this terminology. Young argues that Schopenhauer changed his mind about will being the thing-in-itself in Kant's sense, as the ultimate (but unknowable) reality. Instead it is only the thing-in-itself of appearance; so that will is "a description of penultimate rather than ultimate reality." (Young 2008 pp.317-318) That would allow for "a domain 'beyond' the will" (Young 2005 p.99) and for the type of salvation envisaged by the mystics, which would be "wonderful and real". (Young 2008 pp. 318-319)

purifying lye of which is pain.” (WWR 2 p.639) Salvationism (as we shall see in Chapter 2) leaves the ethics of compassion behind. Cartwright notes that:

Schopenhauer said relatively little about compassion in his main work, even when one includes the supplementary essays of its second edition [...] He had, obviously, bigger fish to fry, and his entire treatment of human actions from a moral point of view is but a passing stage along the route to the denial of the will.

(Cartwright 2008 p.297)

Schopenhauer said that it was essential for the philosopher to maintain a “purely contemplative attitude” and always “to inquire, not to prescribe.” (WWR 1 p.271) Since “will in itself is absolutely and entirely self-determining, and for it there is no law”, (WWR 1 p.285) such moral prescription would be pointless. In his explication of the term “good” (WWR 1 p.362) Schopenhauer says that it applies only in relation “to a desiring will”, so that “every good is essentially relative”; an “*absolute good*” or “*summum bonum*” is a contradiction for the will, as thing-in-itself, since there can be no “permanent fulfilment” for it. But salvationism cannot be so easily gainsaid. Schopenhauer proposes that “the complete self-effacement and denial of the will, true will-lessness” for the “honorary” position of *summum bonum*. (WWR 1 p.362) Despite this pledge of impartiality it is clear that salvationism is the *de facto* “official” philosophy of Schopenhauer’s main work.

If one believed that Conrad was influenced by Schopenhauer's thought and that his source was *The World as Will and Idea*, with its primarily salvationist message, one might be more disposed to believe that Conrad's fiction implicitly endorsed salvationism. One would look to *The World as Will and Idea* to discover what aspects of it might have interested Conrad, who was both an artist and a pessimist. Art and pessimism are both important themes in the work, particularly in the less philosophically technical Books III and IV which are most likely to appeal to a literary man – *ergo* art and pessimism must be Conrad's main interests in Schopenhauer. I believe some literary scholars have, on occasion, thought *something* along these lines, albeit with more intellectual sophistication than this brief outline suggests.

Wollaeger (1990 p.31), for example, claims that "Conrad and Schopenhauer alike are connoisseurs of futility." It is true that *salvationism* sees life as futile, a "disease" for which complete denial of the will-to-live is the "radical cure". (WWR 1 p.362) For it, the world's "non-existence would be preferable to its existence" for it is "something which at bottom ought not to be." (WWR 2 p.576) Schopenhauer and Conrad were both pessimists, but it does not follow that their pessimism was of the same kind. One can be a pessimist without being a salvationist and denying the will-to-live – "A pessimistic description of life is compatible with an affirmation of it." (Janaway 1999b p.333)¹ Schopenhauer's pessimism follows from his

¹ Janaway's (1999b) analysis of Schopenhauer's pessimism shows that it depends upon the claim that: "All satisfaction, or what is commonly called happiness, is really and essentially always *negative* only, and never positive". (WWR 1 p.319) This thesis contributes to Schopenhauer's "quite bizarre" form of "hedonic calculus in which each felt pain accumulates points on the down side of life, but where the total figure for satisfaction is permanently set at zero." (Janaway (1999b p.334), Conrad never endorses this form of pessimism.

metaphysics of will. The world is the way it is (hellish) because of the way will as thing-in-itself is. The world, as the objectification of this will, has suffering built into its fabric. In “On Ethics” he said that the world has not “merely a physical” but a “moral significance”. (SE p.195) Whereas Conrad, perhaps with that passage in mind, wrote:

I have come to suspect that the aim of creation cannot be ethical at all. I would fondly believe that its object is purely spectacular: a spectacle for awe, love, adoration, or hate, if you like, but in this view – and in this view alone – never for despair!

(APR p.90)

I have not found any convincing evidence that Conrad’s fiction implies an endorsement of Schopenhauer’s metaphysical pessimism.

However, Panagopoulos (1998 p.197) claims that Conrad’s fiction does implicitly support Schopenhauer’s metaphysics; citing *Victory* as a novel which reveals that Conrad shared Schopenhauer’s “fundamental ontology” of “‘will’ and representation”. In his chapter on *Victory*, Panagopoulos (1998 pp.165-197) offers only one example of this. It is an episode where Axel Heyst, smoking an evening cheroot on the island of Samburan, is compared to his “nearest neighbour” an “indolent” volcano which “smoked faintly all day”; given their relative distance the volcano and cigar make “the same sort of glow and of the same size”. (V pp. 7-8) Panagopoulos claims:

In the case of *Victory* this essential unity corresponds to Schopenhauer's "will" and the phenomenal diversity to its "representation". Thus, the comparison made between Heyst and the volcano [...] can also be read as supporting the main thesis of *The World as Will and Representation*: that all physical phenomena are 'representations' of the metaphysical "will to live".

(Panagopoulos 1998 p.173)

Panagopoulos (1998 p.174) is correct in saying that Conrad's analogy suggests a certain "volcano-like unpredictability" in Axel, for he does erupt into action later in the novel by eloping with the young woman Lena. However, there is nothing in this example to warrant the claim that Conrad was implicitly endorsing Schopenhauer's metaphysics. The analogy is also not decisive evidence for Panagopoulos's other claim, that *The World as Will and Idea* was Conrad's direct source for the philosophy. Conrad could have been aware of Schopenhauer's metaphysical thesis from the essay "On Ethics" where Schopenhauer wrote that at the level of the will as thing-in-itself, "we" are all one and the same thing, universal will:¹

For the thing-in-itself, the Will-to-live, is in every being, even the least – is present whole and undivided as completely as in all that ever were, are, and will be, taken together.

¹ In this thesis I use "universal will" to refer to the metaphysical reality underlying the world of representations (shorthand for "will as thing-in-itself") and "individual will" to refer to the human character.

(SE p.218)

One of the things which may have attracted Conrad, and other writers, to Schopenhauer is the eminent place he gave to the arts in his philosophy. He called them “the flower of life” (WWR 1 p.266); thought that the great “internal truths” of the world could be found not only in philosophy but in “the catastrophe of every good tragedy” (SE p.195); said that music was “the panacea of all our sorrows.” (WWR 1 p.262); and his work is replete with illustrations and examples drawn from Shakespeare, Goethe, Petrarch, Schiller, Scott and many other poets, dramatists and novelists. Schopenhauer’s reputation as the philosopher who venerated the arts may have led Conrad to him but it does not follow that Conrad was influenced by Schopenhauer’s aesthetics, or endorsed it.

Wollaeger (1990 p.32) makes the very bold claim that Conrad and Schopenhauer’s “remarks on art reveal more important affinities” than the relationship between the philosophy and the fiction. I suspect what underlies this claim is Wollaeger’s belief that Conrad endorsed Schopenhauer’s metaphysics of will. He says that a line from Conrad’s “Preface” to his 1897 novel *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”*, in which Conrad says that his aim as a writer is “to make you hear, to make you feel – it is, before all, to make you see” (PN p. 147) has “clear antecedents in several passages” of Schopenhauer’s major work. He cites one (WWR 1 p.195) in which:

Schopenhauer emphasizes the artist's technical ability to let us see the "essential" in things "with his eyes".

(Wollaeger 1990 pp. 32-33)

Wollaeger's selective quotation omits mention of what Schopenhauer claims that the artist is actually communicating – what it is he lets us see. It is "the essential in things which lies outside time and all relations" (WWR 1 p.195) i.e. something transcendental. Schopenhauer's term for the "essential" in things which the artist perceives, and communicates in his work, is the "Platonic Idea", or sometimes just "Idea". The Ideas are "every definite and fixed *grade of the will's objectification*" and are related to individual things as "eternal forms" or "prototypes". (WWR 1 p.130) Only these Ideas, unchanging and outside time and space, have "actual being" whereas things that exist "in space and time" – i.e. individual things – have only "an apparent" existence. (WWR 1 p.181) The status of the Ideas in Schopenhauer's metaphysics, and how we might come to know them, is a vexed question in the exegesis of Schopenhauer's philosophy.¹ The Platonic Idea is central to Schopenhauer's theory of art, both in its creation, by the artist, and its reception, by the audience. The only exception is music which, as "*a copy of the will itself*", bypasses the Ideas. (WWR 1 p.257) If Conrad was using "essential" in the

¹ Magee (1997 p.239) says they are an "*ad hoc*" addition to Schopenhauer's "two-decker" ontology of will and representation. Janaway (1996 p.41) and Vandenebeelee (2008 p.195) disagree. Young (1987 p.435) says that the Ideas must be "ordinary perceptual objects"; Janaway (1996 p.51) agrees that in apprehending an Idea "we perceive the empirical thing in a particular, significant way". Atwell (1995 p.150) says the "Ideas cannot be *identical* with ordinary (perceptual, natural) objects" since the latter are subject to the principle of sufficient reason and the former are not. Wicks argues for a "two-tiered form" of the principle of sufficient reason, the first tier of which includes "universal objects" including the Platonic Ideas. (Wicks 2008 p.60) But, since the principle of sufficient reason is mind-dependent, the Ideas "cannot exist independently of human consciousness" either. (Wicks 2008 pp.95-96)

same way as Schopenhauer one would expect the term Platonic Idea, or a term signifying an eternal non-spatial, atemporal entity to be mentioned directly or obliquely somewhere in Conrad's fiction, letters, essays, or the author's notes he wrote, towards the end of his life, to accompany all his novels and short story collections. No such instance occurs. Conrad's comments on writing suggest a very anti-transcendental bias. In his 1905 essay "Books" he urges the writer of fiction:

Let him mature the strength of his imagination amongst the things of this earth, which it is his business to cherish and know, and refrain from calling down his inspiration ready-made from some heaven of perfections of which he knows nothing.

(NLL p.14)

Conrad praised the "scrupulous" vision of his literary hero Maupassant, who "devoted attention to the aspects of the visible world" rather than trying to describe "misty and mysterious shapes dear to muddled intellects, belonging neither to earth nor heaven." (NLL p.27) It is the "visible world" of the here and now Conrad wanted to make his readers see not, directly or indirectly, immutable Platonic Ideas in a timeless realm.

Scheick (1990 p.3) is a literary scholar who takes *The World as Will and Idea* as "the primary means of dissemination of Schopenhauer's influence on turn-of-the century authors" – including Conrad. He claims that *Heart of Darkness* "is Conrad's most pronounced experiment in

Schopenhauerian aesthetics” (Scheick 1990 p.115) by which he means that “the idea of Schopenhauerian compassion” (Scheick 1990 p.3) – i.e. compassion grounded in the metaphysics of the will as thing-in-itself – is built into the structure of Conrad’s novel. Scheick takes Conrad’s repeated use of certain images as obvious and unambiguous indicators of Conrad’s endorsement of Schopenhauer’s metaphysics, as for example, the references to mist. The novel opens with Marlow and his circle of friends aboard a yacht on the Thames, as night falls. The unnamed first-person narrator, describing the scene, says that “the very mist on the Essex marsh was like a gauzy and radiant fabric”. (HD p.103) This mist, Scheick (1990 p.116) insists, “is the veil of *Maya*, the Oriental notion adopted by Schopenhauer to describe the illusory nature of phenomenal existence.” He does not say why this must be a specifically Schopenhauerian or metaphysical mist. Scheick (1990 p.119) is correct when he says that Marlow, the main narrator, shows compassion for other people throughout the novel. But he then goes on to claim that Marlow “arrives at a Schopenhauerian perspective”. This perspective is what I have termed salvationist. Scheick claims that Marlow shows the “compassion of the Schopenhauerian saint”. (Scheick 1990 p.128) However, *that* would require Marlow to have completely denied the will-to-live, for the world to have become “nothing” to him, and for individuals to be an illusion. None of which is consistent with the Marlow who, when telling the tale – long after he is supposed to have adopted a salvationist view of life – is very much a man of

the world to the extent that he is still a professional seaman, the only one of his friends who still “followed the sea”. (HD p.105)

4.

So much, for the present, of the salvationist element of Schopenhauer’s philosophy, let us now consider the worldly one. Salvationism preaches a gospel of renunciation, of denying the will to live, and withdrawal from the world. It occurs in the essays, for example in “On the Sufferings of the World” where Schopenhauer sums up life as “*a cheat*” and “an unprofitable episode, disturbing the blessed calm of non-existence”, a swift return to which is the best course to take. (SP p.14) The instances of salvationism are far outnumbered in the essays by advice on how best to live as part of the world. In §53 of *Counsels and Maxims* the worldly, practical Schopenhauer also began with the premise that life is a cheat: “In this world, *where the game is played with loaded dice*”. (CM p.123) But instead of resignation and withdrawal from life, he prescribes defiance and engagement:

[A] man must have a temper of iron, with armour proof to the blows of fate, and weapons to make his way against men. Life is one long battle; we have to fight at every step [...] It is a cowardly soul that shrinks or grows faint and despondent as soon as the storm begins to gather, or even when the first cloud appears on the horizon. Our motto

should be *No Surrender*; and far from yielding to the ills of life, let us take fresh courage from misfortune [...]

(CM p.123)

How many readers familiar only with his major work would recognize this as a quote from Schopenhauer?

Central to the worldly element of Schopenhauer's philosophy is his theory of character. There is far more space devoted to this in his essays than in his major work; especially to the importance of self-knowledge as part of the process of self-realization, which I believe, from the evidence of his fiction, most interested Conrad. Schopenhauer's theory of character will be discussed in depth in Chapter 1 but three important Schopenhauerian terms, which will be used frequently, need to be glossed briefly here to prevent possible misunderstanding later; "acquired character", "self" and "self-knowledge".

Schopenhauer says that "acquired character" is "the most complete possible knowledge of our own individuality". (WWR 1 p.305) We only attain acquired character, through our actions; "from experience of what we will and what we can do". (WWR 1 p.304) It is a combination of "experience" and "reflection" on our experiences. (WWR 1 p.303) He raises the question of why acquired character might be of value, since every natural phenomenon "is in itself consistent". (WWR 1 p.303) Since each of us naturally just *is* the individual he or she is; why do we need to attain acquired character before we can, in some sense, *become* that individual, i.e. become who we are?

The answer lies in our capacity for abstract reason which allows us to consider the concept of humanity "*man in general*" and considering the "aspirations and abilities" of people in general can lead me to believe that any of these is open for me to pursue. (WWR 1 p.303) There are many things which are obviously precluded to me by my unique individual character. Experience will show me this through a series of painful hard knocks. Acquired character, a systematic and thoughtful form of knowledge garnered from experience, can help us avoid these painful experiences.

In *Counsels and Maxims* §30 Schopenhauer makes a crucial distinction between "acquired character", the highest form of knowledge of our "innate character", and "artificially acquired" character. In the latter case someone attempts, through following a set of "abstract principles", to act in ways which do not reflect his or her innate character or true nature and acts in a way that is "*unnatural*" and "*everything that is unnatural is imperfect*". (CM pp. 88-89) Acquired character is an attempt to reveal our innate character as clearly as possible not to vainly attempt to supplant it with something artificial. Schopenhauer thought that:

Imitating the qualities and idiosyncrasies of others is much more outrageous than wearing others' clothes, for it is the judgment we ourselves pronounce on our own worthlessness.

(WWR 1 p.306)

In Chapter 6 we will examine how Conrad explores this theme in *Victory*, where Axel Heyst tries to live in this artificial way based on the principles of his father's philosophy.

When referring to the "knowledge of our own individuality" which we need to attain acquired character, it is natural to think of this as being "self knowledge", so that the terms "self" and "character" are used interchangeably. Occasionally Schopenhauer does use "self knowledge" as meaning knowledge of one's individual character. In the paragraph in which he introduces the concept of acquired character, for example, he talks about the need for a man to have insight into what "he wills and is able to do by dint of his individuality" and just before that he says that "although a man is always the same, he does not always understand himself, but often fails to recognize himself until he has acquired some degree of real self-knowledge." (WWR 1 p.303)

However, the dominant sense of "self" and "self-knowledge", the one most frequently used by Schopenhauer, does *not* refer to the individual character. Instead it refers to what in his metaphysics is the deepest level of our nature – not as *individual* will (character) but as *universal* will, will as the-thing-in-itself. At the level of *universal will* there are no individuals. In this sense "the real self is the will-to-live" (WWR 2 p.606) which I have in common with every other individual, indeed every living thing. My "real self", therefore, is not an individual at all. Schopenhauer's ethics is grounded in his metaphysics of will, and the claim that at the level of universal will we are metaphysically identical. The compassionate person intuitively (not

conceptually) grasps this, for in seeing another person suffering, “he recognizes that it is his own self which now appears before him”. (BM p.212) When a person approaches salvation, denial of the will-to-live, they come to the “knowledge that our true self exists not only in our own person, in this particular phenomenon, but in everything that lives.” (WWR 1 p.373)

This is what I would call the *salvationist* sense of “self”, for “self-knowledge” concerned with this sense of “self” i.e. the realization that my *true* self is not individual, and that individuality is an illusion, is a step on the path to salvation, denial of the will-to-live. The *worldly* sense of “self” and “self-knowledge”, perhaps the everyday sense, refers to the individual character. In this sense “self” refers to one’s unique individual character. To avoid possible confusion I use both “self” and “self-knowledge” in this worldly sense, as I believe Conrad did. If, when examining Schopenhauer’s theory of character in detail for example, I discuss the salvationist sense of “self” or “self-knowledge” I will draw attention to this. Acquired character is about knowledge of our *individuality*, our unique character and it is self-knowledge in this worldly sense that is the one with which Conrad is concerned. In *Lord Jim*, for example, Marlow ponders on whether Jim’s explanation of his actions is sincere or not:

I didn't know what he was playing up to – if he was playing up to anything at all – and I suspect he did not know either; for it is my belief no man ever understands quite his own artful dodges to escape from the grim shadow of self-knowledge.

(LJ p.58)

It is clear that it is knowledge of “self” as individual character that Marlow believes we try to escape from. Acquired character can help us to avoid these artful dodges as far as possible.

Coming to see that Conrad’s primary interest in Schopenhauer is character (especially acquired character) is made more difficult if one believes that *The World as Will and Idea* was his direct source. Acquired character is dealt with there in a few pages. (WWI 1 pp. 391-397) (WWR 1 pp.303-307) The prospect is very different if one believes, as I do, that Schopenhauer’s essays were Conrad’s direct source. The essay “Character” (HN pp. 91-102), taken from Schopenhauer’s unpublished manuscripts by the translator Bailey Saunders, appears in the volume *On Human Nature* and is a plain and succinct summary of Schopenhauer’s thoughts on the subject. Character is an important element in the essay “On Ethics” and Schopenhauer scattered observations on character, and need for self-knowledge, in his aphoristic “Further Psychological Observations” which appeared in Bailey Saunders’ translation in the volume *Studies in Pessimism*. (1898)

Atwell (1990 p.222) says that Schopenhauer’s most popular work, the *Aphorisms on the Wisdom of Life* – which include the *Counsels and Maxims* – “should be read as a long elaboration of the acquired character.” Bailey Saunders’ translation of the *Counsels and Maxims* was immensely popular during Conrad’s time as a writer; it was reprinted eight times between 1890

and 1912. Cartwright sees some of the essays, especially *Aphorisms on the Wisdom of Life*, as exhibiting Schopenhauer's "willingness to compromise the austere findings of his philosophy" – what I call his salvationism – by "providing a eudemonology, instructions for the art of living as successfully and pleasantly as possible". (Cartwright 2010 pp. 407-408) In some of the essays Schopenhauer still maintains that the worldly, practical path is the second-best option – denial of the will-to-live remains the ideal – but a life in the world is presented as a *viable* option and one which has self-knowledge and acquired character at its heart. There is more of Schopenhauer's worldly philosophy in the essays, about acquired character as the best way of enabling us to make our way in the world, and what today is called self-realization, than in his major work.¹ There are more pages devoted to it and the ratio of worldly to salvationist content is much higher. Magee (1997 p. 259) finds the essays expressing an unmistakable "love of life" and Schopenhauer's "gargantuan appetite" for it. The essays also have a more informal, intimate and personal style with Schopenhauer frequently adopting a conversational tone. Knowles (1973 p.24) draws attention to Conrad's predilection for using the convention of the "yarn" in his novels and stories, with a "raconteur" as narrator. In his essays Schopenhauer is very much the philosophical raconteur, and this may well have appealed to Conrad.

¹ It is to the worldly aspect of Schopenhauer's philosophy to which reviewers of the first five volumes of Bailey Saunders' translations draw attention. A selection of them is reprinted in the 1898 first edition of the sixth volume, *Studies in Pessimism*. They refer to Schopenhauer as being "a man of the world, with a firm grip of the actual; the "essentially practical character" of *The Wisdom of Life. Counsels and Maxims* is seen as an eloquent plea for "that inner self-culture which is the great and unfailing condition of human happiness." (SP pp.1-2) That "inner self-culture" is acquired character, which gives us our best chance of self-fulfilment.

The worldly strand of Schopenhauer's philosophy; attaining acquired character, discovering our unique qualities, making the best of our abilities, and avoiding (as much as possible) deeds which we will come to regret, suggests an alternative form of salvation. Hannan argues that:

Schopenhauer found life unbearable, until he saved himself through his work. His work is the expression of his nature, of his own brilliant and conflicted soul. Thus, if we look at Schopenhauer's life, instead of listening to his official teaching, we see that Schopenhauer *shows* a path to salvation more accessible to most of us than saintly denial of the will. He shows us that we can save ourselves by becoming, and expressing, who we are.

(Hannan 2009 p. 143)

This type of self-realization is central to Schopenhauer's worldly philosophy but it can be found not just in his life but in his essays. These are an important counterbalance to his salvationism, his "official teaching", which involves a denial of the will-to-live and a rejection of life in the world. ¹

¹ Self-realization was also part of Nietzsche's philosophy. An aphorism in *The Gay Science* says: "*What does your conscience say?* – 'You shall become who you are.'" (Nietzsche 2001 p.152) His autobiographical *Ecce Homo* is subtitled: "How to Become What you Are". (Nietzsche 2005 p.70) An important difference between Schopenhauer and Nietzsche's respective notions of individual character will be discussed in Chapter 1.

5.

Schopenhauer said that all the parts of his philosophy “have the most intimate connexion with one another.” (WWR 1 p.285) For example, character and ethics are intimately connected, particularly regarding the issue of moral responsibility. Character and Schopenhauer’s metaphysics of sexual love are closely connected. In explicating these three interconnected elements I have, to some extent, teased them apart, so that I analyze character, ethics and sexual love in three separate chapters. While I have tried to avoid repetition between these chapters, the mutual connections between these elements are not ignored. The richness of Schopenhauer’s philosophy, with its plethora of examples, means that even if one has to make a point twice it is often possible to do so in a slightly different way, which can enhance clarity. When examining Conrad’s fiction in detail we will see how character, ethics and sexual love appear with the sort of “intimate connexion” Schopenhauer envisaged.

Although it is my contention that Conrad’s source for Schopenhauer was his essays, I have used *The World as Will and Representation* (WWR 1 and WWR 2), *On the Basis of Morality* (BM) and the *Prize Essay on the Freedom of the Will* (FW) when outlining Schopenhauer’s philosophy. I do so because these texts are the most widely used, and thus most familiar, to anyone studying Schopenhauer in the academic world; they are the touchstones for the extremely fine points of interpretation of Schopenhauer’s philosophy; and they are the texts used by commentators on Schopenhauer whose arguments I critically examine. However, when I believe that a point in

Schopenhauer's philosophy is being alluded to by Conrad; I put forward a corresponding passage in the essays as a possible source. In works where I believe Conrad had a particular Schopenhauer essay in mind – for example “On Ethics” in *Heart of Darkness* and “On Women” in *Chance* – I use a translation that would have been available to him. Some passages in Conrad appear to echo a particular English translation. These nineteenth-century editions also contain introductory guides to Schopenhauer's philosophy by their translators, plus prefatory remarks and footnotes which would have been available, and potentially helpful, to Conrad. The allusions to Schopenhauer's philosophy in Conrad's fiction, ranging from obvious to tenuous, are extensive. There is not space to deal with them all so I have selected a core of novels on which to focus attention, with supplementary references to some of his other works.

In Chapter 1, I outline Schopenhauer's theory of character and the relationship between the three facets of it, and explain the technical terms Schopenhauer employs. There is the “intelligible character” and the “empirical character”, terms borrowed from Kant. The first is the metaphysical aspect of our individual character and the second is how it is unfolded in time in the world. We only learn about our character *a posteriori*, through experience, which is why the third facet, acquired character, is so important. Schopenhauer's concept of “repentance”, actions which we regret, leads to his claim that we can sometimes act out of character. The possibility of such actions was disputed by Atwell. I consider his objections in the wider context of Schopenhauer's theory of action, and the relationship between a person's

intellect and their character, their *individual* will. While repentance (through its connection with acquired character) is a worldly concept, there is a salvationist form of regret, “pangs of conscience”, which is regret for oneself as universal will. Finally, Schopenhauer’s claim that free will exists only at a transcendental level, and the implications of that claim for moral responsibility, are considered.

Chapter 2 deepens and broadens the importance of character by examining its connections with Schopenhauer’s ethics. His ethics of compassion is grounded in his metaphysics of will and the problems that are claimed to arise from this, principally by Atwell and Cartwright, are examined. The crucial difference between the ethics of compassion and salvationism is indicated. Schopenhauer saw our egoism as the source of human misery. Without restraint, either externally by the state or internally, by a moral incentive, human beings are capable of extreme wickedness. These themes of egoism, compassion and restraint are all examined in the context of *Heart of Darkness*. I argue that Conrad had Schopenhauer’s essay “On Ethics” in mind in this novel and that in it he suggests an alternative form of moral restraint to Schopenhauer’s metaphysical moral incentive.

Having now prepared ourselves with the key elements of Schopenhauer’s philosophy of character in theory, Chapter 3 considers Conrad’s fictional examination of them in action in *Lord Jim*. In the field of philosophy of literature, Carroll (2002 p.7) and John (1998 p.332) have compared novels and other forms of narrative fiction to philosophers’ “thought experiments”. The broader canvas of the novel is much superior as

a source for coming to understand people than philosophy's "little fictions", says Cooper (2000 p.393) who adds that the latter are often "ludicrously abstract" and liable to "over-simplification." In *Lord Jim* character and its intimate connection with moral responsibility, are presented with the depth, breadth and imaginative power that no thought experiment could hope to match. In the figure of Gentleman Brown, Conrad gives us in the flesh Schopenhauer's notion of what wickedness consists in and *why* people are wicked. I consider alternative salvationist and worldly interpretations of Jim's death; whether he finally denied or affirmed the will-to-live.

Having considered the connections between character and ethics we move in Chapter 4 to examine the connection between character and sexual love. Schopenhauer differentiates between indiscriminating sexual impulse, the satisfaction of which could be facilitated by any one of many people, and sexual love which is directed at one *particular* individual. Schopenhauer's theory offers an explanation of how sexual love is simultaneously intensely individual *and* impersonal, in that it is done at the behest of the "will of the species". His explanation sees sexual love as a metaphysical illusion in which individuals are duped into believing that this overwhelming passion is really about them. The explication of whether it is "about" them, and what exactly "about" signifies in this context, leads me to argue that Schopenhauer's metaphysics of sexual love conflict with his worldly concept of acquired character. I consider an alternative explanation for the illusion of sexual love, suggested in Conrad's fiction, and consonant with an important

aspect of Schopenhauer's thought – that the illusion may be personal and psychological rather than metaphysical.

Connections between Schopenhauer's metaphysics of sexual love, and his view on the relationship between the sexes in "On Women", are evaluated as prelude to a large-scale examination of them in Chapter 5 as they appear in Conrad's novel *Chance*. I argue that the narrator Marlow is the novel's central figure and that it charts his course from repentance, for abandoning his maritime career and the missed chance for sexual love; his emotional re-awakening through love for Flora; to the attainment of acquired character, a self-insight which brings emotional equilibrium. Through the figure of Roderick Anthony, I advance my argument about sexual love as a personally-generated illusion, while also showing how the lover can fail to see the beloved as an individual because of the distorting effect of personal fantasy.

Chapter 6 is devoted to Conrad's novel *Victory* in which the Schopenhauerian themes discussed earlier are brought together in a single work; acquired character, self-knowledge, sexual love, and the salvationist and worldly approaches to life. It also explores another aspect of Schopenhauer's theory of character not previously explored; Schopenhauer's claim that one cannot live a genuine, authentic life if one seeks to imitate another person's character. This is the case for the novel's protagonist Axel Heyst whose knowledge and realization of his individual character is compromised by an adherence to his father's beliefs and values. What makes this particularly pertinent is that Heyst's father is a philosopher and

one clearly modelled on Schopenhauer. The eminent Conrad scholar Daphne Erdinast-Vulcan disputes this resemblance between Axel's father and Schopenhauer. I consider, and rebut, her argument. *Victory* is Conrad's counterblast to Schopenhauer's salvationism. The heroine Lena sacrifices her life for her lover Axel. The nature of Lena's victory and the significance of Axel's suicide have been extensively debated by literary scholars. I argue that his suicide is not evidence of world-denial but, with Conradian irony, an affirmation of the will-to-live as argued for in Schopenhauer's own philosophy.

CHAPTER 1

CHARACTER IN THEORY

1.

Schopenhauer said that each of us has an *individual* character which is “different in each and every one.” (FW p.42) But just as the world has two aspects in Schopenhauer’s philosophy so does our character. It has a metaphysical aspect and a phenomenal one. This is how Schopenhauer describes them in his essay “Character”:

I have described *character* as *theoretically* an act of will lying beyond time, of which life in time, or *character in action*, is the development. For matters of practical life we all possess the one as well as the other; for we are constituted of them both.

(HN p.92)

Elsewhere he adopts Kant’s terminology from the *Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant 1997 pp. 535-537) and calls these aspects, respectively, the “intelligible character” and the “empirical character”. (WWR 1 p.287) (BM pp.111-112) (FW pp. 73-74 and pp. 42-44) The intelligible character is an act of universal will which “resides outside time and change”. (WWR p.296) Our

individual character is, therefore, “*inborn*”, not the product of education, culture and environment, what Schopenhauer calls “art or circumstances subject to chance”. (FW p.46) This makes one’s individual character incorrigible – it is “*constant*; it remains the same throughout his whole life.” (FW p.44) If the intelligible character is an act of universal will then it cannot be known directly, for universal will, as thing-in-itself, cannot be known in this way, as object for a subject. (WWR 1 p.175) My intelligible character is, therefore, not directly accessible to me by introspection. It requires “time to unfold itself and show the very diverse aspects which it may possess”. (HN p.94) That unfolding in the phenomenal world is the empirical character. Intelligible character is innate and “conduct merely its manifestation”. (HN p.125) Self-knowledge, in the worldly sense of knowing one’s *individual* character, comes from our ability to observe our empirical character, character in action. I come to know myself from my own deeds, just as I come to know the character of other people from their deeds: “We come to know ourselves as we come to know others.” (WWR 1 p.302) A person perceives his character in “the mirror of his deeds”. (HN p.129)

Schopenhauer uses a musical analogy to illustrate the nature of character. Our actions are “like a series of variations on a single theme” (WL p.4):

But on looking back over our past, we see at once that our life consists of mere variations on one and the same theme, namely, our character,

and that the same fundamental bass sounds through it all. This is an experience which a man can and must make in and by himself.

(HN p.93)

Learning to understand one's character does not follow the pattern of, for example, Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations* where the waltz theme is unambiguously stated first and then thirty-three ingenious variations follow. It is more like listening to Elgar's *Enigma Variations* where as well as the audibly manifest theme there is, the composer said, a "larger theme" which goes "through and over the whole set" but which "is not played"; rather like a drama in which "the chief character is never on stage." (Hopkins 1984 p.216) Our intelligible character is also off-stage; residing outside time, so discovering its nature is like working out Elgar's hidden silent theme, which we have to reconstruct by working back from the audible variations. Schopenhauer had something like this process in mind when he said that everything in nature had a "family likeness which enables us to regard them as variations on the same ungiven theme" (WWR 1 p.154) i.e. universal will.

We can only learn about our character *a posteriori*, from our deeds. But that does not seem to be a forbidding prospect, since all our deeds, even a behavioural "trifle" (SE p.229) will reveal a facet of our character, for:

Life is only the mirror into which a man gazes not in order that he may get a reflection of himself, but that he may come to understand himself by that reflection; that he may see *what* it is that the mirror shows.

(HN p.92)

If all my deeds are infused with my individual character like an indelible dye (HN p.74) then this process appears to be relatively unproblematic. There is, of course, the ever-present possibility of self-deception and wishful thinking which may lead me to distort the true reflection the mirror of life shows me, but given careful thought, persistence and a modicum of objectivity I should be able to discern my character clearly and distinctly in the mirror of my deeds.

We are not presented with knowledge of our individual character, we have to obtain it. Until we do so our predictions of how we will behave are little more than guesswork. Since my predictions of what I will do may come awry I can be surprised by my own actions. (SE p.231) Learning to understand one's character is a way of averting the occurrence of unpleasant, painful and perhaps even dangerous, surprises. Greater self-knowledge leads to more accurate predictions of how we will behave in a variety of situations, so that we can learn which ones to avoid. While Schopenhauer believed that our character is not transparent to us – that we discover its nature empirically – it does not follow as Haber claims (1995 p.494) that “genuine self-knowledge” is not possible; or that his philosophy reveals that: “the self is no more nor less than a proliferation of texts.” (Haber 1995 p.495) At least it does not follow unless one accepts the postmodernism that Haber (1995 p.483) claims Schopenhauer to have been a precursor of. Genuine knowledge of one's character (or anything else) does

not require knowledge that is complete, comprehensive and infallible, or we should know next to nothing. That our “desires and their corresponding activities do not form a coherent whole” (Haber 1995 p.498) is something Schopenhauer acknowledges as being true for the vast majority of people because they never attain *acquired character* – the third element of Schopenhauer’s philosophy of human character.

2.

Acquired character is what I have termed a *worldly* concept. It is gained only with experience of life – “through contact with the world”. (WWR 1 p.303) Schopenhauer says that acquired character is “what in the world is called character” which comes only when we have learned from experience “what we will and what we can do”; until that time we (as the world terms it) are “without character”, someone who find little self-fulfilment as they are buffeted by “hard blows” while attempting to make their way in the world. (WWR 1 pp. 304-305) When we have experience we must subject it to “reflection”, and in this way we may eventually gain acquired character, which is “the most complete possible knowledge of our own individuality”. (WWR 1 p. 305) With acquired character comes “distinct” knowledge of “the unalterable qualities of our own empirical character”, including our “mental and bodily powers” and of all the strengths and weaknesses “of our own individuality”. (WWR 1 p. 305) The question immediately arises – indeed Schopenhauer raises it himself – what is the point of gaining acquired

character? Our individual character is unalterable so that each of us must, surely, always “appear like himself and consistent” without the need for acquired character gained “through experience and reflection”. (WWR 1 p.303) Schopenhauer adds:

But the case is otherwise, and although a man is always the same, he does not always understand himself, but often fails to recognize himself until he has acquired some degree of real self-knowledge. As a mere natural tendency, the empirical character is itself irrational; indeed its expressions are in addition disturbed by the faculty of reason [...] For these always keep before him what belongs to *man in general* as the character of the species, and what is possible for him both in willing and doing. In this way, an insight into that which alone of all he wills and is able to do by dint of his individuality, is made difficult for him. He finds in himself the tendencies to all the various human aspirations and abilities, but the different degrees of these in his individuality do not become clear to him without experience.

(WWR 1 p.303)

I may think that I possess the capacity, or the potential, to succeed in one or more fields, simply because I have seen other people achieving success in them. None of those people, however, has *my* individual character. We can find in ourselves “the tendencies to all the human aspirations and abilities” and, without scrutinizing carefully our deeds and what they tell us about our

individual characters, may end up like “children at a fair”, snatching at “everything that fascinates us in passing” – but ultimately grasping nothing. (WWR 1 p.303) If we want success in life, to avoid its hard blows, to achieve something substantial and “grasp and possess one thing” we must “renounce and leave aside innumerable others”. (WWR 1 p.303) Success will only come when one chooses to pursue a target which can be achieved by virtue of one’s individual character and its particular qualities. That pursuit may be “pleasure, honour, wealth, science, art or virtue” but until we renounce those other distracting pursuits which seem to be within our reach – because they are in the reach of “*man in general*” – we will be left clutching thin air or a painfully acquired handful of dust:

Therefore mere willing and mere ability to do are not enough in themselves, but a man must also *know* what he wills, and *know* what he can do. Only thus will he display character, and only then can he achieve anything solid. Until he reaches this, he is still without character, in spite of the consistency of the empirical character. Although, on the whole, he must remain true to himself and run his course drawn by his daemon, he will not describe a straight line, but a wavering and uneven one. He will hesitate, deviate, turn back, and prepare himself for repentance and pain.

(WWR 1 p.304)

Acquired character consists not only in the self-knowledge which comes with experience and reflection but also in the application of that knowledge to the practical problems of life. It brings us four main benefits. Firstly, it indicates the *ends* which are “feasible” and “suitable” for our character (WWR 1 p.304) so that: “We can concentrate on areas where our talent lies and avoid things for which we have no natural aptitude.” (WWR 1 p.305) Secondly, with knowledge of our strengths and weaknesses, we can reach those ends directly rather than by a “zigzag path” or wandering, like a “will-o’-the-wisp”. (WWR 1 p.303) Thirdly, the distinct knowledge we gain about our character – “the unalterable role of our own person” – means that it will be manifested in our deeds more distinctly, “without hesitation, without inconsistencies.” (WWR 1 p.305) Fourthly, there will accrue to us a hedonic benefit, for it allows us to “escape in the surest way” the “bitterest of all sufferings, dissatisfaction with ourselves”; but this comes with the crucial caveat “as far as our individuality allows” (WWR 1 p.307) which must always be borne in mind.

In *Counsels and Maxims* Schopenhauer emphasizes the role of planning and self-organization, which is an important part of acquired character. In §4 he says that in relationship to our character, we are like a mason working on a house, who is aware of particular details but is ignorant of the overall design of the building. Likewise we give insufficient thought to our character as a whole. To be in command of ourselves, and our path through life, one needs to possess an overall *plan*:

He must know what is his real, chief, and foremost object in life, – what it is that he most wants in order to be happy; and then, after that, what occupies the second and third place in his thoughts; he must find out what, on the whole, his vocation really is – the part he has to play, his general relation to the world. If he maps out important work for himself on great lines, a glance at this miniature plan of his life will, more than anything else stimulate, rouse and ennoble him, urge him on to action and keep him from false paths.

(CM pp.17-18)

To do this requires time and experience. We always “act in accordance with the nature of our character under the influence of motive, and within the limits of our capacity” but this may not be clear to us while we are actively *engaged* in these actions: “It is only when we come to view our life as a connected whole that our character and capacities show themselves in their true light”. (CM p.18) This synoptic view of oneself constitutes the “*clearness of view*” which Schopenhauer believed was a hallmark of maturity. (CM p.134) If we do act consistently in line with our inner character then our life will have the “uniformity of tone” and “dramatic unity” of a genuine work of art, one which we can perform without striking “a false note”. (CM p. 113) If our character is the melody and our deeds are variations on it then with acquired character our performance will be clear, unfaltering and fluent. Devoid of self-knowledge and a plan of action, we will still have to play that melody but will do so in a performance full of painful dissonances. Acquired character

enhances our innate individuality, making the outlines of our individual character sharper and clearer. Someone with acquired character now has his or her individuality displayed in *high definition*. As a worldly concept, acquired character is diametrically opposed to salvationism, the target of which is denial of the will to live in which individual character is nullified and expunged.

3.

However valuable acquired character is, and Schopenhauer considers it to be necessary for worldly satisfaction and self-fulfilment, it cannot alter our character which is “innate and unchangeable”. (SE p.230) A function of our individual character is our moral nature, our capacity for good and evil. Schopenhauer often refers to our “*moral character*”. (SE p. 228) (HN p.91) (WWR 2 p.263) Character is also innate, so that “virtues and vices are inborn”. (FW p.47) Since character is unchangeable, it follows that virtue cannot be taught. (BM pp.190-191) Schopenhauer says that every human action is attributable to one of the “*three fundamental incentives of human actions*” – egoism, malice and compassion. (BM p.145) Each of these is “present in everyone in different and incredibly unequal proportions”. (BM p.192) Atwell interprets this as saying that our moral nature depends upon the “unique combination of the three basic moral incentives”. (Atwell 1990 p.38) No amount of knowledge therefore – even that which leads to acquired character – can change our individual character. Acquired character,

according to Schopenhauer, cannot make us a morally better (or worse) person. Qualities of character, which includes our moral qualities, are matters of will not of intellect: “In the *heart* is the man to be found, not in the head.” (WWR 2 p.239) The source of our goodness or badness does not come from our faculty of cognition:

That is why a man may have weak reasoning powers and a weak understanding and yet have a high sense of morality and be eminently good; for the most important element in a man depends as little on intellectual as it does on physical strength.

(HN p.111)

Our character is our individual *will* and Schopenhauer frequently quotes Seneca’s maxim “*velle non discitur*” (SE p.238) – “willing cannot be taught”. (PP 2 p.238) The intelligible character’s metaphysical nature means that it is impervious to “*moral teaching*” (SE p.237) and “incapable of any improvement through culture.” (SE p.228) Schopenhauer’s seemingly dismissive judgement on acquired character, as “of importance not so much for ethics proper as for life in the world” (WWR 1 p.307) must be seen in the context of his belief that knowledge is impotent when it comes to moral improvement.

Young chides Schopenhauer for making the “dispiriting claim that philosophy can never ‘guide conduct’” which, he goes on, “raises the question of why one should take the trouble to read Book IV [of WWR] at all –

or indeed any of Schopenhauer's philosophy". (Young 2005 p.159) While it is true that, in the passage Young refers to (WWR 1 p.271) Schopenhauer claims that philosophy is a "theoretical" not a "practical" pursuit, and thus cannot "guide conduct", he makes his prime target clear – one of the "old claims" of philosophy, namely that it can "transform character". His purpose is to insist that, on the contrary, the "dead concepts of philosophy" cannot change "the innermost nature of man himself" i.e. willing cannot be taught. (WWR 1 p.271) Schopenhauer is, in this context, using "conduct" to mean, specifically, *moral* conduct which supervenes on our character, which is fixed and incorrigible.

Schopenhauer would agree that if one hoped to change one's character – one's individual *will* – by reading his (or anyone's) philosophy then the effort would be wasted. But there is a good reason for reading it – to change one's knowledge and a change of knowledge can lead to a change in one's *behaviour*. "Conduct", in the sense of behaviour, how we act, can be changed by knowledge. One cannot change someone's heart (will) but one can change their head (cognition). Schopenhauer quotes the proverb "Once a thief, always a thief" with approval. (FW p.44) No amount of philosophy will change the thief's moral character (an innate disposition to steal) but that does not rule out a prudential change in the thief's *behaviour* resulting from a change in knowledge. This is what Schopenhauer believed the 19th century American prison system aimed at; not to "undertake to reform a human being's *character* or *heart*, but to put his *head* right" (FW p.45) i.e. change his cognition. The thief maintains a disposition to steal but may be shown that it

is not in his best interests to do so, that it's a mug's game, and he may, therefore, prudently refrain from stealing – at least sometimes. That he does so from self-interest meant for Schopenhauer (as we will see in the next chapter) that the thief's restraint has no *moral* value.

4.

One of the strongest reasons for gaining acquired character is that it can help us to avoid performing deeds which we later, in the light of “more accurate” information and “corrected knowledge”, (WWR 1 p.296) come to repent of. Without acquired character we are more likely to perform such deeds; one who lacks self-knowledge must “prepare himself for repentance and pain.” (WWR 1 p.304) Most of us will have experienced repentance and expressed it in the familiar lament – “If only I'd known *then* what I know now!” Schopenhauer gives two examples which, as he points out, show that repentance is more than regretting my “choice of means” to achieve my ends, but one which extends to “what is properly ethical”. (WWR 1 p.296) He claims that “it is possible for me to have acted more egoistically than is in accordance with my character” or to have acted “less egoistically than is in accordance with my character”. (WWR 1 p.296) Given the fixity of one's moral nature, as part of one's character, how is this possible?

Schopenhauer's examples of how I can act more, or less, egoistically are cases in which someone is “acting out of his character”. (FW p.44) In this way it is possible that Schopenhauer's incorrigible thief could, on a particular

occasion, act more dishonestly, or less dishonestly, than was in accordance with his character, yet still remain “always a thief”. But how can out-of-character deeds happen? Schopenhauer’s notion of the innate and fixed individual character, with deeds as the mirror of that character, seems to leave no conceptual space for them. In “On Ethics” he says that our individual character colours all our “actions and thoughts down to the most insignificant” (SE p.228) and that “As a man is so must he act”. (SE p.236) From this we can infer that ‘all my deeds are *my* deeds’ – not merely as a trivial truth but as a substantive one.

Schopenhauer says that “repentance is always corrected knowledge of the relation of the deed to the real intention.” (WWR 1 p.297) If I act out of character, and do something of which I repent, I must at the time have been in some way cognitively deficient. I was not seeing the situation as it really was. He offers the following reasons for why I might have acted more egoistically than I really am. I could have been “carried away by exaggerated notions of the need in which I stood”; or deceived by the “cunning, falseness and wickedness of others”; or been “in too much of a hurry” and acted “without deliberation”; or been “overwhelmed by the impression of the moment” which excited an emotion “so strong that I did not have the use of my faculty of reason.” (WWR 1 p.296) All of these suggestions involve the person acting out-of-character being cognitively compromised at the time. What they have in common is lack of thought, of will and passion over-riding the faculty of cognition. They are instances where: “I acted without deliberation, determined not by motives distinctly known in the abstract, but

by motives of mere perception". (WWR 1 p.296) In *Counsels and Maxims*, Schopenhauer also mentions letting "the impressions of the moment" overcome our moral maxims and resolutions (CM pp. 62-63) and adds failure to rein in the imagination (CM pp. 53-4) to the list of causes of out-of-character actions. The possibility of out-of-character actions appears to create a practical problem for self-knowledge – how can I be sure that a particular deed of mine was genuine? Repentance is the key to solving the problem. The pain of regret will indicate that this was a deed which, with intellectual freedom, I would not have performed. Acquired character requires us to reflect *honestly* on our experiences and consider if, in the light of our improved knowledge, we would have acted differently.

With acquired character the possibility of such actions taking place is minimized, for:

This puts us in a position to carry out, deliberately and methodically, the unalterable role of our own person, and to fill up the gaps caused in it by whims or weaknesses, under the guidance of fixed concepts. This role is in itself unchangeable once for all, but previously we allowed it to follow its natural course without any rule. We have now brought to clearly conscious maxims that are always present to us, the manner of acting necessarily determined by our inner nature. In accordance with these we carry it out as deliberately as though it were one that had been learnt, without ever being lead astray by the fleeting influence of mood or impressions of the present moment, without

being checked by the bitterness or sweetness of a particular thing we meet on the way, without wavering, without hesitation, without inconsistencies. Now we shall no longer, as novices, wait, attempt and grope about, in order to see what we really desire and are able to do; we know this once for all, and with every choice we have only to apply general principles to particular cases, and at once reach a decision. We know our will in general, and do not allow ourselves to be misled by a mood, or by entreaty from outside, into arriving at a decision in the particular case which is contrary to the will as a whole.

(WWR 1 p.305)

Acquired character involves a transition from being amateurs at the game of life and becoming professionals; skilful, focused and, as far as our individual character allows, not flustered or distracted.

The objection might still be made that even if I did act hastily, emotionally and thoughtlessly on a particular occasion, this was an expression of *my* character. Indeed it was a *natural* expression of it, unmediated by “clearly conscious maxims”. How can behaving in this natural way be deemed to have been acting out of character? We must remember that, for Schopenhauer, our intelligible character, our character as it *really* is, “resides outside time” (WWR 1 p.301) just as the Platonic Ideas do. Schopenhauer draws an analogy between the difficulties the Ideas have in manifesting themselves perfectly in the phenomenal world and the difficulty with which the intelligible character manifests itself in time, through our

deeds. In our world different Ideas conflict with each and “seldom allow the form that was striving for visibility to appear in perfect purity and distinctness, i.e. in perfect beauty.” (WWR 1 p.297) The same is true for our intelligible character:

This will, revealing itself in time alone, i.e., through actions, finds an analogous hindrance in the knowledge that rarely give it the data quite correctly; and in this way the deed does not turn out wholly and entirely in keeping with the will, and therefore leads to repentance.

(WWR 1 p.297)

A deed that is “natural” is not, therefore, one which necessarily reflects our intelligible character most accurately. Nature is exceeded by art in terms of the clarity by which the Idea is revealed, because of its “greater concentration, perfection and intelligence”. (WWR 1 p.266) Art reveals “that *ideal truth* which is superior to nature.” (AC p.28) What nature “merely stammers” in “*half-spoken words*” the artist articulates clearly. (WWR 1 p.222) In his prize essay on free will Schopenhauer uses a theatrical analogy to describe the person who has acquired character:

He now plays skilfully and methodically, with firmness and dignity, his own part, which he formerly played only by the light of nature in virtue of his empirical character. He now plays it without ever, as we say,

acting out of his character, which latter always shows that it in a particular case a man was mistaken about himself.

(FW pp. 43-44)

The person with acquired character is like an artist whose subject matter is their own character. He or she sets out “deliberately and methodically” to reveal their true inner (intelligible) character as *accurately* as possible – more accurately than it appears “by the light of nature”.

This aesthetic way of seeing acquired character is, perhaps, what inspired Nietzsche in *The Gay Science* to demand that we “give style” to our character. We must, he says, make a “survey all the strengths and weaknesses” of our character and “fit them into an artistic plan”. (Nietzsche 2001 p.163) His version of acquired character goes much further than Schopenhauer:

Here a great mass of second nature has been added; here a piece of original nature has been removed – both times through long practice and daily work at it.

(Nietzsche 2001 pp.163-164)

Schopenhauer did not believe that parts of our “original nature” could be excised. He believed that an attempt to change one’s “character itself” was as hopeless as trying to change lead into gold, or “by careful cultivation, make an oak bear apricots”. (FW p.46)

Acquired character is, as we have said, a worldly concept and so is repentance. Both are means by which we become better fitted to take our place in the world and both are part of the process of coming to understand our *individuality*, our character. As well as repentance Schopenhauer introduces a second form of regret which he calls “the *sting of conscience* or the *pangs of conscience*”. (WWR 1 p.365) ¹ He first mentions the notion of pangs of conscience in §55 of his major work. (WWR 1 p.297) This is a section devoted to his theory of character, including acquired character, but he delays discussing it until §65 which is a section emphasizing that suffering is essential to willing and grows in proportion to it, so that: “Consequently, much intense willing always entails much intense suffering.” (WWR 1 p.363) So §65 is an integral part of Schopenhauer’s salvationist doctrine of the complete denial of the will-to-live. Salvation involves “the *freedom* of the will-to-live to deny itself and to abolish character”. (WWR 1 p.408) Salvationism believes that “individuality is only a special error, a false step, something that it would be better should not be”. (WWR 2 pp. 491-492) It wants the individual character to be expunged not thrown into higher relief, as it is in those people who have acquired character.

“Pangs of conscience” is, therefore, a salvationist concept. A person experiencing these pangs does not regret a particular deed or action. Rather, it is “pain at the knowledge of oneself in one’s own nature, in other words as will.” (WWR 1 p.297) Since it is first mentioned in §55 one might be misled into believing that Schopenhauer was referring to character i.e. *individual* will.

¹ The term “stings of conscience” also occurs in the essay “Ethical Reflections”. (HN p.125)

Interpreted in this way, Schopenhauer might be taken to mean that with pangs of conscience one comes to regret being the person one is. So that while in repentance one says, "I regret what I have done", with pangs of conscience one says "I regret who I am".

That is not what Schopenhauer means by pangs of conscience. The "will" referred to as being "one's own nature" is not individual will (character) but *universal* will. By "nature" he means not our individual nature but the nature that everyone, indeed *everything*, has in common, which is universal will. This becomes clear in §65 where pangs of conscience is said to be a "particular pain" which is "felt in the case of every bad action, whether it be mere injustice arising out of egoism, or pure wickedness". (WWR 1 pp. 364-365) To suffer pangs of conscience the "bad person" must have a "presentiment" that he and his victims are, in a profound sense, one and the same, that individuality is "a delusive dream" and that "he is not only the tormentor but also the tormented". (WWR 1 p.365) He comes to recognize himself "as the concentrated phenomenon of the will-to-live" (WWR 1 p.366). After which he understands – as "a mere feeling" and "*not* as distinct, abstract knowledge" – that the will-to-live, what we all are essentially, is "the inner nature of the *bad*". (WWR 1 p.367) The person suffering pangs of conscience is well along the road to salvation – "complete resignation and holiness" – just needing a little more "clarity and completeness", which requires him to see that the will-to-live is the inner nature of the "*good*" in "precisely the same way" that it is of the bad. (WWR 1 p.367) The person with acquired character is fitted for engagement with the world, but the

salvationist saint or ascetic is an “overcomer of the world”. (WWR 1 p.386)
With the renunciation of the will-to-live, which is the inner nature of both good and bad, he or she has gone beyond Schopenhauer’s ethics of compassion. To such overcomers, the world is “nothing” for, when the will is abolished, there is: “No will: no representation, no world.” (WWR 1 p.411)

5.

The way in which cognitive errors can lead to out-of-character deeds is explained in detail by Schopenhauer as part of his wider theory of human action. There are three elements to this: individual character, motives and intellect. He says that:

Just as every effect in inanimate nature is a necessary product of two factors, namely the universal *natural force* here manifesting itself and the particular *cause* here calling forth that manifestation, so in the same way is every deed of a human being the necessary product of his *character* and the *motive* that has entered. If these two are given, the deed inevitably ensues. For a different deed to arise, either a different motive or a different character would have to be posited.

(FW p.50)

Motives, unlike causes or stimuli, reach us via “the intellect or the faculty of cognition” which is “the medium of motives”. (FW p.89) Motivation is not like

physical causation. A planet does not have to be aware of the forces that move it, but motives cannot determine our actions unless they are known to us, for what is “not known or understood” cannot “operate upon his will.” (SE p.231)

The source of out-of-character actions lies in the relationship between (individual) will and intellect. Each one of us is a partnership of the two – “the union of a particular heart with a particular head” (SP p.62) – but the relationship is often fraught and disputatious. Schopenhauer describes their complex relationship in a range of analogies. Will and intellect make an odd couple – like a “strong blind man carrying the sighted lame man on his shoulders”. (WWR 2 p.209) It is an unequal partnership – the will is “what is essential” in us while the intellect is only “secondary” (WWR 2 p.215) – but co-operation is essential if we are to understand ourselves and gain acquired character. Despite its subservient nature the intellect is, of course, the means of self-knowledge:

What the bridle and bit are to an unmanageable horse, the intellect is to the will in man; it must be led by this bridle by means of instruction, exhortation, training and so on [...]

(WWR 2 p.213)

How can the intellect do this? It is “secondary and physical” and the will is “original” and “metaphysical” and intellect can only become active when it is “put into motion” by “the will”. (WWR 2 p.213) The answer is that the will,

sometimes and only temporarily, allows the intellect to take charge. In a memorable metaphor Schopenhauer says that “on its own part” the intellect “is hardly able to get a word in edgeways” in a conversation with the will and is “brought to silence by a nod” from it. (WWR 2 p.212) However, when we are threatened by dangers, enemies or opponents, it is essential that we have “*equanimity, composure and presence of mind*” and these consist in the will shutting up – “Composure consists in the silence of the will.” (WWR 2 p.215) The will is, in modern terms, a control freak constantly interfering with the work of its servant the intellect – but sometimes it allows intellect to get on with its job.

Individual will can be quiet, of its own volition, if it is shown by the intellect that it is in its own best interests to be so. The final decision in such matters always belongs to the will but a powerful incentive to take heed of the intellect comes from the pain and suffering that results from a lack of self-knowledge. The strong blind man will find life’s travails easier to cope with if he listens to what the lame sighted man is telling him. The more enlightened by intellect the individual will becomes – the more it fathoms its own individual qualities – the less it will interfere with the intellect’s work and the more it will take cognizance of what it says and heed its advice. This is what we attain with acquired character; “the most complete possible knowledge of our own individuality”. (WWR 1 p.303)

If one’s character cannot change, it seems that when a motive appears which previously determined one to perform a particular deed then, if the identical motive appears again, we must do the same thing. We seem

condemned to “to pursue the same old paths again when the opportunity is renewed.” (FW p.45) But behaviour can change due to a change in knowledge; a new belief can be a counter-motive which is stronger than the previous motive. The intellect is medium of motives, so the vast majority of them are “*abstract*”, and normally we are motivated by “a mere *thought*”. (FW p.31) By using our intellect we can change our behaviour:

In general the sphere and domain of all correction and improvement lie in *cognition* alone. The character is unalterable; the motives operate with necessity, but they have to pass through *cognition*, the medium of motives. Cognition, however, is capable of the most manifold extension, of constant correction to innumerable degrees; all education works to this end. Cultivation of reason by cognitions and insights of every kind is morally important, because it opens the way to motives which would be closed off to the human being without it. As long as he was unable to understand them, they were non-existent for his will. Thus in identical circumstances, a human being’s position can in fact be quite different the second time from what it was the first, if in the meantime he has been able correctly and fully to understand those circumstances. In this way, motives by which he was previously unaffected now have an effect on him.

(FW pp. 45-46)

New knowledge can be a counter-motive which restrains us from performing the same action again. Society has a built in set of counter-motives to certain forms of behaviour – the legal system with its state-prescribed punishments. Knowledge can be an *internalized* form of restraint which is a personal counterpart to the external restraints provided by society. With this degree of control over ourselves, we can pre-empt the compulsion of external self-control by society: “it will be prudent to anticipate compulsion by self-control.” (CM p.58) Using Schopenhauer’s analogy we might say that it is better to put the bit and bridle on *ourselves* rather than have the state do it for us. Atwell (1990 p.138) suggests that greater insight into our character can help us to avoid getting into situations which we know, from experience, lead to outcomes we wish to avoid. Acquired character, therefore, can help us to keep out of harm’s way.

Anything our intellect can make available to us has the potential to be a motive. Beliefs can be motives for us, whether they are true or false. So can real things and imaginary things; fact and fantasy; apprehensions and misapprehensions. Schopenhauer says that “imaginary circumstances can act like real ones not only in the case of a particular deception, but also in general and for some length of time.” (WWR 1 p.295) If the intellect is functioning optimally then it can minimize our susceptibility to falsifications which are a source of out-of-character actions. But the will must also play its part by not allowing “the perversity of the heart” to prevent us from “seeing truths” to which our *unimpeded* “understanding would be quite equal.” (SE p.205)

6.

John Atwell (1990 p.134) found the concept of acquired character “rich and provocative” but he believed that the possibility of out-of-character actions contradicted an essential element of Schopenhauer’s “general theory of the human character”. He argued that repentance, which results from such actions, was “a ‘crack’ in Schopenhauer’s will-body identity thesis”. (1990 pp. 234-235 n.88) If this is a crack which could undermine Schopenhauer’s metaphysics of will it needs to be examined. Atwell believed that what he called “the will-body identity thesis” was the “cornerstone” of Schopenhauer’s philosophy since it allowed him to connect the worlds of will and representation “allowing him entrance into ethics, aesthetics, and metaphysics.” (Atwell 1990 p.16) The thesis is that the will and the body of the individual person are not two things, connected causally, but two aspects of one thing so that “in some sense, the agent (as a will) *is* one’s bodily actions and thus *is* one’s acts of will”. (Atwell 1990 p.30) The thesis appears in Schopenhauer’s essays. For example, in “Ethical Reflections” where he says that “Our body is itself our will objectified” (HN p.119) and in “Fragments of the History of Philosophy” where we are told that will is presented to us in a “double manner”; “as our own body” and “in our own self-consciousness”. (SE pp. 108-109)

Atwell quotes two passages from Schopenhauer's major work to illustrate the will-body thesis. In the first Schopenhauer says that the "act of will and the action of the body [...] are one and the same thing" but "given in two entirely different ways" directly and indirectly, the latter through "perception for the understanding." (WWR 1 p.100) The second passage reads:

Every true, genuine, immediate act of the will is also at once and directly a manifest act of the body; and correspondingly, on the other hand, every impression on the body is also at once and directly an impression on the will.

(WWR 1 p.101)

This passage, by limiting "act of will" to acts which are "true", "genuine" and "immediate", suggests how Schopenhauer can allow for out-of-character actions while maintaining that individual character is innate and fixed. For an act of (individual) to be a true and genuine act it must have been performed when the person was "*intellectually free*", since only this condition guarantees that the action was "the pure result of the reaction of his will to the motives that lie in the outside world" (FW p.89) motives about which the individual was not deceived.

If our deeds are to be genuine and accurate reflections of our individual character then the intellect must be free to do its job of presenting motives to the character:

Only insofar as the medium of motives happens to be in a normal state or condition, fulfils its functions regularly, and thus presents to the will for choice the motives in as an unfalsified manner as they exist in the real world can this will decide according to its nature, i.e., in accordance with the individual character of the human being, and thus manifest itself *unimpeded* in conformity with its very own essence. The human being is then *intellectually free*, i.e., his actions are the pure result of the reaction of his will to the motives that lie in the outside world before him as before everyone else.

(FW p.89)

Schopenhauer distinguishes between cases where intellectual freedom is “*suspended*” – in “madness, delirium, paroxysm” and innocent mistakes – and where it is only “*diminished* or partially suspended” through intoxication or “affect”, the “sudden, vehement stirring of the will” which obscures possible countermotives which cannot get “*fair play*”. (FW pp. 89-90) In the first class of actions we are not legally or morally responsible for them; in the latter class such responsibility is only partially suspended. In the case of killing while under the influence of affect we are guilty of manslaughter, in cases of intoxication we are responsible for getting intoxicated. (FW p.90)

Although Atwell discussed intellectual freedom (1990 pp. 54-58) he seems to have underestimated how crucial for Schopenhauer’s theory of character is the fact that motives are *mediated* by the intellect. This means

that for human beings they are “almost always abstract representations” for only in this way can several different motives be presented to us simultaneously, resulting in an “act of deliberation” which Schopenhauer calls an “*elective decision*”. (WWR 1 pp. 297-298) Animals are always motivated by “a representation of perception” – the here and now – but we, instead, try to use our reason to advantage by making ourselves “independent of the present moment” so that, excluding “insignificant actions” we are “determined by abstract, considered motives”. (WWR pp. 289-299) Intellect’s role as a conduit, one whose effectiveness can be compromised by the interference of the will, creates the conceptual space in which out-of-character deeds can happen.

If motives were like stimuli and we reacted to them in that way, like autonomic bodily functions, then there would be no possibility of acting out of character. Motives would be like knee-jerk reactions and *every* act of will would be immediate and genuine. My knee-jerk reaction is a bodily act and, given the will-body identity thesis, also an act of will but not of *individual* will. In out-of-character acts I do not act as in line with my *individual* will but rather just as “*man in general* as character of the species”. (WWR 1 p.303) Acquired character, as we have seen, is the way to avoid such behaviour and make sure that all our deeds are authentically *individual* ones. Atwell (1990 p.65) was aware of this argument as a response to the objection about out-of-character acts but while I believe it provides a solution, Atwell (1990 pp. 234-235 n.88) thought it allowed Schopenhauer to escape from “inconsistency only partially, and perhaps it does not even do that.”

Atwell has another objection concerning acquired character, which is aimed at Schopenhauer's claim that it is "of importance not so much for ethics proper as for life in the world." (WWR 1 p.307) Instead Atwell (1990 p.123) sees acquired character as "ethically important" and actually more "ethically significant" than compassion, which Schopenhauer thought was "the basis of morals". Atwell (1990 p.123) claims that as a basis for ethics, compassion is "so fundamentally flawed as to be (almost) summarily dismissible." We will consider Schopenhauer's ethics of compassion in detail in Chapter 2, but for now let us consider Atwell's claim about acquired character's relationship to ethics. He believed that a problem arose because of Schopenhauer's "rather sharp distinction between "prudence and ethics" (Atwell 1990 p.130) which resulted in "highly admirable character traits" not being recognized as virtues.

Someone with acquired character demonstrates not only the capacity for self-knowledge but also the qualities of being consistent, determined, single-minded, resolute, conscientious, deliberate, methodical and dependable. (WWR 1 pp.303-305) Schopenhauer admits that he wanted to separate "just, virtuous and noble conduct" from what is "*reasonable* or *rational*". (BM p.83) The only actions which "*have moral worth*" are those which derive from compassion, the "wholly direct and even instinctive participation in another's sufferings" (BM p.163) while in being rational we are guided by "*thoughts* and *concepts*". (BM p.83) Let us leave aside, as a moot point, the question of whether or not these qualities are moral virtues. Atwell has a further point; that these qualities are, at least, a necessary prerequisite

for the exercise of moral virtues. He asks: “Would we really ascribe moral virtue to a person who lacked every trace of conscientiousness?” and replies “I think not.” (Atwell 1990 p.136)

I agree with Atwell’s second point. Schopenhauer may be right that it is possible for someone to have “weak reasoning powers and a weak understanding and yet have a high sense of morality and be eminently good” (HN p.111) but it is difficult to envisage how a person could manifest that goodness while lacking the majority of the qualities the person with acquired character has – even more if they lacked them all. Schopenhauer, when not giving out practical, worldly advice, saw such qualities, associated with rationality, as being ethically neutral at best. They can be put in the service of vice as well as virtue: “a man can go to work very rationally, and thus thoughtfully, deliberately, consistently, systematically and methodically and yet act upon the most selfish, unjust and even iniquitous maxims.” (BM p.83) In the essay “Moral Instinct” he goes further, saying that “it is reason alone which makes us capable of being scoundrels”. (HN p.109)

The reason that Schopenhauer undervalues these qualities lies in the tension between the worldly and salvationist aspects of his philosophy. Although salvationism goes beyond the ethics of compassion, Schopenhauer nevertheless saw the exercise of compassion as a first step towards salvationism. Compassion requires an “intuitive perception” that there is not a “mighty *difference*” between oneself and other people so that “another’s ego is treated as equal to one’s own.” (BM p.205) The compassionate person has a dim, tentative grasp of the metaphysical truth, as Schopenhauer saw it, that

“his own true inner nature” is the inner nature of everyone – universal will – and that there is a fundamental unity underlying the (deceptive) appearance of individuality. Acquired character does not seek to diminish the differences between people, but to increase those differences by making an individual more sharply and clearly defined as the individual he or she is. If we take “ethics proper” as a fingerpost pointing in the direction of salvation, the dismissive tone of Schopenhauer’s comment is more understandable. It is in line with the overall tone of Book IV which is, except for the brief excursion into acquired character, relentlessly salvationist.

7.

It is a “fact of consciousness”, says Schopenhauer, that each person has a “clear and certain feeling of *responsibility* for what he or she does. Each of us feels accountable for their actions, and this feeling rests on the “unshakeable uncertainty that we ourselves are *the doers of our deeds*”. (FW p.83) It is certainly true for anyone who has acquired character. In coming to know one’s individual character we become better at distinguishing between deeds performed when we lacked intellectual freedom, and of which we repent, and those which were genuine; authentic deeds which accurately mirror our character. The person with acquired character will not try to shirk responsibility for their genuine deeds, but will acknowledge ownership of them. But, as Nagel pointed out, simply *feeling* responsible for our actions does not guarantee that we are, even if we cannot eliminate the feeling of

responsibility. (Nagel 1979 pp. 37-38) I must not only feel responsible for my actions but *be* responsible for them. However, all the events of our lives “great and small” are as “necessarily predetermined as the works of a clock”, Schopenhauer wrote in the essay “On Ethics”. (SE p.225) How can we be responsible if we are just “like puppets” operated by “internal clockwork”? (WWR 2 p.358) How can I be responsible for my deeds unless, in some sense, I freely chose to do them? ¹

Schopenhauer agrees that freedom is required for moral responsibility but believed that most theories sought for it in the wrong place. As regards the phenomenal world, subject to space, time and causality, Schopenhauer was a “hard determinist” (Janaway 1989 p.244) and said that “our individual acts are in no sense free” (SE p.225) and occur with “strict necessity”. (FW p.85) Freedom, he argued, is not to be found in individual actions. His response to the question of moral responsibility was to locate “*guilt*”, “*responsibility*” and “*freedom*” in the same place – “in the *character* of the human being”. (FW pp. 84-85) The “*character*” he refers to is not the empirical but the intelligible character:

For the empirical character, like the whole human being, is as an object of experience a mere appearance, hence tied to the form of all appearance, to time, space and causality, and subject to their laws.

¹ Some contemporary philosophers believe that moral responsibility is possible even without free will, in the sense that on a given occasion one could have done otherwise. Frankfurt rejected this “principle of alternate possibilities”, claiming that: “A person may well be morally responsible for what he has done even though he could not have done otherwise.” (Frankfurt 1969 pp. 829-830) This paper has generated a plethora of responses, refinements and (it is claimed) refutations. Further discussion is beyond the scope of this thesis.

On the other hand, the condition and basis of this whole appearance is the human being's *intelligible character*, i.e., his will as thing in itself, which is independent of those forms and therefore subject to no time distinction and consequently permanent and unchangeable, and to which certainly also belongs absolute freedom, i.e., independence from the law of causality (as a mere form of appearances). This freedom, however, is *transcendental* [...] By virtue of this freedom, all deeds of a human being are his own work [...]

(FW p.86)

Schopenhauer's decision to locate freedom and responsibility in the intelligible character means that to be responsible for my *actions* – to really be the doer of my deeds – I must somehow be responsible for my character, for that is where responsibility lies. Responsibility requires freedom so intelligible character (what the individual fundamentally is) must be that individual's free choice.

In his essays Schopenhauer uses the scholastic term "aseity" to describe this requirement. For something to have aseity, he says, it "must be an original thing existing by virtue of its own power and completeness, and not referable to another." (SE p.73) In "On Ethics" he says that it is "necessary that the existence and nature of man be itself the work of his freedom that is, of his Will and that the latter, therefore, has aseity." (SE p.236) In "Fragments of the History of Philosophy" he expands on this:

Moral freedom and responsibility, or accountability, necessarily presupposes Aseity. Actions are always based on character, that is, they proceed with necessity from the peculiar, and therefore unchangeable structure of a being under the influence and according to the measure of motive. Hence, if it is to be responsible, it must exist originally by virtue of its own power. It must, as regards its *existentia* and *essentia*, be its own work, and the creator of itself, if it is to be the true creator of its acts.

(SE p.109)

In the prize essay on free will he says that the “essence” of the “human being himself” (the intelligible character) “must be conceived as his free act” which manifests itself in the world as “a plurality and diversity of actions” but they all bear the “same character” by virtue of being manifestations of an “original unity”. (FW p.87)

Objections have been made to Schopenhauer’s claims. The first concerns the question of to whom, or what, “his” refers. Magee (1997 p.207) says that Schopenhauer’s claim cannot be “coherently formulated” – what can be said “to have chosen to be me? Not, I certainly.” On this point it is may be that Schopenhauer is less incoherent than Magee claims. The difficulty in Schopenhauer’s explanation is an example of what he called “the greatest equivocation”, which occurs in our use of the word “I”. The same problem arose in Chapter XLI of the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, “On Death and Its Relation to the Indestructibility of Our

Inner Nature". Something survives my death but do I survive it? The answer to this, Schopenhauer says, depends upon what we take "I" to be in this context:

However, the greatest equivocation really lies in the word "I" [...] According as I understand this word, I can say: "Death is my entire end"; or else: "This my personal phenomenal appearance is just an infinitely small part of my true inner nature as I am of the world."

(WWR 2 p.491)

A similar equivocation can occur when Schopenhauer refers to "will". Janaway gives three uses of "will":

It is either (1) will (an essence I share with everything in the world), (2) will to life (an essence I share with organic nature as a whole), or (3) my individual will or underlying character (which is peculiar to me).

(Janaway 1999a p.151)

Oddly he omits a very important fourth use, which I would interpose between (2) and (3), the will of the species, an essence each of us shares with every other human being. In terms of "will", therefore, every person has four aspects. With awareness of how Schopenhauer uses these terms, and applying it to the problem of moral responsibility, we might interpret Schopenhauer as saying something like this: "I" (as individual will) was

chosen by me – “I” (as universal will). What “I” am (superficially) is an individual but what “I” am (profoundly) is universal will. Janaway (1999a p.158) feels that the sort of explication would not be sufficient to ground my moral responsibility as an individual:

Schopenhauer’s very notion of my will’s being my underlying, non-rational, unchosen essence, in virtue of which I have the goal’s I have and behave as I do, seems to rob me, the self-conscious individual, of autonomy. Trying to restore my individual autonomy by appeal to the same notion of will as thing in itself seems an unpromising strategy.

(Janaway 1999a p.158)

Unless one adopts the transcendental viewpoint, which sees individuality as an illusion, Janaway’s point has bite.

A second objection to Schopenhauer’s claim about aseity is that our intelligible character is a “free act”. This objection has far-reaching ramifications for Schopenhauer’s theory of character and beyond. Young finds the first point “incomprehensible” since “a free choice or act of will is an *event*” which can only take place in time not in an “atemporal realm”. (Young 2005 p.164) Universal will as thing-in-itself, as Schopenhauer reiterates, is “extra-temporal”, (WWR 1 p.301) “lying outside time”. (SE p.225) Janaway (1989 p.244) found it “unclear” how an act is possible outside space and time, and “how my essence could be an act of mine.” Not only “time and space” but also “plurality, must be foreign” to will as thing-in-itself,

Schopenhauer tells us. (WWR 2 p.275) This leads Janaway (1999a pp.151-152) and Wicks to raise a different problem – in a realm to which plurality is foreign, how can there be intelligible *characters* (plural)?

Intelligible characters occupy an uneasy place within Schopenhauer's metaphysical arrangement, for they inconsistently stand midway between the world as will and the world as representation, and squarely in neither. Since there are billions of them, the phenomenal notion of individuation applies.

(Wicks 2008 p.118)

However, Schopenhauer offered, in passing and very tentatively, a possible solution in his essay "On Ethics", as Wicks (2008 p.118) and Janaway (1999a p.151) note. Schopenhauer first outlined the argument for transcendental freedom, and stated that the "individual character" is "to be regarded" as that individual's "free act. He himself is such, because he once for all wills to be such". (SE p.225) He then concludes:

From this it follows further that the individuality does not rest alone on the *principium individuationis* [principle of individuation], and hence is not through and through mere phenomenon, but that it has its root in the thing-in-itself, in the will of the individual, for even his character is individual. How deeply its roots penetrate here belongs to those questions whose answer I do not undertake [...]

(SE p.225)

Schopenhauer's reluctance to answer may be due to his belief, expressed in the essay "Philosophy and Its Method", that the language of philosophy – which he termed "rationalism" in contrast to the language of the mystics, "illumination", is limited to describing "the *phenomenon*, but does not reach the ultimate, inner and original essence of things". (PP2 p.9) If individuality has its roots in the thing-in-itself then the border between the two aspects of the world, as will and representation seems to disappear. His reluctance to undertake an answer may, instead, signal his realization that to do so would undermine his metaphysics:

That the world in itself does not split up into separate individuals, that individuality is phenomenal only, is a fundamental and consistent tenet of Schopenhauer's philosophy. It is for this reason that in his ethics Schopenhauer can rely on the thought that ultimately individuality is an illusion.

(Janaway 1999a p.150)

Schopenhauer cannot claim that all "genuine virtue proceeds from the immediate and intuitive knowledge of the metaphysical identity of all beings" (WWR 2 pp. 600-601) if individuality "has its root in the thing-in-itself" and there are non-identical individuals (intelligible characters) at the level of will as thing-in-itself.

Schopenhauer may have had another reason for suggesting that individuality exists at the level of the thing-in-itself – for it would provide him with a solution to what, in the essay “Character”, he called “*the hardest of all problems*”. (HN p.100) It is the problem of ethical diversity:

How is it that, while the will, as the thing-in-itself, is identical, and from a metaphysical point of view one and the same in all its manifestations, there is nevertheless such an enormous difference between one character and another? – the malicious, diabolical wickedness of the one, and set off against it, the goodness of the other, showing all the more conspicuously.

(HN p.100)

He suggests the relationship between intellect and will as a solution, but has to dismiss it for: “A man's intellect, however, by no means stands in any direct and obvious relation with the goodness of his character.” (HN p.101) The intellect is just a brain function (WWR2 p.233) and is therefore phenomenal. But ethical diversity “proceeds immediately from the will” for:

Otherwise ethical character would not be above and beyond time, as it is only in the individual that intellect and will are united. The will is above and beyond time, and eternal; and character is innate; that is to say, it is sprung from the same eternity, and therefore it does not admit of any but a transcendental explanation.

(HN p.101)

Schopenhauer's attempt to combine freedom, determinism *and* his particular brand of transcendental metaphysics begins to creak at the seams. Why must the intelligible character be above and beyond time? Because he makes freedom and responsibility reside in the intelligible character. His hard determinism leaves no place in the phenomenal world for the freedom he believes we need if we are to be morally responsible. Freedom (and the intelligible character in which it is grounded) has to be transcendental, since only if it is can we really be the doers of our deeds. It is indubitable that ethical diversity exists. In the transcendental realm there cannot be a plurality of intelligible characters since plurality is foreign to the thing-in-itself. But there has to be a plurality of intelligible characters to account for the ethical diversity of (transcendental) intelligible characters. If will as thing-in-itself had a singular intelligible character, the character of the world, then as Janaway (1999a p.150) says: "What I am in myself ought to be no different from what you are in yourself, or indeed from what any phenomenal object is in itself." It is difficult to see how, given Schopenhauer's metaphysics, he can accommodate both transcendental freedom and ethical diversity. No wonder he ended the essay "Character" so plaintively: "Perhaps some one will come after me who will throw light into this dark abyss." (HN p.102) He reached a similar conclusion in his major work, when discussing the problem of why there is an "incredibly great" difference between characters, ending with the confession that "there is opened before us an abysmal depth in our contemplation". (WWR 2 p.529)

8.

The people who populate Conrad's novels and short stories live and breathe in a world where there is a robust sense of moral responsibility, grounded in character, and people are held to be accountable for their actions. As regards character in action, as it is revealed through deeds, Schopenhauer would have felt at home in Conrad's fictional world, as he did in Shakespeare's, whose "intuitive wisdom" about the nature of human character and psychology constantly revealed itself "*in concreto*" in his dramas. (SE p.231) In "On Ethics", Schopenhauer gives an example of how the "unchangeability of character" reveals itself. He asks us to consider someone who "has perhaps failed in decision or firmness, or courage, or other qualities demanded by the moment" and:

Now after it is over he knows and honestly regrets his wrong conduct and thinks, perhaps, "If only that occurred to me again I would act differently!" It does occur to him again, the same thing happens, and he acts again exactly as before, to his great astonishment.

(SE p.231)

Allusions in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* suggest that Conrad knew this essay but it is tempting to believe that this particular paragraph was the seed from which Conrad's masterpiece *Lord Jim* flowered, for its young eponymous hero lives out exactly this experience as a crew member aboard

the *Patna*. Jim's declarations that he would act differently if given another chance echo this passage and the suffering he experiences at the shame of his failure closely resembles Schopenhauerian repentance. In Chapter 3 I will argue that *Lord Jim* is a rigorous and imaginative investigation, on a grand scale, of the implications of this aspect of Schopenhauer's theory of character.

Schopenhauer claimed that not only are we the doers of our deeds but that "it never occurs to anyone" to use the necessity of circumstances "as an excuse for their transgression, and to throw the blame on the motives because their appearance rendered the deed inevitable." (FW pp. 83-84) He overstated his case, perhaps in an effort to persuade us that this feeling of "responsibility" and "accountability" is a "fact of consciousness" for everyone. (FW p.83) There are some people who do not seem to experience this feeling or, if they do, successfully repress it. Willems, the protagonist of Conrad's *An Outcast of the Islands* is such a man. As a skilful billiard player Willems knows that once struck the balls will go "zig-zagging towards the inevitably successful canon". (OI p.9) While Willems understands physical causality, he is "unable to conceive that the moral significance of any act of his could interfere with the very nature of things". (OI p.7) While billiard balls move with inevitability once struck, Willems is convinced that taking money from his employers to pay off his gambling debts is an action whose consequences are not similarly inevitable. He thinks it can be separated out from the nexus of events like "a sentence in brackets, so to speak", which would allow him to step off "the straight and narrow path of his peculiar

honesty” and then resume “the safe stride of virtue” without his “excursion in the wayside quagmires” resulting in a permanent change of direction. (OI p.7)

Willems loses his job at Hudig’s but is given another chance by the trader Captain Lingard. And, as Schopenhauer would have predicted, Willems betrays his new employer, by selling valuable information about Lingard’s secret trading route to his rivals. But the pusillanimous Willems will not accept responsibility for his actions, it is circumstances not his *character* that was to blame, he maintains: “It wasn’t me. The evil was not in me, Captain Lingard!” (OI p.211) He claims that his betrayal was an “error of judgement” (OI p.205) which is what he said the theft from his first employer had been. If his first theft was an error of judgment, caused by a cognitive lapse, then he could repent of it and ensure that it did not happen again. His corrected knowledge could have led to a change of behaviour. His disgrace, his exile to an island and his loss of social status would all have been possible countermotives to prevent another such “error” happening. The repetition of the betrayal of trust reveals that the fault lies in Willems’ character, but he lacks any insight into it.

Conrad’s fiction depicts the issues of character and moral responsibility embedded in particular communities which bind individuals together. In his essay “Character” Schopenhauer gives one of the external restraints which deter us from committing bad actions as “an objective attachment to fidelity and good-faith, coupled with a resolve to hold them sacred, because they are the foundation of all free intercourse between man and man”. (HN p.97) Willems fits Schopenhauer’s picture of the egoist who

sees a gulf between him and other people, which works against feelings of fidelity: “Scruples were for imbeciles. His clear duty was to make himself happy.” (OI p.110) The person with acquired character seeks to combat their “whims or weaknesses”, the temptations of the moment, with the “guidance of fixed concepts.” (WWR 1 p.305) People like Willems and his fellow criminal Babalatchi have “the true vagabond’s pliability to circumstances and adaptiveness to momentary surroundings”. (OI p.45) They are moral straws in the wind.

Character as the locus of moral responsibility and acquired character, the highest level of knowledge of one’s individuality, are Schopenhauerian notions that feature prominently in Conrad’s fiction. What would Conrad have made of the metaphysical argument for freedom and responsibility Schopenhauer puts forward in “On Ethics”? Not a great deal perhaps given the scathing comments in his letters and essays about all things transcendental. Moral responsibility is at the heart of his fiction but free will is scarcely mentioned explicitly. In *Victory* Lena accepts responsibility for her part in the unmarried sexual relationship she has with Axel Heyst, since “she had come to him of her own free will”. (V p.266) In *Freya of the Seven Isles*, Freya Nielsen tells her lover that when she marries him, “I shall come of my own free will”. (TLS p.168) Jim goes to his punishment at the maritime inquiry “practically of his own free will” and his decision to do so is “a redeeming feature in his abominable case.” (L p.49-50) The “practically” refers to the cultural pressure on Jim, as a representative of British maritime

training, to do the right thing in attending. His act stems from his character and sets him apart from his equally culpable crewmates who fail to attend.

This suggests that Conrad did not find the subject of free will particularly troubling and thought that it was compatible with a scientific world view. Ludwig Schnauder (2004 p.73) disagrees, claiming that *Nostramo* reveals an “implicit” rejection of compatibilism and that there is “scant room for free will” in the world. A little room, however, would still be enough to make us the doers of our deeds. Schnauder does not consider that free will could be compatible with political oppression, dictatorship and the forces of capitalism which are part of the novel’s fictional landscape. All these things are restraints on our liberty but do not eliminate the possibility of moral responsibility. Darwinian evolution, which is a theme in Conrad’s *The Secret Agent*, does not in itself rule out the possibility of us having sufficient freedom to ground moral responsibility as Schnauder (2007 p.97) claims it does. Perhaps Conrad thought that of free will as a brute fact; or something that could not be proved but which he felt to be indubitable; or that it was an illusion, but one without which neither we, nor society, could function properly. His fiction suggests he believed that, in terms of moral responsibility, the buck stopped at one’s individual character. Stripped of its metaphysical framework, that is also Schopenhauer’s view.

Kossler’s view of the relationship between character and free will in Schopenhauer’s philosophy, offers an intriguingly different interpretation of what, in this context, freedom means:

Freedom, and with it ethical responsibility, is therefore also present in action, yet not as the freedom that the individual *has*, but rather as the freedom by which the individual *becomes himself*. The individual can only act in line with his character, yet every action gives a new definition of the individual character from the numerous possibilities of being human as such; and in that sense the action is *free*. The character is perhaps on the one hand that which is experienced in action, yet not as already defined or laid down, but instead as a character that is realised anew in every action; the character is therefore also that which experiences, so that the expression ‘experience of character’ can be seen as binding both aspects.

(Kossler 2008 p.242)

The implication of Kossler’s view, as I understand it, reveals how important acquired character is in Schopenhauer’s overall theory of character. Kossler construes freedom as a function of how I realize my character through action, through my deeds. I am free to leave it relatively undefined – I must always remain true to myself “on the whole” (WWR 1 p.304) – or make it more sharply defined. The sharpest definition of character comes when I have acquired character. In choosing definition – to become as clearly as possible *who I am* – we must actively “renounce” other possible actions and not “snatch at everything that fascinates us”. (WWR 1 p.303) ¹ Only when we

¹ There is a similarity here between Schopenhauer’s view that of the compatibilist Daniel Dennett, who says that moral freedom, involves learning to make ourselves “*insensitive* to many of the opportunities that come our way” not through blindness or stupidity but by making them “beneath serious consideration.” (Dennett 2003 pp. 216-217)

have the ability to do this do we “display character”. (WWR p.304) How do I know which opportunities to spurn? By reflecting on what deeds I repent of – repentance provides the clues by which I can come to understand what my element is, what I am best suited for and what situations I am better off avoiding.

CHAPTER 2

EGOISM, INDIVIDUALITY AND ETHICS

1.

Schopenhauer believed that egoism is the “chief and fundamental incentive in man” from which nearly all our actions spring, and that our “*egoism* is boundless”. (BM p.131) The egoism of each individual is “colossal; it towers above the world”, he wrote in his ethical treatise *On the Basis of Morality*, so that every person sees themselves as “the centre of the world”. (BM p.132) At its extreme this self-centredness can develop into a solipsistic tendency to regard only oneself as “*real*, at any rate from a practical point of view, and all others to a certain extent as mere phantoms” and:

This is due ultimately to the fact that everyone is given to himself *directly*, but the rest are given to him only *indirectly* through their representation in his head and the directness asserts its right.

(BM p.132)

Schopenhauer has a metaphysical explanation for this phenomenon.

If we confined our thinking to the world of appearances which is subject to time and space, the *principium individuationis* through which the plurality of individuals is possible (BM p.206) then the egoist’s position is the reasonable

one to adopt. It is “*empirically* considered”, says Schopenhauer “strictly justified”:

According to experience, the *difference* between my own person and another appears to be absolute. The difference in space that separates me from him, separates me also from his weal and woe.

(BM p.205)

This is for Schopenhauer, of course, a “very superficial” (BM p.206) view of what each of us fundamentally is, for “plurality is only apparent”, only a “phenomenal appearance”. (BM p.207) Underneath this is the “substratum of this entire phenomenal appearance our innermost *essence-in-itself*” (BM p.206) – i.e. universal will – which is “the one and the same essence which manifests itself in all living things”. (BM p.209) Individuality, and the egoism which springs from it, may be justified empirically but from the fundamental metaphysical perspective it is revealed to be an illusion. Schopenhauer’s metaphysical ethics of compassion depends upon “*one* individual’s again recognizing in *another* his own self, his own true inner nature.” (BM p.209)

Schopenhauer warns that if the colossal egoism of millions of individuals went unchecked, the result would be a war of all against all, as envisaged by Hobbes, “to the undoing of all”. (BM p.133) This egoism can be restrained in a “negative” way by the power of the state, the setting up of which was prompted by our fear of the disastrous consequences of “universal egoism” and “mutual violence”. (BM p.133) This negative incentive can fail to

be effective and Schopenhauer believes that there is a positive “*moral incentive*” to oppose the “antimoral force” of egoism. (BM pp. 135-136) To be effective this incentive cannot consist in Kant’s “artificial subtleties” which call for “the finest distinctions” which rest on “the most abstract concepts”:

On the contrary, such an incentive must be something that requires little reflection and even less abstraction and combination: something that independently of the formation on the intellect, speaks to every man, even the coarsest and crudest; something resting merely on intuitive apprehension and forcing itself immediately on us out of the reality of things.

(BM pp. 120-121)

This moral incentive must be one which is practical, suitable for “real life” not just university “disputations” (BM p.121) and one which is grounded in the “reality of things” which, for Schopenhauer, means his metaphysics of will.

Given his view that the will is primary and the intellect “secondary” (BM p.64) then the moral incentive could not be an abstract principle, a matter of mere reason. An attempt to counter the “violence and fury of passions”, the individual’s will in action, by a Kantian abstract principle “would be as effective as a syringe at a great fire.” (BM pp.75-6)

Schopenhauer reveals that this moral incentive is “the everyday phenomenon of *compassion*” which is not only “the real basis of all voluntary justice and loving kindness” but also the *sole* source of moral value: “Only

insofar as an action has sprung from compassion does it have moral value; and every action resulting from any other motives has none.” (BM p.144) Anything tainted by egoism is “*without moral worth*”. (BM p.143) Compassion is one of the “*three fundamental incentives* of human action”, along with egoism and malice, and all our actions can be accounted for by one of these motives alone, or by a combination of more than one. (BM p.145) ¹ In acts which have moral value, compassion overcomes the first two. His description of how it does this makes it appear very different from an “everyday phenomenon”. Being compassionate involves making someone else “*the ultimate object* of my will in the same way as I myself otherwise am”:

But this necessarily presupposes that, in the case of his *woe* as such, I suffer directly with him, I feel *his* woe just as I ordinarily feel my own; and, likewise, I directly desire his *weal* in the same way I otherwise desire only my own. But this requires that I am in some way *identified with him*, in other words that this entire *difference* between me and everyone else, which is the very basis of my egoism, is eliminated, to a certain extent at least.

(BM pp. 143-144)

He limits compassion to someone’s “*suffering*”, claiming that it is not aroused “at any rate directly, by “his *well-being*, on the contrary, in and by itself this leaves us unmoved.” (BM p.145) This restriction depends upon

¹ There is a fourth incentive “one’s own woe”, exhibited by ascetics. (WWR 2 p.607)

Schopenhauer's negativity-of-pleasure thesis – that it is only pain which is “*positive and directly felt and experienced*”. (BM p.146)

The metaphysical explanation of compassion is that at the most fundamental level (will as thing-in-itself) we are metaphysically identical. This is a form of “practical mysticism”:

That a man gives alms without having, even remotely, any other object than that of lessening the want that oppresses another, is possible only insofar as he recognizes that it is his own self which now appears before him in that doleful and dejected form, and hence that he recognizes his own inner being-in-itself in the phenomenal appearance of another.

(BM p.212)

What I recognize in the other person is obviously not “self” construed as character (*individual* will) but that deeper self as *universal* will – at which level he and I are one. For the compassionate person there is not “an immeasurable difference, a deep gulf” between him or her and other people (BM p.213) as there is for egoists and the wicked. The “moral isolation” of the wicked can “drive them to despair”. (BM p.212)

Schopenhauer sought to make his metaphysically-grounded compassion less “astonishing, indeed mysterious” (BM p.144) than it seems at first. However, some questions remain, such as how this form of compassion functions; whether compassion is the only moral incentive;

whether compassion requires Schopenhauer's metaphysical underpinning. We will now turn our attention to these issues.

2.

Atwell and Magee found difficulties with Schopenhauer advocating both an ethics of compassion and the denial of the will-to-live as the nearest thing to a *summum bonum*. Magee argued that one of them must be given up since they are "incompatible":

On the one hand he tells us that all morality is based on compassion: on the other he says that the most ethically desirable state for an individual to attain is the renunciation of all willing. But clearly, it is impossible to be compassionately concerned for another without activity of will. [...] if I have renounced all willing then I must be indifferent to the good or harm of another as I am of my own [...] the cessation of willing must be accompanied by an indifference to moral considerations.

(Magee 1997 p.243)

Atwell (1990 p.183) agrees with Magee's first point, arguing that compassion typically involves effort to help someone, and effort needs an act of will and, therefore, compassion must involve willing. He goes on to say that the only solution to this objection is to interpret Schopenhauer as claiming that in the

compassionate person, not “all willing” is renounced but only “egoistic or selfish willing”. (Atwell 1990 p.183)¹ Magee’s second point, that complete denial of the will would lead to ethical indifference, prompts Atwell to add that if this led to “indifference to all suffering, then it appears to reach immorality, not true morality.” (Atwell 1990 p.251 n.98) These objections point to the two aspects of Schopenhauer’s philosophy which I have called worldly and salvationist.

But there is a response we can make on Schopenhauer’s behalf to Magee’s first objection. Although Schopenhauer believed that the compassionate person, who intuits that there is no gulf between him or herself and other people, is “on the direct path to salvation” (WWR 1 p.374) he recognized that, for the overwhelming majority of people, this would be as far as they went on that path, since they would continue to affirm the will-to-live. Having a foot on the path to salvation is a long way from being an ascetic for whom the world is “nothing.” (WWR 1 p.412) Schopenhauer does not make affirmation and denial a question of either/or, but a matter of degree. He maintained that there are “modes of conduct” in which are “expressed affirmation in its different degrees on the one hand, and denial on the other”. (WWR 1 p.285) There seems no reason to suppose that someone cannot affirm the will-to-live to some degree, without being malicious or excessively egoistic, and also be compassionate. Schopenhauer describes the compassionate person – who sees other people not as “*absolute non-ego*” but as “I once more” (BM p.211) – as experiencing a “deep inward

¹ This might be thought of as the replacement of “individual willing” by “human willing in general” which is experienced by someone in the state of the “aesthetically sublime” while watching a tragedy on stage. (WWR 1 p.202)

peace” and a “calm, and contented mood” (BM p.212) which, Cartwright argues, suggests “that compassion binds us to life” and that compassionate people “do not live in a world from which they would resign”. (Cartwright 2008 p.212)

Magee’s claim that the ascetic is indifferent to “moral considerations” is correct, but it does not follow that this is incompatible with Schopenhauer’s ethics. Schopenhauer would be sanguine about Atwell’s allegation of the ascetic’s “immorality”, although “amorality” might be more accurate. Moral considerations, in the sense that Magee and Atwell mean, are worldly matters. For salvationism what really matters is not the path to salvation, along which tread (falteringly, haltingly and not very far) the compassionate, the just and the philanthropic, but the terminus, which is complete denial of the will to live, is salvation itself. Schopenhauer sees the ethics of compassion as merely a station on the way to salvation: “The moral virtues are not really the ultimate end, but only a step towards it.” (WWR 2 p.608) To borrow a metaphor from Wittgenstein (*Tractatus* 6.54), once someone has climbed the ladder of the moral virtues and reached salvation it can be cast aside, as he said his own propositions could be, “and then he will see the world aright.” (Wittgenstein 1974 p.74) Schopenhauer believed that those who have been saved see the world aright, when they make “the transition from the merely moral virtues to the denial of the will to live.” (SP p.26)

This distinction between Schopenhauer’s ethics of compassion and salvationist denial of the will also helps to answer another objection by Atwell. Regarding Schopenhauer’s example of the alms-giver (BM p.212) mentioned

above, Atwell asks what the alms-giver could see in the beggar, in terms of a mutual “inner being”, to make “disinterested alms-giving meaningful”, and answers:

What he finds is simply the will-to-live. For this, and nothing else (so far as one can know), is the thing-in-itself. This means that what he actually finds is sheer egoism – a drive to perpetuate itself, an impulse to continue existing (no matter what the cost for others), an insatiable, hungry, self-devouring force! That is what the alms-giver and the beggar have in common: that is their “inner nature”. Look microscopically into the deep recesses of anyone’s heart, and you will find a wild, horrible beast – yourself once again. This is the metaphysics of ethics!”

(Atwell 1990 p.122)

Clearly Schopenhauer did not believe that the alms-giver’s compassionate gesture resulted in this experience of existential horror. Instead he says that when “we ourselves do a noble deed” it is accompanied by “deep emotion and delight”. (BM p.211) Yet Atwell is right that Schopenhauer insists that compassion is based on an intuitive grasp of the metaphysical fact that alms-giver and beggar have the same “inner being-in-itself”. This inner being is universal will. Since universal will, is “inherently evil” (Magee 1997 p.242) and “evil incarnate” (Young 2005 p.191) – as the world, its objectification, shows – then this, surely, is what the alms-giver would intuit.

However, rather than immediately refuting the experience of compassion as put forward by Schopenhauer, Atwell's provocative interpretation instead reveals that there are really two elements in the process of the intuitive apprehension involved in compassion. In the alms-giver's case the first element predominates. It is an intuition, perhaps dim and inchoate, of a feeling of oneness, kinship and connection with the beggar; that the difference between them is not "absolute". (BM p.144) It is this feeling which results in the compassionate person's feelings of "deep emotion and delight" – the opposite of the wicked person's despair which results from their moral isolation. The second element of intuition involves not only recognizing the complete metaphysical identity of I and not-I but also the *nature* of what it is that we fundamentally are – universal will, which is "greedily grasping for itself every material capable of life". (WWR 2 p.350) When Schopenhauer claimed that his ethics was "the perfectly real" and "everyday phenomenon of *compassion*" (BM p.144) it was this first element he was describing. What Atwell describes is the second element – something which would be intuited by a salvationist ascetic or someone, at the very least, well on the path to complete denial of the will-to-live. What makes Atwell's reading of the alms-giver example so startling is that he superimposes the two elements of everyday compassion and salvationist insight. In the first element, feeling predominates; the good person's "deep inward peace" and a "calm, and contented mood". (BM p.212) In the second it is cognitive insight, seeing the nature of universal will, which is *our* will, as it really is, which predominates. Given that compassion has to make way for

true salvation one might also consider these two elements as two stages in a realization of what the will is, which leads to its complete denial.¹

If Schopenhauer's compassion is really the "everyday phenomenon" we are familiar with, does it require the metaphysics which underpins it? A worldly form of compassion, which severed its link with Schopenhauer's metaphysics, would eliminate the tension Janaway sees as existing between the two ways in which Schopenhauer uses the "I once more" principle. The first is practical and the second metaphysical. In the first way, Janaway says, I recognize that other people have self-consciousness and an inner life in the same way that I possess them. This means that "recognition of a genuine *intersubjectivity* underlies the morally good, non-egoistic view of life", while the second "metaphysical" way says that "I and others are literally identical" and this metaphysical viewpoint precludes the practical way. (Janaway 1989 pp. 282-283)

Such a worldly version of compassion has been put forward by both Cartwright and Young. By removing the metaphysical framework of the ethics we would be "naturalizing compassion", as Cartwright calls it, a process he admits "would not please Schopenhauer". (Cartwright 2008 p.309)

¹ There is an analogy here with Schopenhauer's aesthetics. In aesthetic contemplation the source of "aesthetic enjoyment" sometimes lies predominantly in the "bliss and peace of mind of pure knowledge free from willing" and sometimes "in the apprehension of the known Idea". (WWR 1 p.212) Whether the state is predominantly affective or cognitive depends upon which grade of the will's objectivity is being apprehended. The higher the grade (human beings are the highest grade) the more "they reveal to us most completely the essence of the will". (WWR 1 p.213) In tragedy, the most cognitively valuable art, we experience "not the feeling of the beautiful, but that of the sublime" which leads us to "turn away from the will-to-live itself" in the "tragic catastrophe". (WWR 2 p.433) For Schopenhauer, tragedy is the supremely salvationist art, in which is "found a significant hint as to the nature of the world and its existence", as an objectification of "the same will, living and appearing in them all, whose phenomena fight with one another and tear one another to pieces." (WWR 1 p.253) This is like the alms-giver's insight in Atwell's example.

Naturalizing compassion requires the abandonment of Schopenhauer's claim that in compassion for someone's woe: "I suffer directly with him, I feel *his* woe just as I ordinarily feel my own". (BM p.143) Schopenhauer rejects Cassina's "psychological" view "that compassion arises from an instantaneous deception of the imagination" by which, in being compassionate, we believe "that we are suffering *his* pains in our person". (BM p.147) Instead, he says:

We suffer *with* him and hence in him; we feel his pain as *his*, and do not imagine that it is ours.

(BM p.147)

However, says Cartwright, that still leaves Schopenhauer claiming that "we feel another's pain" but:

It would seem that it is my immediate consciousness of pain that makes it my pain and that I cannot have an immediate consciousness of another's. Certainly, I could think of what I would feel if I were in the other's situation. I could imagine what I would feel if I were the other, or if I know the other person intimately, I might even experience something analogous to the other's experience when I imagine what this person feels, but this is a different phenomenon than feeling the other's distress in the other's body.

(Cartwright 2008 p.303)

Cartwright (2008 p.303) believes that we should reformulate Schopenhauer's claim that in compassion, "A participates immediately in B's suffering" with one which says that, "A participates imaginatively in B's suffering". Cartwright (2008 p.303-304) says that his claim is supported by the phenomenon of weeping which Schopenhauer sees as expressing "*sympathy with ourselves*", but which requires "imagination" and reveals that a person "must also necessarily be capable of affection i.e., of sympathy towards others". (WWR 1 p.377)

The metaphysical ethics of compassion claims that "every appeal to gentleness, leniency, loving-kindness, and mercy" is "a reminder of that respect in which we are all one and the same entity" (BM pp. 210-211) where "entity" refers to universal will as thing-in-itself. Young, however, believes that no "appeal to metaphysics is required" to explain the phenomenon of altruism and that the non-ego the altruist cares for is not a "non-spatio-temporal unity" but simply "a community" which is a "natural entity, a plurality of individuals." (Young 2005 p.183) Compassion is an important theme in Conrad's fiction but it appears, contrary to some interpretations by literary scholars, to be this worldly form, rather than Schopenhauer's metaphysical form.

3.

As part of the process of naturalizing compassion, we can also question Schopenhauer's claim that it is the only moral incentive. He

supports his claim with his Caius and Titus thought experiment. (BM pp.168 - 169) Each young man is passionately in love with a different girl, but each is thwarted by a rival. They both decide to murder their rivals, which they can do without being detected or even suspected. But each after an “inward struggle” abandons the plan. What prompted their respective decisions? Schopenhauer will speak for Titus, and the reader is invited to supply Caius’ reason. Schopenhauer then suggests possibilities which the reader might offer on Caius’ behalf. These include religious reasons, Kant’s categorical imperative, and thoughts from other philosophers like Wolff, Spinoza, Smith, Hutcheson etc. Schopenhauer has Titus say that when the arrangements for the murder of his rival had been made:

“I clearly saw for the first time what would really happen to him. But I was then seized with compassion and pity; I felt sorry for him; I had not the heart to do it, and could not.”

(BM p.169)

In a series of rhetorical questions Schopenhauer asks the “honest and unbiased reader”:

To which of them would he prefer to entrust his own destiny? Which of them has been restrained by the purer motive? Accordingly, where does the foundation of morality lie?

(BM p.169)

We are being prompted to answer “Titus” and “compassion”, but Atwell declines to do so. As a moral incentive he offers a principle of human rights – “My rival has a right to live, and I have no right to kill him”, which Atwell says is not based on compassion. (Atwell 1990 p.114) He also questions if trusting one’s fate to Titus would be the best choice. Atwell prefers his version of Caius, a man of principle, for although Titus was “seized” by compassion on this occasion: “On the next occasion he may be ‘seized’ by bloodthirstiness, for all one knows.” (Atwell 1990 p.115)

Atwell says that Schopenhauer could appeal to fixity of character, so that Titus’s compassionate decision demonstrated a stable character trait, but adds that our actions are determined not solely by character but by the motives which are presented to it, via the intellect and “no particular motive need always occur to one, that is, one’s intellect”. (Atwell 1990 p.115) Atwell is correct and in his theory of action Schopenhauer was at pains to emphasize the importance not only of the character and motives but also the intellect, as “the *medium of motives*”. (FW p.89) If we do not cognize a motive we cannot act on it:

Thus in identical circumstances, a human being’s position can in fact be quite different the second time from what it was the first, if in the meantime he has been able correctly and fully to understand those circumstances. In this way, motives by which he was previously unaffected now have an effect on him.

(FW p.46)

Even if compassion was the predominant part of Titus's moral character; that would not guarantee that it always functioned in the same way. In the essay "Character" Schopenhauer uses himself as an example of this phenomenon of changeability:

The sight of others' suffering arouses, not only in different men, but in one and the same man, at one moment an inexhaustible sympathy, at another a certain satisfaction; and this satisfaction may increase until it becomes the cruellest delight in pain. I observe in myself that at one moment I regard all mankind with heartfelt pity, at another with the greatest indifference, on occasion with hatred, nay, with a positive enjoyment of their pain.

(HN p.95)

Such a fluctuation cannot be explained by a change in character; but only to a different motive being present, or to the same motive being cognized differently i.e. by a change of knowledge.

Schopenhauer attempts to address the problem by which compassion is left vulnerable to fluctuations of behaviour due to a change in motives. After listing acts which compassion will prevent us from committing, everything from annoyance to adultery, he continues: "However it is by no means necessary for compassion actually to be stirred in each individual

case, for it would often come too late.” (BM p.150) This is where moral maxims and principles, such as Schopenhauer’s “Injure no one; on the contrary, help everyone as much as you can” (BM p.69), prove their worth:

For although *principles* and abstract knowledge generally are by no means the original source or first foundation of morality, they are nevertheless indispensable to a moral course of life; they are the receptacle or reservoir which stores the habit of mind that has sprung from the fount of all morality, a habit of mind that does not flow every moment, but when the occasion for its application arises, flows along the proper channel.

(BM p.150)

In this way young Titus could stiffen his resolve not to turn murderous in the future even if he was not seized by compassion. If we questioned the use of such abstract principles, in the light of Schopenhauer’s earlier scepticism about the effectiveness of them against the passions (BM pp.75-6), Schopenhauer could point out that *his* principles (unlike Kant’s) spring “from the fount of all morality” i.e. compassion and that is what gives them their force and roots them in a person’s character.

Atwell might well have responded that this simply begs the question about whether compassion *is* the fount of all morality – the only moral incentive. In passing, though, he suggests that Titus would need more than just a collection of maxims to fall back on. In doing so he raises an important

point which again highlights the tension between worldly and salvationist elements in Schopenhauer's philosophy. What Atwell thinks Titus *really* needs, is acquired character. (Atwell 1990 p.115) Atwell turns Schopenhauer's ethics upside down by putting acquired character ahead of compassion in importance (Atwell 1990 p.123) and rejecting Schopenhauer's claim that acquired character was "of importance not so much for ethics proper as for life in the world". (WWR 1 p.307) Acquired character is a *worldly* concept. It cannot change one's character (nothing can) but, because of the greater knowledge of our individuality which it brings, it can change one's behaviour. In this respect it is like the law which, acting as a motive, "can remodel *what we do*, but not really *what we will to do*, to which alone moral worth attaches." (BM p.194) This last thought, that what we *do* does not have moral worth was developed by Schopenhauer in "On the Doctrine of the Denial of the Will-to-Live", Chapter XLVIII of the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, which reveals its inherently salvationist message. The chapter is a paean to asceticism, vegetarianism, "celibacy, voluntary poverty, humility" and denial of the will-to-live and castigates "worldliness". (WWR 2 p.607) With "complete resignation" of the will comes a "new birth" and after that "the morality or immorality of past conduct becomes a matter of indifference". (WWR 2 p.607) Salvationism sees the effort of gaining acquired character as, ultimately, pointless.

A worldly alternative to salvationism would include a naturalized form of compassion and have acquired character as a necessary adjunct. It would also not limit acts of moral worth to ones made through compassion.

Schopenhauer maintains that to say someone is *virtuous but not compassionate* or *unjust and compassionate*, are contradictions. (BM p.172) Atwell disagrees: "one can have a lot of virtues, and even be 'virtuous', without ever acting from compassion." (Atwell 1990 p.240) He cites Schopenhauer's example of the poor man who returns the rich man's lost wallet, not through fear of being caught or for personal gain, which makes it an instance of "disinterested philanthropy" and "voluntary justice". (BM p.126) This is supposed to show that the poor man must have been acting from compassion, sympathetically identifying with the rich man's sufferings, but this is "clearly wrong" says Atwell (1990 p.109): "Why not say, in short, that he acted from a sense of justice at bottom?"

Conrad's short story *Typhoon* (1903) includes an incident which fits Atwell's category of morally worthy acts which do not originate in compassion but, at bottom, simply a sense of justice. Captain MacWhirr is captain of the *Nan-Shan* a merchant vessel which has on board, below decks, a large number of Chinese coolies each of whom has with him his accumulated wages in dollars. In the ensuing typhoon the coolies' sea-chests are smashed open and the dollars scattered in the hold. A mass brawl ensues. The first mate Jukes advises letting the coolies "fight it out amongst themselves" (T p.72) but MacWhirr orders that the fight is stopped and the dollars gathered up. The ship survives and before it reaches port MacWhirr decides that since there was no way of telling which dollars belonged to whom, self-assessment would lead to lies. Since all the coolies had worked in the same place for the same length of time; he "would be doing the fair

thing by them” by sharing it equally among them. (T p.73) His action is not prompted by pity for the coolies as fellow-sufferers but simply because: “He had to do what’s fair.” (T p.60) His quest for fairness is supererogatory. The Chinese workers are travelling cheaply in the hold as “cargo” (T p.72), and have none of the rights passengers would. MacWhirr’s action goes beyond his duty which would have been allowed him to keep the hatches shut or hand over the money to a Chinese official to deal with, who would probably have pocketed it. (T p.73) He is not motivated by personal acclaim. The dollars will be gathered even if the ship is “going to the bottom” (T p.61) and, when she survives, he insists on keeping the affair “quiet”. (T p.71) A desire for justice, rather than compassion, appears to be MacWhirr’s motivation. “We must plan out something that would be fair to all parties”, he says. (T p.72) MacWhirr will not be swayed from his decision by the protestations of his crew, for whom his plan is time-consuming and requires extra work. His sense of fairness is unswerving. Once he sees this as the right thing to do, “a steam windlass” cannot drag the idea out of him, a crew member comments. (T p.71)

4.

Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* is the work in which he most clearly grapples with Schopenhauer’s ethics of compassion, the central ideas of which would have been available to him in the essay “On Ethics” (SE pp.195-239). In the essay Schopenhauer expresses the mordant view that:

There rests directly in every one a colossal egoism which overleaps the boundaries of justice with the greatest ease, as daily life teaches on a small scale, and history at every page on a large scale.

(SE p.209)

It is our natural “limitless egoism” that is the source of “hatred, anger, envy, rancour, and malice” which at its extreme it is like a “demon” waiting to be let loose to rage. (SE p.209) He quotes with approval Gobineau’s claim that man is the ultimately cruel animal – “*l’animal méchant par excellence*” – five times and gives examples aimed at showing that man is the only animal that “tortures for the sake of torturing” which reveals his “*devilish*” nature. (SE p.210)¹ Conrad’s fiction is his taxonomy of egoism, in its every subtle and nuanced shade. There is the self-obsessed narcissism of James Waite in *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* and the Faustian over-reaching of Kurtz, in *Heart of Darkness*. In *Lord Jim* we have Jim’s romantic “exalted egoism” (LJ p.303) and the pirate Brown’s “mad self-love”. (LJ p.287) Nostromo’s vanity is so great that he “would have preferred to die rather than deface the perfect form of his egoism.” (N p.217)

The narrator Marlow claims in *Heart of Darkness*, that: “We live, as we dream – alone”. (HD p.129) It echoes Schopenhauer’s belief that individuality brings with it isolation and a seemingly unbridgeable gap between us:

¹ Conrad uses Gobineau’s phrase in a letter of 1899 to his friend Cunninghame Graham (CL 2 p.159) which Owen Knowles (1994 p.78) argues “directly echoes” Schopenhauer’s essay.

In plain language, every man is pent up within the limits of his own consciousness, and cannot directly get beyond those limits any more than he can get beyond his own skin.

(WL p.3)

In “On Ethics” Schopenhauer maintains that egoism can reach such extremes of malice and cruelty that the nature of our essence as universal will is required to account for it:

There really resides in the heart of each of us a wild beast which only waits the opportunity to rage and rave in order to injure others, and which if they prevent it, would like to destroy them. Hence arises all the pleasure in fighting and war [...] I say it is the Will to live which, embittered more and more by the constant sorrows of existence, seeks to lighten its own suffering by causing the same to others. In this way it gradually develops genuine malice and cruelty.

(SE p.211)

The reason we do not see even more cruelty in the world is because that colossal egoism is normally kept in check by the mechanisms of society:

Man is at bottom a wild, horrible creature. We know him merely as broken in and tamed by what we call civilization, and hence the occasional outbreaks of his nature shock us. But where and when the

padlock and chain of legal order fall off and anarchy enters, then he shows himself what he is.

(SE p.207)

In *Heart of Darkness* Conrad imagines the padlock and chain taken off, and explores what unbridled egoism is capable of. Kurtz is given absolute power on a small scale, at a remote ivory trading post in Belgian-controlled Africa. Here, Marlow tells us, there is no “solid pavement under your feet”, no police, public opinion or “the holy terror of scandal and gallows” – all “little things” which make a “great difference.” (HD p.154) In the absence of restraint, Kurtz participates in “unspeakable rites” (HD p.155) and becomes a sort of deity to the local people, taking a “high seat amongst the devils of the land”. (HD p.154) He surrounds his compound with human heads on stakes, a sign of the “gratification of his various lusts”. (HD p.164) He experiences “abominable terrors” and “abominable satisfactions”. (HD p.178) Free from the restraints of European society Kurtz does not replace them with any self-imposed ones. “He had kicked himself loose of the earth”, Marlow judges. (HD p.174)

The novel has attracted an enormous amount of critical exegesis, and much of it is centred on Marlow’s description of Kurtz’s death. He dies from a debilitating illness contracted in the jungle which has left him looking as pale as the ivory he collects:

“Anything approaching the change that came over his features I have never seen before, and hope never to see again. Oh, I wasn't touched. I was fascinated. It was as though a veil had been rent. I saw on that ivory face the expression of sombre pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror – of an intense and hopeless despair. Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during that supreme moment of complete knowledge? He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision – he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath:

“The horror! The horror!”

(HD pp. 177-178)

Marlow believes Kurtz to be a “remarkable man” because: “He had something to say. He said it.” (HD p.178) We know what Kurtz said, but what did he *mean*?

What these final words signify is open to interpretation and deliberately made so by Conrad. This suggestiveness is part of the novel's overall aesthetic structure which makes it the perfect example of what Conrad thought art should aim at being:

“[A] work of art is very seldom limited to one exclusive meaning and not necessarily tending to a definite conclusion. And for this reason the nearer it approaches to art the more it acquires a symbolic character. [...] All the great creations of literature have been symbolic,

and in that way have gained in complexity, in power, in depth and in beauty.

(CL 6 p.211)

Metaphors must be, to some degree, open to paraphrase and symbols likewise must be, to some degree, explicable. Readers know Kurtz as mediated through Marlow's narrative. Cedric Watts points out that Marlow interprets Kurtz's gnomic final words in four different ways:

(1) Kurtz condemns as horrible his corrupt actions, so that his 'judgment upon the adventures of his soul on this earth' is 'an affirmation, a moral victory'. [HD p.179]

(2) Kurtz deems hateful but also desirable the temptations to which he has succumbed: the whisper has 'the strange commingling of desire and hate'. [HD p.179]

(3) Kurtz deems horrible the whole inner nature of everybody: 'no eloquence could have been so withering to one's belief in mankind as his final burst of sincerity' when his stare 'penetrat[e] all the hearts that beat in the darkness'. [HD pp.178-197]

(4) Kurtz deems horrible the whole universe: 'that wide and immense stare embracing, condemning, loathing all the universe... "The horror!"' [HD p.182]

(Watts 2002 p.215)

The parallel with the different aspects of Schopenhauer's notion of will is striking. (1) is applicable to Kurtz's character, his individual will; (3) to all humanity, the will of the species; (4) to will as thing-in-itself of the world, universal will. In (2) Kurtz reveals his continuing fascination with the darkness, rather than a total repudiation of it, what Marlow calls the "fascination of the abomination". (HD p.106) In Schopenhauerian terms we might construe (2) as showing that as objectifications of will we are (without salvation) always attached to it. The "opacity" (Watts 2002 p.215) of Kurtz's words means that Marlow's explications are amenable to both worldly and salvationist interpretations.

Taking (4) to be the primary meaning of Kurtz's words, leads to a salvationist interpretation. For example, Panagopoulos (1998 p.74) says that Conrad's "darkness" and Schopenhauer's "will" are "comparable". No doubt, but *how* comparable? His evidence for this comparison is Marlow's description of the colonial exploiters in terms of hollowness. For example, Marlow says of the Eldorado Exploration Company's general manager that "there was nothing within him". (HD p.123) Another is a "papier-mâché Mephistopheles, and it seemed to me that if I tried I could poke my forefinger through him, and would find nothing inside". (HD p.128) Panagopoulos (1998 p.74) says that this description of "an inner vacuum or absence" echoes "the transcendent nature of 'will'". The rampant will-to-live, though, is "the most real thing we know", whose kernel is the sexual impulse by which it exhibits its "one purpose", namely "*maintaining all the species*". (WWR 2 p.351) It does not resemble, at least not obviously and without further argument, a

vacuum. Since the will-to-live “presses impetuously into existence under millions of forms everywhere” (WWR 2 p.350) it seems instead to *abhor* a vacuum. The examples Panagopoulos gives are, rather, instances of a trope, extending throughout the novel, by which Marlow describes the lack of firmly-rooted moral values in terms of hollowness. By the time of his death Kurtz has become a “hollow sham” (HD 176) and the reason he finds the “voice” of the darkness “irresistibly fascinating” and why it “echoed loudly within him” is because he “was hollow at the core”. (HD 164-5)

Panagopoulos’s comparison of the darkness and universal will leads him to judge that the novel reveals the “superficiality of human virtue and its inability to combat what the novel regards as the profound viciousness at the heart of man.” (Panagopoulos 1998 p.75) But Marlow has something positive to say about human life and values. The darkness Kurtz faced, he tells us, was also faced by the Roman soldiers who invaded Britain. They encountered “death skulking in the air”, felt that “utter savagery, had closed around them”, and lived in an inhospitable climate which left them “dying like flies”. (HD p.106) But they did not succumb to savagery like Kurtz because: “They were men enough to face the darkness”. (HD 106) Kurtz is like the young Roman trader who goes to Britain to make his fortune and succumbs to the “fascination of the abomination”. (HD p.106) They all face the darkness but why do Kurtz and the trader succumb and not the legionnaires or the commander of the trireme and his crew that brought them from the Mediterranean? Differences in individual character will be the primary factor but there is an important second one: the strength gained from having a

shared code of conduct. In the case of the soldiers, military discipline which brings with it the Conradian moral values of solidarity and fidelity.

Marlow does not think the Roman invasion of Britain was admirable in itself, it was “just robbery with violence”, but:

What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea – something you can set up, and bow down before and offer a sacrifice to.

(HD 107)

The reader has to supply the unspoken idea: perhaps Rome as a civilizing influence, bringing literacy, law, a language of learning and the concept of citizenship. The idea is unselfish in that it is not about the individual's ego. The company for which Kurtz and his fellow hollow men work for claims to be working for the good of civilization but its values are a sham, a mask to cover economic rapine and individual greed – “rapacious and pitiless folly.” (HD p.117) Kurtz has been commissioned to write a report for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs but his seventeen page report is empty eloquence – “burning noble words” with no “practical hints to interrupt the magic current of phrases” – the real values of Kurtz and the trading operation are revealed in his scrawled footnote – “Exterminate all the brutes!” (HD 155) Conrad suggests that one way in which we can resist the darkness is if we have *internalized* restraint in the form of a set of communal

values. In circumstances where external restraints have broken down we can carry them within us, wherever we are. Kurtz has no such shared, solidly grounded values to sustain him. Instead, he is capable of acquiring any value and then using it in the service of his extreme egoism for his personal advancement. Marlow discovers that Kurtz was a journalist but could have been a success in politics, without caring for which party: "He had faith – don't you see? – he had faith. He could get himself to believe anything – anything." (HD 181) A man who can do that really believes in nothing, except himself.

Without communal values a person is thrown back upon their own resources. Panagopoulos claims that:

In Heart of Darkness all the ennobling and virtuous aspects of man are regarded as mere illusions, "rags that would fly off at the first good shake".

(Panagopoulos 1998 p.75)

The work does not suggest that this is true of *all* such moral aspects. Conrad was a sceptic about moral absolutism, that a single principle, either egoism or altruism could *by itself* solve all our moral problems:

The only indisputable truth of life is our ignorance. Besides this there is nothing evident, nothing absolute, nothing uncontradicted; there is

no principle, no instinct no impulse that can stand alone at the beginning of things and look confidently to the end.

(CL 1 p.348)

Such scepticism is not the same as nihilism, nor does it involve an appeal to a transcendental or metaphysically grounded moral principle. Instead it is something which makes Conrad one of “the leading pioneers of moral thinking in fiction” says Najder (1997 p.194) who explored the “idea of an autonomous morality, man-created, secular and related to social life”. We can see this if we look at the passage from which Panagopoulos extracts Marlow’s words. It comes as Marlow watches and listens to Kurtz’s native followers, dancing, chanting in a rite of “incomprehensible frenzy” which is disturbing yet appealing, suggesting a “remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar”. (HD p.139) He continues:

Let the fool gape and shudder – the man knows, and can look on without a wink. But he must at least be as much of a man as these on the shore. He must meet that truth with his own true stuff – with his own inborn strength. Principles won't do. Acquisitions, clothes, pretty rags – rags that would fly off at the first good shake. No; you want a deliberate belief. An appeal to me in this fiendish row – is there? Very well; I hear; I admit, but I have a voice, too, and for good or evil mine is the speech that cannot be silenced.

(HD pp. 139-140)

Marlow is not saying, as Panagopoulos claims, that virtues are “mere illusions” but instead, that values which are not genuine, grounded in our character, firmly entrenched in our way of life and fully internalized are useless. They are shams, clothes worn to disguise moral nakedness and will not sustain us through the first moral crisis we face. Kurtz adopts values and can change them like changing a suit. Kurtz’s young Russian disciple looks like a harlequin dressed in “parti-coloured rags” (HD 161) metonymy for the shreds of Kurtz’s philosophy. Stripped of his finery Kurtz has no “true stuff”, he is hollow. Where Marlow’s voice expresses his inner nature, Kurtz’s voice intones whatever set of values he is espousing at the time, adopted to satisfy his ego. In terms of true stuff there is nothing – “He was very little more than a voice” (HD p.153) – and when he dies: “The voice had gone. What else had been there?” (HD p.178) When society’s restraints are taken away Kurtz is thrown back on his own internalized restraints, but he has none. Kurtz lacks “restraint” (HD p.164); he is “a soul that knew no restraint, no faith”. (HD p.174) Marlow’s “very second-rate” native helmsman (HD p.156) dies because instead of keeping at the wheel, doing his duty, he wanted to take part in the confused gunfight on deck. The helmsman was not a trained merchantman so that he has never internalized the restraining code of seamanship. Although he and Marlow had a “kind of partnership” which created “a subtle bond” (HD p.156) it was not enough to restrain him in a crisis: “He had no restraint, no restraint – just like Kurtz – a tree swayed by the wind.” (HD 156)

Watt rejects nihilistic interpretations of the novel. He argues that “work and restraint”, and the “stubborn energy and responsibility of his daily activities” are Marlow’s defences against a “darkness” which neither he nor Conrad found “irresistible.” (Watt 1979 pp. 252-253) The importance of work in our lives once again connects Conrad with the worldly aspect of Schopenhauer’s philosophy. In §17 of *Counsels and Maxims* Schopenhauer acknowledged the satisfaction making something, “a book or a basket”, can give us:

There is a direct pleasure in seeing work grow under one's hands day by day, until at last it is finished. This is the pleasure attaching to a work of art or a manuscript, or even mere manual labour; and, of course, the higher the work, the greater pleasure it will give.

(CM p.59)

In a letter of 1895 (CL 1 pp. 232-233) Conrad expressed a similar sentiment: “I have arrived at the conclusion that there lies the sole chance of happiness. In a task accomplished, in an obstacle overcome – no matter what task, no matter what obstacle.” Schopenhauer also links work with acquired character. Work can be a way of coming to know which are “our good qualities and strong points as well as our defects and weaknesses” (WWR 1 p.307) If we are working at something we are good at, which is an expression of our character, then we will be in an “atmosphere” in which we can flourish – “every man is happy only in an atmosphere suitable to him. For example,

not everyone can breathe the atmosphere of a court.” (WWR 1 p.304) This connection of work and character is expressed by Marlow who says that he does not believe that work *in itself* is meritorious, but instead its ability to reveal something important about one’s character:

I don’t like work – no man does – but I like what is in the work, – the chance to find yourself. Your own reality – for yourself, not for others – what no other man can ever know. They can only see the mere show and can never tell what it really means.

(HD p.131)

The many hours of “hard work” he spends getting “the battered, twisted, ruined, tin-pot steamboat” fit to journey up the Congo makes him love the old vessel, for: “She had given me a chance to come out a bit – to find out what I could do.” (HD p.131) One of the things which led Marlow to call Kurtz a “hollow sham” was the latter’s attitude to work. Kurtz’s cousin tells Marlow that the man was “essentially a great musician”, whereas Marlow takes Kurtz to be “a painter who wrote for the papers” (HD p.180). A former journalistic colleague of Kurtz tells Marlow that Kurtz’s real vocation was politics. Marlow asks for which party, to which the reply is “Any party” (HD 181) – which neatly captures Kurtz’s moral hollowness. Finally, Marlow confesses that: “I am unable to say what was Kurtz’s profession, whether he ever had any – which was the greatest of his talents.” (HD p.180) The last words are an

ironic sting in the tail, as is Marlow's acerbic claim that Kurtz was a "universal genius". (HD p.181)

If in Watts' list of interpretations of Kurtz's final words we prefer (1) rather than (4); then his character becomes the focus of the story. Kurtz's path is seen as tracing an arc from self-ignorance, through denial of the source of his deeds, attempts to shift the blame (it's the fault of the universe) and implicate mankind (we're all as bad as each other) to self-knowledge and an acceptance of responsibility for this actions. This acceptance is Kurtz's "moral victory". This reading is in line with Schopenhauer's worldly claim in *Counsels and Maxims* §12, that:

If we have made obvious mistakes, we should not try, as we generally do, to gloss them over, or to find something to excuse or extenuate them; we should admit to ourselves that we have committed faults, and open our eyes wide to all their enormity, in order that we may firmly resolve to avoid them in time to come.

(CM p.50)

We will not avoid them by changing our character, that is impossible, but through acquired character, the self-knowledge which will allow us to avoid getting into situations where the (dark) dispositional elements of our character can manifest themselves. Kurtz's self-knowledge comes only at the moment of death. For those to whom it arrives earlier, Schopenhauer makes clear that shouldering responsibility, and considering how those deeds "might

have been avoided” is “a salutary form of self-discipline, which will make us wiser and better men for the future.” (CM pp. 49-50) I favour this worldly interpretation of the novel which places emphasis on individual character and self-understanding, which are the leading themes in Conrad’s fiction.

5.

Conrad believed that compassion is a moral virtue but he does not implicitly endorse Schopenhauer’s metaphysically-grounded ethics of compassion. Compassion in *Heart of Darkness* seems to be of the naturalized, worldly variety. Young (2005 p.183) says that the altruistic person cares for other people as fellow members of “a community”. In Conrad’s fiction this sense of community is often embodied in the “shipboard community”:

Conrad's conception of the shipboard community as an extended family in which each man's place within the hierarchy defines his duties and responsibilities [...] affirms the values of family and personal relations, while placing commitment to community on other than materialist terms.

(Schwarz 1997 p.567)

Conrad’s communities had to be ones which, for him, were definite and concrete – one’s family, ship, or country – not abstractions. Marlow sees

himself as one of the workers but not “one of the Workers, with a capital – you know.” (HD p.113) Conrad would have agreed with Schopenhauer’s claim (BM p.212): “Whoever dies for his country has freed himself from the delusion that restricts existence to his own person”, minus its metaphysical implication and interpreted in a worldly way, as meaning that in self-sacrifice I discover that there can be something more important to me than my own welfare. Conrad was clear that “Abnegation – self-sacrifice means something.” (CL 2 p.159) ¹ To mean something, though, self-sacrifice had to be something definite, not to an abstraction:

A definite first principle is needed. If the idea of nationhood brings suffering and its service brings death, that is always worth more than service to the ghosts of a dead eloquence – precisely because the eloquence is dead or disembodied.

(CL 2 pp.160-161)

The link with *Heart of Darkness* is obvious, both Kurtz’s eloquence and internationalism are emphasized. Conrad is at pains not to give Kurtz a clearly defined nationality – “All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz”. (HD p.154) His report to the “International Society for the Suppression of

¹ There are many such instances of self-sacrifice in Conrad’s fiction. For example, in *The Rover*, set in the Napoleonic Wars, the retired gunner Jean Peyrol goes back to sea (and certain death) for a final mission in which he sacrifices himself for France, in a gesture which, the English officer who orders his death says, “suggested a more than common devotion to duty and a spirit of daring defiance.” (R p.194) In *The Rescue* Jorgenson deliberately blows up the heavily armed beached ship *The Emma* – with himself on board – to prevent the enemies of his friend Tom Lingard gaining control of it; thus saving Lingard’s life and those of many others.

Savage Customs” which Marlow reads and finds, is “eloquent, vibrating with eloquence” but beneath “his magnificent eloquence” Kurtz is “hollow at the core” because “there was something wanting in him”. (HD pp.164-165) This is the “definite first principle” Conrad refers to, something which Kurtz lacks making him metaphorically disembodied: “He was very little more than a voice.” (HD p.153)

Given Conrad’s scepticism about abstractions, and how that scepticism appears as an important theme in *Heart of Darkness*, I find it difficult to believe that the work implicitly endorses Schopenhauer’s ethics of compassion, or the metaphysics of will, which is its foundation. Marlow is compassionate throughout the novel, but there is no suggestion that he does so through a metaphysically-grounded insight, of the sort Panagopoulos quotes from Schopenhauer: “Himself, his will, he recognizes in every creature, and hence in the sufferer also.” (WWR 1 p.373) There is no evidence in the novel for Panagopoulos’s claim (1998 p.104), that Marlow “perceived the victim and tormenter within his being”. Marlow shows no sign of believing that, at some profound level, he and Kurtz – indeed he and every one else – is *one*, metaphysically identical. Marlow’s actions can be explained by a worldly, practical sense of compassion like the naturalized form Cartwright argues for, which does not demand that someone “participates immediately” in another’s suffering but only “participates imaginatively”.

This imaginative participation is sufficient to account for the claim of “distant kinship” Marlow feels with his native steersman at the moment of the

man's death. (HD p.156) Despite our individual differences we can recognize that other people have basic emotions, desires, hopes and fears *similar* to ours. Anyone not hopelessly bigoted will understand that this applies to people of different cultures and times. Marlow demonstrates this in the "remote kinship" he feels with the sight and sound of the wild native revellers (HD p.139) and his connecting the Congo in Victorian times with the Thames in Roman times, which has also "been one of the dark places of the earth." (HD p.105) If Conrad's use of compassion is limited to its practical intersubjective sense then there is nothing exclusively Schopenhauerian about it. After all, Rousseau, before Schopenhauer, had proposed compassion as "the only natural virtue" which comes "before any kind of reflection" and which is the foundation of "generosity", "clemency" and "humanity". (Rousseau 1993 pp. 73-75) Schopenhauer quotes this passage – from *A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* – in full and calls Rousseau "the greatest moralist of modern times." (BM pp. 183-185) What makes compassion *Schopenhauerian* compassion is its metaphysical foundation. Madden (1999 p.49) claims that Schopenhauer's ethics of compassion provide "central elements of the moral structure" of the novel but he never mentions the metaphysical basis which is what is original and distinctive about Schopenhauer's account. Schopenhauer believed that compassion's power and moral traction in the everyday world was derived from the metaphysical unity of all things at the level of will as the thing-in-itself. This explained how disinterested acts of benevolence, which are mysterious, given our natural

egoism, are possible and allowed him to dispose of previous explanations as “fictions”. (SE p.216)

6.

Crucial to our understanding of what sort of compassion is at work in *Heart of Darkness* is an incident which Marlow considers to be an “unfathomable enigma”. (HD p.146) Forming part of the native crew of the steamboat, which he captains on his Congo journey, is a group of cannibal tribesman. They have been allowed to bring on board supplies of hippo meat but it rots and the smell is so bad that the passengers, company employees, throw it overboard. The company pays the cannibals in brass wire tokens to exchange for food at friendly riverside villages, but there are none. The cannibals are starving. They outnumber the white men thirty to five and could easily overwhelm them. They had, says Marlow “no earthly reason for any kind of scruple” (HD p.146) but they do not attack them. What is it that restrains them? If it were metaphysical compassion then the cannibals would recognize – not reflectively but intuitively – that they were, in a profound way, identical with the white crew. That they, who are being starved, exploited and fobbed off with worthless payments for their work, are one and the same with their exploiters – tormented and tormentor are one. It would, therefore, be an example of “practical mysticism” (BM p.212) which restrains them. Let us consider the evidence for such an interpretation.

In the essay "Character" Schopenhauer sets out the possible sources of moral restraint:

If a man feels inclined to commit a bad action and refrains, he is kept back either (1) by fear of punishment or vengeance; or (2) by superstition in other words, fear of punishment in a future life; or (3) by the feeling of sympathy, including general charity; or (4) by the feeling of honour, in other words, the fear of shame; or (5) by the feeling of justice, that is, an objective attachment to fidelity and good-faith, coupled with a resolve to hold them sacred, because they are the foundation of all free intercourse between man and man, and therefore often of advantage to himself as well. This last thought, not indeed as a thought, but as a mere feeling, influences people very frequently.

(HN p.97)

All but (3) are for Schopenhauer, not moral responses, but self-interested ones. It is tempting to believe that Conrad had this passage in mind when he wrote the following one describing Marlow's catalogue of possible solutions, to the enigma of the cannibals' behaviour, since it is similar in form and content:

Restraint! What possible restraint? Was it superstition, disgust, patience, fear – or some kind of primitive honour? No fear can stand up to hunger, no patience can wear it out, disgust simply does not

exist where hunger is; and as to superstition, beliefs, and what you may call principles, they are less than chaff in a breeze. Don't you know the devilry of lingering starvation, its exasperating torment, its black thoughts, its sombre and brooding ferocity? Well, I do. It takes a man all his inborn strength to fight hunger properly.

(HD pp. 145-146)

Marlow rejects Schopenhauer's options (1) fear (2) superstition and (4) honour. He never mentions (3) sympathy. The salvationist could claim that while it *is* the solution to the enigma, Marlow is unable to see it. However, the idea that the cannibals feel compassion or sympathy for their white employers is implausible. In metaphysical compassion the compassionate person feels the woe of the sufferer "just as I ordinarily feel my own". (BM p.143) The white crew are well supplied and fed – they have no woe for the cannibals to sympathetically feel. Yes they have, the salvationist replies, the common woe of existence! But this begs the question in favour of salvationism – the view that existence is something that would be better not to have been – and there's no sign that the cannibals feel this way.

Compassion, at least of the metaphysical type, can be eliminated as a motive for their restraint. If this is the case then, for Schopenhauer, there is nothing moral about their restraint. We can infer from the importance Marlow places on this issue, and the vehemence of its expression, that Conrad does not agree – that their *restraint* involves the exercise of a moral virtue. Marlow thinks the episode significant. The cannibals are "big powerful men", free

from external restraint and beset by “the gnawing devils of hunger”. (HD p.145) “I would just as soon have expected restraint from a hyena prowling amongst the corpses of a battlefield,” Marlow concludes (HD p.146) echoing the claim in “On Ethics” that “man yields in cruelty and pitilessness to no tiger and no hyena.” (SE p.207) However, there is still the possibility which we have not considered – that the cannibals were restrained by a form of *worldly* compassion. They might, in the way Cartwright suggests, have put themselves imaginatively in the place of the white men and, while planning to kill and eat them, been overcome by compassion. That does not paint a convincing picture of these cannibal warriors. Such a psychological process would seem to lead to abjuring cannibalism altogether, something the cannibals show no sign of wanting to do. When the white men ponder what to do about the natives concealed in the dense forest, whom they believe will attack them, the chief of the cannibals tells Marlow what *his* tactic would be:

‘Catch ‘im,’ he snapped, with a bloodshot widening of his eyes and a flash of sharp teeth – ‘catch ‘im. Give ‘im to us.’ ‘To you, eh?’ I asked; ‘what would you do with them?’ ‘Eat ‘im!’ he said curtly, and, leaning his elbow on the rail, looked out into the fog in a dignified and profoundly pensive attitude. I would no doubt have been properly horrified, had it not occurred to me that he and his chaps must be very hungry: that they must have been growing increasingly hungry for at least this month past.

(HD p.144)

Compassion, not even worldly compassion, can be *that* selective; applying only to the white men but not to the men in the jungle.

That leaves (5) justice, which at first appears unpromising since Marlow has dismissed “principles”; and we might assume that justice is one. However, in the relevant passage from the essay “Character” (HN p.97) Schopenhauer refers to justice not as an abstract concept or a Kantian maxim, but as a “mere feeling”. He also describes it as “an objective attachment to fidelity and good-faith”. Fidelity was a moral touchstone for Conrad. When recalling his career as a seaman in the merchant navy, he gave “simple fidelity” to the “tradition of sea-craft” as the principle which, in the absence of an “outward cohesive force” was able to weld together a “loose agglomeration of individuals” into a body of men able to withstand “greedy selfishness” and the “subtle dialectics of revolt and fear”. (NLL p.145) The values remain unarticulated “unexpressed standards” (NLL p.145) but they sustain the men against the sea, which Conrad describes in terms which recall the novel’s darkness: “endless, boundless, persistent” and the “greatest scene of potential terror, a devouring enigma of space”. (NLL p.145) They were able to face the sea as the Roman soldiers faced the darkness. Both groups were “workers engaged in an occupation in which men have to depend upon each other” and this “raises them, so to speak, above the frailties of their dead selves.” (NLL p.145) The other important factor for Conrad is that such collective values must be internalized to be effective, and doing that requires them to cohere with a person’s inner

character; only then can they be an expression of his own “true stuff” rather than false principle and acquisitions. (HD p.139) Clearly the principle of restraint the cannibals possess is of this kind, it does not fly off when faced with the torment of hunger.

It may seem an interpretative leap from the merchant marine to the cannibals but, to an outsider, the restraining moral force of sea-craft would appear “very mysterious”. (HD p.145) The cannibals are hard-working, efficient, disciplined and have a leader. When the boat is attacked they don’t panic like the native helmsman and the white company men: they are “alert” and “quiet” and their headman is “dignified”. (HD p.144) They also have a contract with the company and seem determined to keep their part of the bargain. Why doesn’t Marlow see the parallel between the merchant marine and the collective ethic of the cannibals? After all, he tries to view them “as you would on any human being, with a curiosity of their impulses, motives, capacities, weaknesses, when brought to the test of an inexorable physical necessity”. (HD p.145) Marlow succeeds in this to an extent unmatched by any of the other white men on board, or by Kurtz with his desire to “exterminate all the brutes”. Even so, one must not forget how utterly strange they would be to a late Victorian Englishman. The extent of Marlow’s insight is a tribute to his humanity and perspicuity. Second, it is central to Conrad’s aesthetic – suggestive not explicit, aiming at the symbolic – to leave interpretative room for the reader and invite us to make connections that his characters cannot.

There is a parallel to the example of the cannibals in *Lord Jim*, written a year after *Heart of Darkness*. When they fear their ship is about to sink, the white members of the *Patna* crew desert her and her eight hundred passengers, but the two Malay steersmen remain at their post in the face of what appears to be imminent death. In the Malays, unlike the white crew, adherence to values of the craft-of-the-sea, and their sense of duty, are so strongly entrenched that they would not seriously consider deserting their posts. Their principles are not ones which fly off at the first good shake.

7.

Conrad's fiction suggests that while compassion is a virtue it is one which, by itself, is inadequate in dealing with the moral problems we face. Salvationism sees the world as a global penal colony. (SP p.27) While we are in it, Schopenhauer says, we should adopt a line from Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* (Act V scene iv) as our motto: "*Pardon's the word to all!*" (SP p.29) Since tormentor and tormented are, metaphysically, one and the same entity, universal will: "Boundless compassion for all living things is the firmest and surest guarantee of pure moral conduct". (BM p.172) Schopenhauer, when not in the grip of salvationism, makes it clear through many examples that compassion is aimed at the suffering – the *tormented* not the tormentor. But ultimately, given his metaphysics, the slaves, whose plight he eloquently presents in the essays "On Ethics", and the slave-traders, whom he lambasts, are superficially different – but profoundly the same.

The metaphysical form of compassion sees all instances of self-sacrifice, which is the practical demonstration of compassion, as being virtuous. This led Atwell to claim that:

Schopenhauer has made the serious error of divorcing moral worth from what has worth. He fails to see that the moral worth of an action depends in part on the value of what it is meant to bring about. And whether another person's well-being is worth promoting depends largely on what his well-being amounts to and what its worth is.

(Atwell 1990 p.112)

Something like Atwell's sentiment appears in the worldly aspect of Schopenhauer's philosophy, expressed in his essays. Schopenhauer said that if someone commits an offence then, given the incorrigibility of innate character that person "must always do the same thing under like circumstances" (CM p.85) Instead of universal forgiveness or boundless compassion, Schopenhauer warns that: "To forgive and forget means to throw away dearly bought experience." (CM p.85) ¹

We have seen Schopenhauer recognizing, and offering himself as an example, of how sympathy can fluctuate widely on different occasions in the same person. Conrad may have had something like this thought in mind when he wrote that sympathy, "is, we must admit, a very fluctuating, unprincipled emotion". (NLL p.10) Now it may be objected that Schopenhauer

¹ This sounds more like Schopenhauer himself who "could hold a grudge like an elephant that is said never to forget". (Cartwright 2010 p.484)

saw compassion not as an emotion but as an “intuitive apprehension”. (BM p.121) However, there is also the affective element of compassion; the “deep emotion and delight that is felt when we hear of, still more when we see, and most of all when we do a noble deed”. (BM p.211) Conrad’s main concern is not with compassion itself but with the *affective experience* of compassion. There is, his fiction suggests, inherent in this state the danger of people performing compassionate deeds primarily to experience this “deep emotion and delight”. Pugmire describes processes like this as a type of sentimentality, in which:

Replacing the thought of what I was responding to by the thought of my response to it places me at one remove from the world as it is, a move towards withdrawal to the world of my own imaginings and sentiment.

(Pugmire 2005 p.109)

In Conrad’s *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* most of the crew become addicted to this form of sentimental sympathy, although they began with expressions of genuine compassion. The shipboard community, its discipline and the men’s fidelity to the craft of the sea is almost destroyed by the crew’s pity for two newcomers to the crew: the black sailor James Waite, who claims to be mortally ill, but may be shamming, and the malingering, barrack-room lawyer Donkin, whom the narrator calls ironically a “sympathetic and deserving creature” who does not share the crew’s “austere servitude of the sea”. (NN

p.6) Both men begin as recipients of genuine compassion but after a time they are only superficially the objects of the crew's pity. The real object is their pleasure in experiencing the emotion itself:

The gust of their benevolence sent a wave of sentimental pity through their doubting hearts. They were touched by their own readiness to alleviate a shipmate's misery.

(NN p.7)

Conrad shows acute psychological insight into the labyrinths of self-deception in the crew's attitude to these two men: "They were touched by their own readiness to alleviate a shipmate's misery." (NN p.7) Is Waite dying? "Was he a reality – or was he a sham – this ever-expected visitor of Jimmy's" the narrator asks. (NN p.22) Waite does die but not before – as the object of his own seemingly boundless *self*-pity – he and Donkin infect the crew: "Falsehood triumphed. It triumphed through doubt, through stupidity, through pity, through sentimentalism." (NN p.85) Waite becomes fetishized and his cabin turned into a "silver shrine" and he a "black idol, reclining stiffly under a blanket, blinked its weary eyes and received our homage." (NN p.64) By indulging this sentimentalized form of sympathy the crew temporarily abandon their fidelity to the values inherent in the craft of the sea, indulging in stealing, fighting, and coming close to mutiny: "They were forgetting their toil, they were forgetting themselves." (NN p.20) Their compassion for Waite is morally over-ripe, "tender, complex, excessively decadent". (NN p.85)

Now it can be objected that in this case the crew were not being compassionate, in Schopenhauer's sense, since their motive was primarily egoistic. Their acts were, therefore, of no moral worth, and so this is not a pertinent criticism of the ethics of compassion. Conrad's point here is not to object to the worth of compassion as such, but to the difficulty involved not only in ensuring that the object of compassion is an apt one – deserving of it – but also the danger of corruption for the compassionate person who experiences this powerful and potentially intoxicating feeling.

Misplaced compassion, foolishly bestowed on the undeserving, can lead to disaster, Conrad suggests. The prime example occurs in *Lord Jim* – which will be examined in detail in the next chapter – where such an error by Jim leads to the slaughter of innocent people by Gentleman Brown. Gaining acquired character involves learning from our mistakes which include our mistaken estimation of other people. If we do not learn then we pay the penalty, as Conrad demonstrates in *Freya of the Seven Isles*. Jasper Allen's brig the *Bonita* is wrecked by his rival Heemskirk who is given the pretext to seize it by the action of the mate Schultz who has stolen and sold the brig's firearms to fund his drinking – technically gun-running. Schultz's reputation is well-known; the narrator had warned Jasper that Schultz has stolen "the stores of every ship he has ever been in". (TLS p.151) Jasper still employs him – from "ready compassion". (TLS p.202) Schultz's thieving is a result of his own ill-directed compassion; when drunk he becomes "charitable" and "drops his money all over the place, or else distributes the lot around; gives it to any one who will take it" (TLS pp.151-152) and then has to steal to

continue this cycle. Compassion which is not connected to the qualities of steadfastness, resolution and self-knowledge, which is part of acquired character, is portrayed as being not only practically useless, but also potentially corrupting.

The clearest example of Conrad using a worldly form of Schopenhauerian compassion comes in *Chance*. Marlow is full of praise for Mrs Fyne when she comforts the fifteen-year-old heiress Flora de Barral for her “brutally murdered childhood” at the hands of a scheming governess. (C p.107) Marlow does not care for Mrs Fyne but judges that her “patient immobility” by Flora’s bedside in a night-long vigil “did infinite honour to her humanity”, adding:

That vigil must have been the more trying because I could see very well that at no time did she think the victim particularly charming or sympathetic. It was a manifestation of pure compassion, of compassion in itself, so to speak, not many women would have been capable of displaying with that unflinching steadiness.

(C p.107)

This pure compassion is very different from that exhibited by the crew of the *Narcissus*, but it does not require Schopenhauer’s metaphysics, only Cartwright’s form of imaginative compassion. It would be easy for Mrs Fyne to imaginatively participate in Flora’s suffering since, as a child, she was tyrannized by her father, an emotional bully from whose home she escaped

through marriage to Fyne. Despite the purity of this response to Flora's suffering, Mrs Fyne also exhibits the type of fluctuating capacity for compassion which Schopenhauer and Conrad were aware of. Initially the plight of Flora, who is made penniless and homeless when her father is jailed for fraud, was "irresistible". (HD p.143) But when, to escape from this plight, Flora agrees to marry Mrs Fyne's brother Roderick Anthony, the sympathy vanishes and Mrs Fyne presents an "implacable front" to Flora. Her change of heart is due to her sense of "proprietaryship" for her brother; she "had not much use" for him but does not want to see him "annexed" by Flora. (HD p.143) It demonstrates the point made by Atwell that when a new motive appears – in this case Flora's romance with Mrs Fyne's brother – compassion may disappear.

Finally, Conrad draws attention to what happens to compassion when it becomes "immoderate". (SA p.124) Salvationism's boundless compassion can metamorphose into the "convulsive sympathy" felt by the mentally retarded Stevie in *The Secret Agent*. Moved by the plight of a cabman and his horse:

He could say nothing; for the tenderness to all pain and all misery, the desire to make the horse happy and the cabman happy, had reached the point of a bizarre longing to take them to bed with him.

(SA p.123)

This deranged form of pity has an equally dark side – “Stevie ended by turning vicious”:

The tenderness of his universal charity had two phases as indissolubly joined and connected as the reverse and obverse sides of a medal. The anguish of immoderate compassion was succeeded by the pain of an innocent but pitiless rage.

(SA p.124)

Schopenhauer warned that: “Every human perfection is akin to a fault into which it threatens to pass over”. (SE p.204) Conrad’s fiction shows that he agreed but went further than Schopenhauer, by applying that caveat to compassion as well. ¹

¹ In the figure of Stevie, Conrad may be expressing his suspicion about an aspect of Schopenhauer’s ethics, which Young identifies as a “tendency to picture the person of real virtue as a kind of simpleton, a holy fool, someone who never reflects, always acts intuitively”, and that could actually involve “a failure of virtue” where a moral dilemma requires us to think “carefully about what action to take.” (Young 2005 p.249)

CHAPTER 3

LORD JIM: CHARACTER IN ACTION

1.

Lord Jim (1900) develops Conrad's exploration of character in ways suggested by Schopenhauer's philosophy, especially the concept of repentance. The young Englishman Jim, whose surname we never learn, is the son of a parson and, as a child weaned on adventure stories, fancies he has a calling for the sea. The first four chapters, told by an omniscient narrator, take him from childhood through an unhappy time as a merchant seaman aboard a British vessel, to his present position as a water-clerk, touting for trade on behalf of ships' chandlers. We learn that Jim has been forced to earn his living this way because of an incident that happened while he was first mate aboard the *Patna*, a ramshackle vessel overcrowded with eight hundred Muslim passengers on their way to Mecca. He is facing a maritime inquiry over the incident. From Chapter V onwards the story is told by Marlow, who was present at the inquiry. Marlow is our narrator, guide and amateur detective who pieces together from Jim, and others, the events of the young man's life and death. The novel is a dazzling literary display from Conrad, with its complex shifting time-frames, but one wholly suited to the task of connecting the surface of a life, Jim's deeds, and its depths, his inner character. Jim's transgression occurred when the *Patna* appears in imminent

danger of sinking after a collision with a submerged wreck. Jim and three other crew members abandon ship for a lifeboat. Ironically the *Patna* does not sink but is towed to safety by a French warship.

Of the deserters only Jim attends the inquiry. He is befriended by Marlow who helps him to find a series of jobs but Jim leaves them all as his notoriety follows him from port to port. Marlow enlists the help of the German merchant and retired adventurer Stein, who gives Jim the job of running a trading post on the isolated island of Patusan which is rife with political dissension and internecine warfare. Jim is supported by Stein's trusted friend Doramin, leader of the Bugis tribe. He defeats their enemy Sherif Ali and through his acts of daring is honoured as Tuan (Lord) Jim by the people of Patusan. He is helped by the mixed-race girl Jewel who becomes his wife. For two years he is the island's *de facto* leader until a murderous English pirate Gentleman Brown, with his starving crew of fourteen, land in a stolen ship and terrorizes the people. Jim decides not to fight them but allow them to leave, with their weapons. Brown reneges on his word and massacres a number of Bugis including Doramin's son, and Jim's friend, Dain Waris. Jim, who had taken responsibility for Brown's safe conduct, goes to Doramin to accept his punishment. The old man shoots him dead.

We learn of all these events as they are filtered through Marlow, with his "democratic equality of vision" who is always trying to peer beneath the surface "externals" and "incidental" factors of a person's life to discover the essential "human being". (LJ p.68) The official maritime element of the inquiry into the *Patna* incident, the "superficial how" is not what interests

Marlow since there is “no incertitude as to facts – as to the material fact” (LJ p.41), of Jim’s leap. It is the “fundamental why” of Jim’s action he pursues, since this is “the only truth worth knowing” (LJ p.41) and in their long conversations Marlow pursues “the subtle and momentous quarrel as to the true essence of life” (LJ p.67) which is beyond any court of inquiry. Just as Marlow is interested in the fundamental not superficial aspect of the *Patna* inquiry so it is Jim’s character, which Marlow tries to fathom in his narrative. Conrad saw this as one of his tasks as a writer, to reveal the “secret purposes” of his characters’ hearts, as he wrote in the “Author’s Note” to *Nostromo*. (N p.409)

Marlow confesses to the group of current and former sailors, who make up the direct audience for his narrative, and to the readers (his indirect one) that: “I wished to find some shadow of an excuse for that young fellow” (LJ p.37) for his desertion of duty aboard the *Patna*. Marlow’s “touch of personal concern” (LJ p.37) for Jim stems from two interlinked factors. First, he is a product of the same maritime training regime whose values, embedded in the “craft of the sea” (LJ p.32), Marlow both imbibed as a youth and promulgated as a man. Secondly, Jim’s appearance is “outwardly so typical” (LJ p.32) of the craft’s graduates that he becomes a synecdoche, a representative of all of them. Marlow investigates Jim’s behaviour both as an individual and as a test case for the efficacy of the craft of the sea’s system of values. Jim is thus, in an oft-repeated but subtly inflected phrase, “one of us” (LJ p.32) a member of that “body of men held together by a community of inglorious toil and by fidelity to a certain standard of conduct”. (LJ p.37) There

is tension between Marlow's sympathy with Jim and his attempt to be objective. This increases the burden on Jim who is doubly guilty of a personal lapse, a loss of individual honour, and a collective one in that he is also a representative of the craft of the sea and its values. Jim looks like an exemplar of the craft, so that his failure to uphold its values makes Marlow question his own powers of perception, since he "ought to know the right kind of looks". (LJ p.34) Jim's looks make him appear to be a "genuine sovereign" (LJ p.34) but his actions suggest that he is counterfeit. Marlow suspects that there is some "subtle unsoundness" (LJ p.65) in Jim. He must discover if there is and, if so, its nature. Marlow's intense personal feelings provide a powerful and convincing motive for his investigation and the reader never doubts that important psychological and moral issues are involved. Marlow finds "depths of horror" (LJ p.34) in the disparity between Jim's appearance, which invites trust, and his action which betrayed it. The language connects it to Marlow's narrative in *Heart of Darkness*, with its similar pattern of surface-depth imagery, and if the rhetoric appears over-emphatic we should remember that aboard ship everyone's safety, even their lives, depends on the integrity of every other crew member.

2.

Marlow would like to exculpate Jim by finding an excuse for his leap from the *Patna*. That he jumped is incontestable and, by the standards of the craft of the sea, inexcusable. Jim's loss of his mate's certificate is irrevocable:

but what of his honour and self-belief? If Jim is to be absolved then it cannot be through the superficial how but the profound why of the matter. Marlow must, somehow, prise apart Jim's deed from his character. His leap must be shown to be not truly representative of his inner nature – but an action made out-of-character. Marlow must show that Jim's leap was not characteristic; both in the general sense of being untypical, and in the Schopenhauerian sense of not being rooted in one's character. In other words, his leap must be act of which Jim, with the corrected knowledge of hindsight, can repent of. If it is an act in which Jim's intellectual freedom was compromised it would be an out-of-character deed, and by itself would not be indicative of a flaw of character. If Marlow cannot do this, then Jim's honour and his belief in his potential for heroism will be lost permanently – at least if one agrees with Schopenhauer about the fixity of character. It is clear that Marlow does since, to Jim's claim that it is possible for him, with a new job, to "begin with a clean slate", Marlow comments:

'A clean slate, did he say? As if the initial word of each our destiny were not graven in imperishable characters upon the face of a rock.'

(LJ p.134)

In his aphoristic collection *The Wisdom of Life* Schopenhauer frames the difference between characteristic and uncharacteristic deeds in terms of honour similar to the way it is used by Conrad in the novel:

The ultimate foundation of honour is the conviction that moral character is unalterable: a single bad action implies that future actions of the same kind will, under similar circumstances, also be bad.

(WL p.61)

If Jim's leap was a mistake due to a temporary lack of intellectual freedom then he will not have "tumbled from a height he would never scale again" (LJ p.82) but could reclaim his position on the personal, and moral, high ground.

Jim's decision-making power aboard the *Patna* seems to have been compromised in the ways Schopenhauer lists; by the power of "present impressions" overcoming reason (CM p.63) and intense emotional arousal. (HN p.109) When he goes below to investigate the extent of the damage to the ship his resolution to act is overwhelmed by the sight of the rotten bulkhead plates, the only thing keeping back the water, and the sensation that they bulge (LJ p.60) under his hands, as he twice tells Marlow, who says that it is "extraordinary what strains old iron will stand sometimes". (LJ p.60) Indeed, the plates held firm throughout the days it took to get the ship back to port. The vivid sensation of the plates bulging, his claim that he felt the ship "going down, down, head first under me" (LJ p.80) may be the work, in part or whole, of Jim's imagination. He has a vivid "inner life" (LJ p.69) and is a "finished artist" and a "gifted devil" with the faculty of "vision". (LJ p.70) Jim insists that he did not desert the *Patna* from a fear of death. (LJ p.63) His later actions in Patusan confirm this. Marlow agrees, but qualifies it by saying that Jim would only have been willing to face death in a "peaceful trance" and

“without added terrors”. (LJ p.63) Jim mentally visualizes all the possible terrors which could result with the combination of a sinking ship, eight hundred panicking passengers and just seven lifeboats:

‘I saw as clearly as I see you now that there was nothing I could do.

It seemed to take all life out of my limbs. I thought I might just as well stand where I was and wait.’

(LJ p.62)

Jim forgets his duty as his vision overwhelms him, although the reality would not have been “half as anguishing, appalling, and vengeful as the created terror of his imagination.” (LJ p.83) The craft of the sea does not demand fearlessness. We are all born cowards, says the stoical French Lieutenant who steered the *Patna* to safety; what matters is the way we deal with our fears. (LJ p.107) The key to it is a certain self-forgetfulness in which egoism is curbed by a moral maxim, in this case duty to stay with the ship. Attaining this state is hampered if we let our imagination run away with us. Jim’s action confirms Schopenhauer’s warning in *Counsels and Maxims* that when it comes to matters “affecting our weal or our woe”:

We should give no play to imagination here; for imagination is not judgment – it only conjures up visions, inducing an unprofitable and often very painful mood.

(CM p.51)

Jim's vision of the passengers as actually being dead – and so beyond saving – prevents action and induces in him a state of petrified “cold stone” (LJ p.70) passivity. If Jim was petrified how was he able to leap overboard? He tells Marlow that it was due to the influence of three other crew members, the captain and engineers, who had already abandoned the ship for a lifeboat:

I jumped! I told you I jumped; but I tell you they were too much for any man. It was their doing as plainly as if they had reached up with a boat-hook and pulled me over.

(LJ p.90)

Jim's excuse sounds feeble but it appeals to what Schopenhauer believed to be a powerful influence on our conduct, more powerful than “*moral instruction*”, that of “*example*” which works “either by restraining a man or by encouraging him”. (HN p.84) In the latter case “it encourages him to do what he is glad to do, but has hitherto refrained from doing from fear of danger or shame; this is example of the seductive kind.” (HN p.85) Marlow refers to the potentially corrupting “contagion of example.” (LJ p.32) Indeed, the foul-mouthed, physically repulsive German captain, the boastful but cowardly second engineer – for whom the passengers are “cattle” (LJ p.11) and “vermin” (LJ p.19) respectively – and the dipsomaniac first engineer, are examples of moral, physical and psychological degradation. When Jim

claims: “I wasn’t given half a chance – with a crew like that”, (LJ p.90) we may be inclined to agree.

The case for exculpating Jim, following the Schopenhauerian scheme, appears a strong one. Jim, young and impressionable, was given a bad example by the crew; failed to keep his imagination in check and to keep a cool head. He allowed powerful momentary impressions to overcome moral maxims, which is a fault of judgment, as is allowing the example of others to seduce one – a sign of “too little judgement” and “too little knowledge.” (HN p.85) His intellectual freedom was compromised which resulted in a deed worthy of repentance, in the light of improved knowledge and self-understanding, but which can be considered as an out-of-character action. All Jim needs, as he several times claims, is a chance for redemption. (LJ p.60) (LJ p.130) Next time he will be ready to seize the chance when it presents itself: “It is all in being ready. I wasn't; not – not then.” (LJ p.59) However, if Jim’s behaviour aboard the *Patna* was not an isolated incident, if it was discovered that he had done something very similar before, that would require us to reassess his case. Two such deeds would be indicative of the pervading dye (HN p.74) of character.

3.

In Jim’s case there is evidence that this is so. It comes in an incident which happened when Jim was a boy receiving maritime instruction on a training ship; undergoing the same training Marlow and his fellow mariners

had in their youth. Marlow is not privy to this episode but readers of the novel are, via the impersonal narrator of the early chapters. Jim reacted on the training ship in a way which suggests that his later action board the *Patna* was not out-of-character. In the earlier one there is a storm, a boat is in trouble and the crew need to be rescued. The boys, with adult leadership, are to row out in a cutter and rescue the drowning men. Jim is an important part of the team; he is first stroke, but fails to join his crewmates in the rescue, despite having adequate time to do so: "he stood still – as if confounded". (LJ p.5) He is petrified into immobility, just as when on board the *Patna*, and the cause in both cases was the same – Jim's imagination. Imagination is a mental faculty not a character trait but the use to which we put our imagination can indicate something about our character. In his account of imagination Schopenhauer said that it is a necessary condition for genius but not a sufficient one. What distinguishes the genius from the person who lacks genius but has "much imagination", is the differing use to which it imagination is put. The genius uses it "objectively" to apprehend Ideas and communicate them in art, but in the "common way", imagination is used to see things in relation to the individual will – "to build castles in the air, congenial to selfishness and to one's whim". (WWR 1 p.187) In this common way imagination is used to serve one's ego. In terms of its power, Jim's imagination is something out of the common, but it is still harnessed to his ego. His use of it indicates the weakness in Jim's character. It is not selfishness exactly but self-centredness, an excessive self-regard – a very particular type of egoism.

His desire to go to sea is not due to family tradition but after reading “a course of light holiday literature”. (LJ p.4) This is harmless enough in itself, but Jim’s intensely imaginative nature leads him to take it to a debilitating extreme. He isolates himself from the other two hundred boys, content with an imaginary world in which he is the hero, “always an example of devotion to duty”. (LJ p.5) He is daydreaming when the call to real action comes. He leaps to his feet but then stays still. Conrad emphasizes the contrast between Jim and his crewmates with a series of gerundive verbs. In his fantasies Jim is “cutting”, “swimming”, “saving” and “unflinching” but when action is called for is silent and immobile while the other boys are “streaming”, “scurrying”, and “shouting”. While the sea is “tumbling”, tethered craft “tossing” and “pitching” and the mist “driving”, Jim is motionless. (LJ p.5) The combination of an extremely vivid imagination, harnessed in the service of the ego, makes Jim see the storm as directed personally at him. (LJ p.5) Even when he is ineffective he makes *himself*, not the rescue, the focus of events. Conrad now reveals his psychological acuity in depicting our stratagems for avoiding self-knowledge and taking responsibility for our actions. Jim wants to maintain his self-image as a hero but has to reconcile it with his failure to take part in the rescue in which he was a marginal figure, stranded on the deck and subject to the captain’s gentle rebuke: ““Better luck next time. This will teach you to be smart.” (LJ p.6) Jim’s first move is a simple excuse, he was not ready – the storm had come too soon, “taking him unawares”. (LJ p.7) The second move involves downgrading the rescue since he can view the storm, once it is in the distance, as “contemptible”, full of only “spurious

menace.” (LJ p.7) The third is crucial. Genuine acts of heroism cannot be enacted as part of a team: the hero of Jim’s imagination and romantic fiction is singular, so that the real rescue can only be a “lower achievement”. (LJ p.7) It is only:

When all men flinched, then – he felt sure – he alone would know how to deal with the spurious menace of wind and seas.

(LJ p.7)

For Jim, heroism is singular not collective. In fantasy it can be clear-cut and simple, rather than mundane and messy. Conrad’s life at sea revealed to him that the real-life equivalents of Jim’s heroic rescues had no glamour. In the chapter “Initiation” in his autobiography *The Mirror of the Sea*, Conrad tells of how taking part in a dangerous rescue at sea rid him of “the illusion of tragic dignity”. (MS p.254) The fascination with the sea remained but the romantic illusions had gone: “I had become a seaman at last.” (MS p.255)

Knowledge of the training ship incident, and the insight it provides into Jim’s character would allow us, as Schopenhauer contends, to predict Jim’s future actions in similar situations:

But above and beyond this, what he will do on the occurrence of that event may be foretold from true and accurate knowledge of his character and the external circumstances under the influence of which

he will fall; and it may with complete certainty be foretold from this alone.

(HN p.76)

The *Patna* is his next opportunity but that is spurned – until it happened Jim had not been tested in his life at sea. On his previous ship he was injured in a storm by a falling spar and spent the rest of the voyage safely in his bunk where the danger, out of sight, could not stir his imagination, hypostasized by Conrad as: “Imagination, the enemy of men, the father of all terrors”. (LJ p.9) Jim finds that he has no vocation for life at sea. He visits “regions so well known to his imagination” but the experience is spoiled by the “prosaic severity” of the task, the only reward of which is “the perfect love of the work. This reward eluded him.” (LJ p.8) Reality fails to live up to his romantic fantasies. In this sense Jim never becomes a seaman. Schopenhauer’s worldly philosophy saw this romantic disillusionment as a normal phase of life, and commendable in that it was a step on the path to maturity. The youth “expects his career to be like an interesting romance; and there lies the germ of that disappointment”. (CM p.132) While disillusion is “the chief characteristic of old age” it also brings “experience, knowledge, reflection, and skill in dealing with men” which combine to give the old person “an increasingly accurate insight into the ways of the world”. (CM p.156) Conrad was a romantic and never repudiated it, but did justice to the practical demands of life as well. The latter had priority, but could be illuminated by

romance. Jim's mistake, and here Schopenhauer's view and Conrad's converge, is in trying to make reality fit his dream.

Here a plea of mitigation seems called for on Jim's behalf. Surely it is a matter of luck or at least of factors beyond his control, that he is both romantic and highly imaginative? This plea overlooks the difference Schopenhauer makes between character and behaviour. We cannot alter the first but we can modify the second. This is the (worldly) purpose of self-knowledge and acquired character, through which Jim could learn to curb his imagination and temper his romanticism. He cannot change what he is but he could modify the way he behaves. The training ship episode also requires us to modify our assessment of Jim's excuse about the moral example he had aboard the *Patna*. First there was no such negative example aboard the training ship. Second, Jim shows culpability by merely being aboard the *Patna*. Jim's had previously been a mate on a "fine ship" (LJ p.8) but after recovering from his injury he joins the *Patna* which is "eaten up with rust worse than a condemned water-tank" (LJ p.10) Jim could see her condition; that the seven lifeboats were inadequate for eight hundred passengers and that it was captained by a man whose speech was "like a gush from a sewer". (LJ p.16) Why did he sign up? While recuperating ashore he is, at first, disdainful of those seamen who, corrupted by the easy conditions for white men in the east "shuddered at the thought of hard work", and the discipline of British vessels, and whose behaviour betrays "the soft spot, the place of decay, the determination to lounge safely through existence":

But at length he found a fascination in the sight of those men, in their appearance of doing so well on such a small allowance of danger and toil. In time, beside the original disdain there grew up slowly another sentiment; and suddenly, giving up the idea of going home, he took a berth as chief mate of the *Patna*.

(LJ p.10)

It would appear that if Jim was subject to the contagion of example it was before he boarded the *Patna*. Schopenhauer notes that the effect of example brings "into prominence" both our "good and bad characteristics" but "it does not create them". (SE p.238) If Jim was attracted to men with a moral soft spot, it suggests he had an affinity with them.

Conrad has a further point to make. It is that Jim, while fascinated by the loafers, did not share their objective. His decision to join the *Patna* derives from "another sentiment". The loungers see the easy life as an end in itself, but Jim joins the *Patna* as a means to an end. Its slack regime allows him the opportunity to indulge in his fantasy life to an extent impossible aboard a reputable vessel:

At such times his thoughts would be full of valorous deeds: he loved these dreams and the success of his imaginary achievements. They were the best parts of life, its secret truth, its hidden reality. They had a gorgeous virility, the charm of vagueness, they passed before him with an heroic tread; they carried his soul away with them and made it

drunk with the divine philtre of an unbounded confidence in itself.
There was nothing he could not face.

(LJ p.15)

Except reality of course: he is now “drunk” with the “divine philtre” (LJ p.15) of his romantic daydreams. It is an intoxicant more powerful than the alcoholic first engineer’s brandy, but similarly self-administered. The hardships of disciplined seamanship are abandoned so that he can “gaze hungrily into the unattainable” but while doing so he does not see “the shadow of the coming event.” (LJ p.14)

Jim’s coming to see the crew as not being “bad chaps” (LJ p.18) arises not because he shares their viewpoint – he always considers himself superior to them – but from the passivity, both physical and moral, induced by his own romanticism. He becomes “too pleasantly languid” to maintain the effort of despising the captain. (LJ p.18) Jim carries the seed of corruption within himself, the soft spot of his own romantic egoism, his own character. Marlow, unaware of the training ship episode, has intimations of this in his conversations with Jim after the inquiry decision:

He would give himself away; he would give himself up. I could see in his glance darted into the night all his inner being carried on, projected headlong into the fanciful realm of recklessly heroic aspirations.

(LJ p.60)

The *Patna* leap was not an isolated incident, the result of a momentary lapse of judgment or an overwhelming sensory impression. It was a characteristic action and a sign of things to come. Jim several times challenges Marlow to say that someone else, including Marlow himself, would have behaved differently in his circumstances. Marlow refuses to be drawn. Firstly from reticence about judging a dangerous position from one of safety, a reticence Conrad shared. Writing about the *Titanic* disaster he said: "I would not dream of blaming a seaman for doing or omitting to do anything a person sitting in a perfectly safe and unsinkable study may think of." (NLL p.199) Secondly, agreeing with Jim would upset his attempt at being sympathetic yet maintaining a critical distance. Thirdly, there is the implied point that Marlow would not have allowed himself to be in such a position – he would not have signed up on such a ship. The *Patna* incident reveals that Jim's allegiance to the craft of the sea's fixed values was a pretence, which fooled others and him. Jim's moral identity had been fashioned with a lack of self-knowledge and with values which did not represent his true self. Despite appearances Jim was not cut out for maritime life which, said Conrad writing of his own twenty years at sea, "offers no opportunities but to those who know how to grasp them with a ready hand and an undaunted heart." (MS p.297) Readiness and steadiness only come when the values of the craft of the sea – which includes fidelity to the ship (as a metonym for those values), shipmates and any passengers in one's care – are capable of being internalized as an expression of one's character, a person's "secret truth".

To understand others one first needs to understand oneself and for Marlow this is made difficult by one's own "artful dodges to escape from the grim shadow of self-knowledge." (LJ p.58) Jim's "artless" smile may not be a self-consciously duplicitous sign of a "gigantic deception" of others, but of "a colossal unconsciousness" (LJ p.56) – a gigantic *self*-deception. What chance do we have of self-understanding if a significant part of our character is, in Marlow's image, in a realm illuminated by "crepuscular light"? (LJ p.155) This leaves plenty of opportunity for misinterpretation. Marlow's references to Jim emphasize the difficulty: his claim on Marlow is "shadowy" (LJ p.160); he is seen as if "under a cloud" (LJ p.246); he feels that he may be fated "never to see him clearly". (LJ p.175) Marlow's feat of interpretation requires that he is aware of self-deception on his own part and on the part of those who provide him with testimony about Jim. Of Brown he wonders: "how much he lied to me now – and to himself always." (LJ p.279) Marlow is working within a Schopenhauerian framework: he wants to establish whether Jim's leap was "one-off" or shows an irreparable flaw in Jim's character. If it is a flaw – what sort is it? Similar questions are asked about Patusan and an attempt made to see if both episodes reveal clear and consistently demonstrated traits in Jim's character. Lastly there is Jim's death – the fact of it is undisputed but not the interpretation of it and its connection with his character. If it is an attempt to "frame a message to the impeccable world" (LJ p.247) it is a coded one which Marlow, and we, have to crack.

4.

In *Lord Jim*, Stein echoes Hamlet in claiming that the paramount problem in life is: “How to be.” (LJ p.153) Individuals do not know how to be, what form of life to pursue, until they know who they are. This why finding the truth about ourselves, as much as we can, is so important. The butterfly collector’s analysis of the problem closely follows Schopenhauer’s thought on acquired character. Butterflies and humans have particular natures but only the former, without intellect or imagination, unerringly exhibits exactly *what it is*, its only way to be. The butterfly finds its place in the world and “sits still on it.” (LJ p.153) Human beings have their fixed characters but, before acquiring self-knowledge, believe they are capable of living in many different ways:

“We want in so many different ways to be,” he began again. “This magnificent butterfly finds a little heap of dirt and sits still on it; but man he will never on his heap of mud keep still. He want to be so, and again he want to be so. . . .” He moved his hand up, then down. . . .
 “He wants to be a saint, and he wants to be a devil – and every time he shuts his eyes he sees himself as a very fine fellow – so fine as he can never be. . . .

(LJ p.153)

There is perhaps an allusion by Conrad here to the last paragraph of “On Ethics” where Schopenhauer mocks the idea that we enter the world as “a

moral zero”, which would allow a person “as a consequence of rational reflection, to decide whether he wills to be an angel or a devil, or whatever else may lie between them”. (SE p.239) In *Counsels and Maxims* Schopenhauer says that it is imperative for each of us to discover what “his vocation really is – the part he has to play” (CM p.17) and only then can “our character and capacities show themselves in their true light” (CM p.18) and the price for not doing so, for following “false paths” (CM p.17) results in “evil and disaster” (CM p.19) and the ultimate Schopenhauerian price of pain. That, says Stein, is the “real trouble – the heart pain” which comes when “you cannot make your dream come true, for the reason that you not strong enough” or not “clever enough”. (LJ p.154) This is the same as Schopenhauer’s “humiliation”, which causes “the greatest mental suffering” (WWR 1 pp. 305-306) brought about when, through lack of self-knowledge, our abilities fail to meet our aspirations. This is something Conrad recognized, that one must not try to “lift beyond your strength” – which demands that we know what it is – and that: “It is more manful to recognise one’s limitations than to ignore them; and he has the larger wisdom who knows when to desist”. (CL 1 p.340)

To acquire character we need to understand ourselves and, since deeds are the mirror of the will, we need to act, engage with life – “In the destructive element immerse” (LJ p.154) says Stein, just as the worldly Schopenhauer preferred experience to the “fools’ paradise” of innocence. (HN p.119) Conrad inserts a biblical allusion into Marlow’s oft-used phrase “one of us”. It is only after Adam’s fall from innocence into experience that

God proclaims that Adam has “become as one of us, to know good and evil”. (Genesis 3:15) Jim, despite being in his early twenties, is frequently described as being like a child. Marlow finds him “as manageable as a little child” (LJ p.123); listens to him as “a small boy in trouble” (LJ p.81); the drinkers at Schomberg’s bar take to him “as a nice child” (LJ p.143); an employer, not knowing the nature of Jim’s disgrace, thinks it cannot be worse than “robbing an orchard”. (LJ p.135) When Cornelius, ousted from his trading job by Jim and plotting revenge, tells Brown that Jim “is like a little child” (LJ p.275) the implication is different and sinister. Jim is an innocent about Patusan society, its political factions and the Machiavellian intrigues they are capable of. Patusan is no Arcadia (LJ p.214) but a “rotten state” (LJ p.168) which in its “utter insecurity for life and property was the normal condition” (LJ p.165) resembles Hobbes’ state of nature. Like Hobbes’ Sovereign, Jim uses “power to make peace” (LJ p.189) but mistakenly believes that his personal exploits and charismatic presence alone secured victory. Marlow understands that the tribal chief Doramin’s authority and his warrior son Dain Waris’s “fiery enthusiasm” (LJ p.190) were necessary to Jim’s success. Ostensibly Jim’s “word decided everything” (LJ p.194) but he fails to see below the surface. He is unaware that his friend Dain Waris is being groomed by Doramin to become the eventual ruler of Patusan, (LJ p.198) as Marlow perceives. Jim thinks both the peace and his position is a permanent one, others think differently, Doramin expects him to leave the island eventually and return to his own (white) world.

Conrad's rites-of-passage novel *The Shadow Line* (1917) follows the young narrator's first voyage as captain and the title refers to the line between youth and maturity. He moves from the "enchanted garden" of youth which expects life at sea to be full of romance, through the disillusion of "boredom, of weariness, of dissatisfaction" (SL p.4), the same path as Jim takes. But after severe trials, in which his crew are stricken with malaria and the ship is becalmed in the doldrums, he reaches maturity. He finds that the values of the craft of the sea – loyalty to his crew, solidarity in their common enterprise, performing one's duty even in daunting life-threatening situations – match his inner nature. When the lives of all the ship's crew are under threat and he is under the strain of exhaustion and fear: "The seaman's instinct alone survived whole in my moral dissolution." (SL 89) As his understanding of himself, and his job, grows he feels that "a sort of composite soul, the soul of command, had whispered suddenly to mine of long days at sea and of anxious moments." (SL 43) The tradition of captaincy, and of the captain's own connection with crew and ship, are no longer considered abstractly but deeply *felt*. Passing the shadow line involves putting away adolescent romance and facing up to the exigencies of real-life. The worldly Schopenhauer expresses identical sentiments.

If we are to understand Jim we must understand his death. When Marlow said that Jim has "mastered" his fate he meant that Jim "had what he wanted" (LJ p.230) in Patusan, but this is external mastery, of circumstances, which proves to be temporary. Pondering Jim's unfinished letter, written just before his death, Marlow uses the term differently, feeling that Jim had been

“overwhelmed by his own personality – the gift of that destiny which he had done his best to master.” (LJ p.47) Here mastery means *self*-mastery gained through self-knowledge which can lead to the attainment of acquired character. Even if it were gained at the very moment of his death it would still be a victory for Jim.

5.

The test for the Conradian protagonist, and a sign of self-knowledge, is the ability to face what he or she fears, rather than shirking it. In *Typhoon* Captain MacWhirr’s “confession of faith” (T p.26) is to face the storm head on: “Face it. That’s enough for any man. Keep a cool head.” (T p.64) In *The Shadow Line* the captain must decide whether to face a dangerous area of sea – where his mad predecessor lies having committed suicide – or avoid it but risk never reaching land. “Skulking’s no good, sir”, the first mate Burns tells him “You must go for him boldly” (SL p.95) He does and Burns greets their successful passage with a “provoking” “mocking” peal of laughter to exorcize the late captain’s malign presence. (SL p.99) In *Nostromo* Dr Monygham is made “the slave of a ghost”, longing for death because he had betrayed secrets under torture, which inflicted upon him the “sort of pain which makes truth, honour, self-respect, and life itself matters of little moment.” (N p.267) He lives a half-life with years of “aimless wandering “outside the pale” of society”. (N p.225) His “immense mistrust of mankind”, expressed in “sceptical, bitter speech” (N pp.35-36) includes distrust of his

self which is, he says, “the last thing a man might be sure of.” (N p.223) He is only freed of the ghost, the memory of his torturer Father Beron, after willingly submitting himself to a similar ordeal and being able to resist.

To emerge from an encounter with one’s “ghost” individuals need a sustaining belief in something other than themselves; a belief that will ground them and provide the gravitas to withstand an assault by the dark powers of doubt and despair. It could be love or devotion to the craft of the sea, for example, which provides this sustaining power. To be effective this belief must be deep-rooted in the individual – if it is merely acquired it will “fly off at the first good shake”. (HD p.140) Such an encounter is the acid test for discovering who we are and what we believe in. If forced into such an encounter some people cannot live with the revelation. They choose the ultimate method of shirking – suicide. In *Lord Jim*, one of the assessors at Jim’s inquiry, Captain Montague Brierly escapes in this way. Like Jim his appearance belies an inner unsoundness. Aged just thirty-two Brierly is captain of the Blue Star line’s best ship the *Ossa* and is feted with awards for the sort of exploits Jim dreams. Brierly “had saved lives at sea, had rescued ships in distress” and is “acutely aware of his merits and of his rewards”. (LJ p.42) Unlike Jim he has no reason to feel shame or guilt about his actions:

He had never in his life made a mistake, never had an accident, never a mishap, never a check in his steady rise, and he seemed to be one of those lucky fellows who know nothing of indecision, much less of self-mistrust.

(LJ pp. 41-42)

He presents to the world a “surface as hard as granite. He committed suicide very soon after.” (LJ p.42) Brierly had a soft spot of moral delinquency and Jim’s error has forced him to recognize it. His “silent inquiry into his own case” is of the profound kind and runs parallel to the superficial one into Jim’s leap, and his verdict on himself is one of “unmitigated guilt”. (LJ p.43) Marlow says that Brierly “committed his reality and his sham together to the keeping of the sea” (LJ p.49) which recalls his description of Kurtz as a “hollow sham”, a man who, “despite of all the appearances of success and power”, was only “avid of lying fame, of sham distinction”. (HD p.176) Brierly’s attitude to Jim demonstrates a phenomenon Schopenhauer described in his essay “On the Sufferings of the World”, in which we are disturbed by the faults of others, because they correspond to, as yet undiscovered ones of our own:

They are faults that do not lie on the surface. But they exist down there in the depths of our nature; and should anything call them forth, they will come and show themselves, just as we now see them in others.

(SP p.29)

Brierly’s suicide is not a result of repentance, regret for deeds he has performed in his maritime career or in his private life. Brierly’s first mate

testifies to Marlow that his captain was: “Young, healthy, well off, no cares” and “wasn’t of the kind that goes mad”. (LJ p.47) Marlow says that: “I am in a position to know that it wasn't money, and it wasn't drink, and it wasn't woman.” (LJ p.43) Brierly’s verdict of “guilty” on himself seems, therefore, to be a recognition that he has in his character a disposition to act in the way that Jim did. Given their different individual characters it would require different circumstances and motives to reveal that character fault, but Brierly’s action suggests that he believed it to be a real possibility, perhaps only a matter of time, before that fault was manifested. Brierly’s immense egoism and vanity – as a captain he believes that he “was second to none” (LJ p.45) – had insulated him from self-doubt. The inquiry into Jim’s case changed that. Until then, Marlow says, Brierly’s “belief in his own splendour [...] had almost cheated life of its legitimate terrors.” (LJ p.47) Jim has experienced his own terrors aboard the *Patna* while Brierly’s terrors are those of anticipation. The man feted for the excellence of his seamanship and his “indomitable pluck” (LJ p.42) discovers that he would be capable of a fall from grace.

Brierly’s judgement on himself does not result in a turning away from life, a denial of the will to live. Schopenhauer says in his in his essay “On Suicide” that it is only an “apparent” act of self-denial but really “suicide thwarts the attainment of the highest moral aim” which is “a real release from this world of misery”. (SP pp. 47-48) The essay was available to Conrad in *Studies in Pessimism* translated by Bailey Saunders, who helpfully added this footnote:

Far from being a denial, suicide is an emphatic assertion of this will. For it is in fleeing from the pleasures, not from the sufferings of life, that this denial consists. When a man destroys his existence as an individual, he is not by any means destroying his will to live. On the contrary, he would like to live if he could do so with satisfaction to himself; if he could assert his will against the power of circumstance; but circumstance is too strong for him.

(SP p.48)

Brierly would have carried on living if he believed that his career of uninterrupted success and acclaim would continue. He cannot face the fear that it might not and so runs from it into death. When Brierly attends the final day of Jim's inquiry it is clear that he has spent the night running away in his imagination, for he "dropped into his seat looking done up, as though he had spent the night sprinting on a cinder track." (LJ p.114) This image of running links Brierly with Jim. When Jim leaves Marlow's hotel, having confided to him his experience aboard the *Patna*, Marlow says: "I heard the quick crunch-crunch of the gravel under his boots. He was running. Absolutely running, with nowhere to go to." (LJ p.112)

Jim's refusal to flee from the maritime inquiry, unlike the rest of the senior crew – "I won't shirk any of it" (LJ p.111) – is a mark of "distinction" says Marlow (LJ p.59). The inquiry is only an initial, and superficial, encounter. Jim's real test comes much later in Patusan. In the next three

years Marlow helps Jim find several jobs, at which he is successful and valued, but he runs away from every one as soon as his identity is discovered. He runs. This is shirking – but from what? He has admitted his offence and paid the price. He does not run from physical fear – a billiard room argument ends with Jim hurling the disputant out of the window. It may be that Jim inwardly fears that the incident was not an isolated one but is the sign of a permanent character flaw. Jim swears that he would “run from no man” but Marlow knows that there is a “curious exception which would hold good even for the bravest of us” (LJ p.54) – attempting to run away from oneself.

In *Under Western Eyes* Razumov betrays his fellow Russian student, the revolutionist Haldin, and afterwards wants: “To retire – simply to retire” to which his inquisitor Councillor Mikulin asks “Where to?” (UWE p.72) Razumov will find no rest, no peace until he can face up to his action, and its implications, and what it tells him about himself. Jim undergoes similar trials, Marlow decides, because:

The truth seems to be that it is impossible to lay the ghost of a fact. You can face it or shirk it – and I have come across a man or two who could wink at their familiar shades. Obviously Jim was not of the winking sort; but what I could never make up my mind about was whether his line of conduct amounted to shirking his ghost or to facing him out.

(LJ p.142)

In his three thousand mile wanderings Jim is certainly “running, with nowhere to go” (LJ p.112) as Marlow judges. Finally Marlow enlists the aid of Stein who puts Jim in charge of a remote and dangerous trading outpost on the island of Patusan. Here is the chance Jim has always wanted – but is it a chance to shirk or face the truth about himself?

Through his acts of daring on Patusan Marlow claims that Jim “achieved greatness” (LJ p.163) “greatness as genuine as any man ever achieved.” (LJ p.177) It would seem that Jim has achieved a necessary part of what it takes to acquire character – he has found his element, with an “atmosphere suitable to him” (WWR 1 p.304) where he can fulfil his “vocation”. (CM p.17) Jim always wanted to be a like a “hero in a book”. (LJ p.5) He tells Marlow that Patusan’s native people “are like people in a book”, (LJ p.189) by which he means one like his “light holiday reading” (LJ p.4) adventures. In Patusan Jim’s solitary fantasy of heroism is sustained by the people who believe in him and it can only be maintained for as long as they do so. They know nothing of Jim’s background and take him and his heroics at face value. They support, foster and embellish his exploits. It is not Jim the parson’s son they believe in but the heroic Tuan (Lord) Jim. They are the sustainers of Jim’s vision and his reality as a hero. This is the significance of the Novalis quotation Conrad used as an epigraph for the novel: “It is certain my Conviction gains infinitely, the moment another soul will believe in it.” (LJ

p.1) ¹ Such conviction accounts for Dr Monygham's rehabilitation and regenerated self-belief in *Nostramo*. He is brought back into society through the belief in his personal worth shown to him by Mrs Gould. A truly isolated individual could not be a genuine person at all for Conrad: "We exist only in so far as we hang together", says Marlow. (LJ p.162) In *Under Western Eyes* the teacher of languages judges that: "A man's real life is that accorded to him in the thoughts of other men by reason of respect or natural love." (UWE p.11)

Others must have faith in the hero; however, that collective belief reciprocally depends upon his self-belief. Self-doubt or a lapse into fallibility will break the spell. Jim's heroic second self, Lord Jim with his "Homeric" laugh and the "supernatural powers" attributed to him (LJ p.193), will vanish when their belief does. "I must stick to their belief in me to feel safe," he says. (LJ p.243) Although Lord Jim is "the work of his own hands", created by his deeds, it eventually, "falls in ruins upon his head", (LJ p.298) when the supporting, buttressing belief of the people is withdrawn. What he gains, his "greatness", is not a transferable property, he cannot take it back to the outside world. Originally Jim's purpose in coming to Patusan was: "the certitude of rehabilitation". (LJ p.180) Here he has shown "fearlessness", "readiness" for action and his achievements are "something to be proud of." (LJ p.180) If rehabilitation is taken to mean making Jim fit to return to the

¹ Conrad agreed with, and was perhaps influenced by, William James' view that: "Wherever a desired result is achieved by the co-operation of many independent persons, its existence as a fact is a pure consequence of the precursive faith in one another of those immediately concerned." (James 1897 p.24) Conrad said he found "everything Professor James ever wrote" to be "most suggestive and morally valuable." (CL 4 p.514)

outside world, then the Patusan episode fails even before Jim's downfall. "Lord Jim" the invulnerable hero can exist only in Patusan. In a moment of rare shrewdness Jim shows awareness of this. When Marlow praises his achievements he says that: "All the same you wouldn't have me aboard your own ship – hey?" (LJ p.222) In this respect Jim's decision to stay on Patusan is "shirking his ghost" for "facing him out" would involve taking his new-found confidence and experience and going back to the world. Originally he longed for a chance to prove that his *Patna* leap was a mistake – "a chance to get it all back again." (LJ p.130) But "chances are what men make of them", says Marlow. (LJ p.174) The outcome of the chance depends on the character of the person to whom it comes. Jim's chance on Patusan gives him the opportunity to achieve things "romantic beyond the wildest dreams of his boyhood" (LJ p.248) but that does not include being a hero in the outside world.

His refusal to return to the outside world is the result of his romantic egoism. Jim is a romantic, says Stein, which can be both good and bad. (LJ p.153) His romantic vision of heroism is the source of his success on Patusan but his romantic all-or-nothing attitude means that he finds the idea of rehabilitation, of going back to face the world, impossible: "This is my limit, because nothing less will do." (LJ p.242) If the outside world will not acknowledge him at his own estimation then he will stay on Patusan. Living in the world requires romanticism to be tempered, Marlow believes: "he was one of us. What business had he to be romantic?" (LJ p.162) Jim's egoism leads him to believe that the whole world cares as much about his fall from

grace as he does. Trying to fathom the reason for Brierly's suicide Marlow tells Brierly's former first officer that "it wasn't anything that would have bothered us two," and the old man agrees: "neither you nor I, sir, had ever thought so much of ourselves." (LJ p.47) That is to say, that neither man had such a high opinion of himself as Brierly nor was so self-centred, so narcissistic. Jim thinks too much of himself in both of these ways.¹ He believes that by moving from job to job he can keep his secret but even "the logs on the river know it". (LJ p.142) So does his employer who does not care, but values Jim's excellent work. (LJ p.141) Jim's "exquisite sensibilities" (LJ p.144) make him sensitive to any slight. "It is not the world who remembers," Marlow tells him, "it is you." (LJ p.171) His caring at all is a sign of Jim's fineness which makes him worthy of Marlow's interest but there is too much fineness and it is too self-regarding, "fine sensibilities, his fine feelings, his fine longings" which constitute "a sort of sublimated, idealised selfishness." (LJ p.128) On Patusan he can exercise them all without fear of hindrance: "There could be no going back for him. Those people had trusted him implicitly. Him alone! His bare word." (LJ p.194) Jim escapes from captivity at the hands of the Rajah and (with help from Jewel) an attempted assassination. Marlow, considering Jim's claim of invulnerability after these episodes, says:

¹ Brudney (1998 p.268) describes Jim as a "narcissist" but goes too far in claiming that Jim sees other people as "merely extras in his movie" and that they are not "real characters" for him. If the contention that there are no "genuinely existing other people" (Brudney 1998 p.274) for Jim then he would not be a narcissist but a solipsist or psychotic.

Perhaps, indeed, nothing could touch him since he had survived the assault of the dark powers.

(LJ p.179)

That was a skirmish. The real assault comes when Gentleman Brown – “a blind accomplice of the Dark Powers” – arrives in a stolen ship with his crew of fourteen “utter outcasts, enraged by hunger and hunted by fear.” (LJ p.259)

6.

Those Conradian protagonists who try to escape from the world and its problems always fail. Axel Heyst’s island hideaway Samburan is invaded by the murderous trio of “infernal scoundrels”. (V p.244) Razumov stays silent and shut up in his room until the revolutionary Haldin enters: “Fatality [...] clothed in flesh – wearing a brown cloth coat and long boots”. (UWE p.62) Brown and his men invade Patusan:

These were the emissaries with whom the world he had renounced was pursuing him in his retreat – white men from “out there” where he did not think himself good enough to live.

(LJ p.281)

Jim is away when they arrive and they are able to terrify the people despite being outnumbered two hundred to one. Ironically it is Jim's power which renders them vulnerable: "they had got into the habit of taking his word for anything and everything." (LJ p.194) They even ignore a plea from Dain Waris – "that brave and intelligent youth" (LJ p.263) with "great resources of intelligence and power" (LJ p.190) – to tackle the pirates, because he lacks Lord Jim's "reputation of invincible, supernatural power." (LJ p.263) Having such power is "an awful responsibility" (LJ p.194) Jim acknowledges, since: "He had made himself responsible on his own head." (LJ p.191) There is a clear biblical echo here of: "His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate." (Psalms 7:16) Conrad's multi-layered allusion combines a hint at Jim's hubris; a prediction of his downfall; irony, since his downfall comes as a result of refusing to fight Brown; and a judgement that Jim's well-intentioned but naïve involvement in Patusan's political affairs was not an unalloyed good.

Brown has come to loot and terrorize but did not expect the presence of Jim and the possibility of punitive retaliation. When Jim returns he finds Brown and his men on a hill-top refuge. Their sharpshooter, with a prodigious long range shot, kills an unarmed villager on Brown's orders to "strike the fear of sudden death" into the rest. (LJ p.270) The encounter with Brown is a chance for Jim to show what he has learned about himself. His character cannot change but a change of knowledge in the light of experience, would help him to see Brown clearly for what he is. Marlow says that it is "evident that he did not distrust Brown." (LJ p.287) He ought to have done since

Brown's actions make his intentions clear. Cornelius instantly recognizes a malefic kinship and makes himself Brown's ally in a plot for revenge on Jim. The Rajah's political advisor Kassim perceives the "difference of character" between Brown and other white men he has met and sees him and his crew as "outcasts". (LJ p.266) Jim could have established Brown's status by asking to see his ship's papers – he has none since the vessel was stolen – but he never queries Brown's story. He could have laid siege and starved them into surrender without further loss of life. This would be a dishonourable course of action only if, as Brudney (1998 p.266) argues, honour is construed as "schoolyard honour". Instead Jim makes three decisions which are bewildering and fatal. First, he offers Brown "a clear road or else a clear fight" (LJ p.283) and, given the odds against him, Brown chooses the former. Second, he allows them, after a protest from Brown, to keep their firearms. Third, he declines to see oversee the matter himself. (LJ p.286) Jim delegates it to Dain Waris, who is massacred, along with his men, by Brown's crew. Brown is able, with Cornelius's help, to surprise them, asleep and unarmed. Jim's decisions confirm that his exploits on Patusan are remarkable but have yielded him, up to this point, little in self-understanding; nor in the ability to understand others, a sign perhaps of his "idealised selfishness." (LJ p.128)

7.

Schopenhauer's metaphysical ethics say that we are all worthy of compassion – "*Pardon's the word to all!*" (SP p.29) It is not a claim endorsed in *Lord Jim* which suggests that Brown was not worthy of Jim's compassion. He is a vivid realization of Schopenhauer's category of the *wicked* human being where egoism becomes active malice – deriving pleasure from the pain of others. Brown's "mad self-love" (LJ p.287) is an example of man as the ultimately cruel animal as outlined in Schopenhauer's essay "On Ethics". (SE p.210) ¹ Brown is a "latter-day buccaneer" but is set apart from the rest of his kind:

The others were merely vulgar and greedy brutes, but he seemed moved by some complex intention. He would rob a man as if only to demonstrate his poor opinion of the creature, and he would bring to the shooting or maiming of some quiet, unoffending stranger a savage and vengeful earnestness fit to terrify the most reckless of desperadoes.

(LJ p.256)

When Schopenhauer says that the wicked man "tortures for the sake of torturing", (SE p.210) he does not mean that the act is gratuitous, and has no

¹ Kirschner (1968 p.272) notes the parallel between Brown's extreme egoism and Schopenhauer's notion of cruelty, citing *The World as Will and Idea*, but does not develop it as I do here.

purpose beyond itself, but that it has no obvious outwardly-directed end, to extract information for example. Brown gains nothing in this outward sense by the torture and humiliation of his victims. That is not its purpose. His “complex intention” is the same as that of Schopenhauer’s wicked man who tortures for an *inwardly-directed* reason, as an analgesic for the intense suffering caused by his excessive egoism, of a level “almost inconceivable” (LJ p.287) in Brown’s case:

I say it is the Will to live which, embittered more and more by the constant sorrows of existence, seeks to lighten its own suffering by causing the same to others. In this way it gradually develops genuine malice and cruelty.

(SE p.211)

It is the extreme nature of the wicked person’s will, its “devilish character” (SE p.210) that requires equally extreme exhibitions of suffering to distract him. Wickedness demands that the torture be specifically tailored to the tastes and desires of the torturer; the whole process is about him not his victims, it has to distract the torturer from his own pain. People are comforted by the sight of someone feeling worse than they do. The difference between us and the wicked is that we are content with *schadenfreude* while the wicked actively create the misery that comforts them. It is a difference between the theory and practice of this “worst trait in human nature”, Schopenhauer says. (SE p.212) Unlike the wicked we also have another

balm for the pain of existence, aesthetic experience, which is a “painless state” in which we are, temporarily, “delivered from the miserable pressure of the will. We celebrate the Sabbath of the penal servitude of willing”. (WWR 1 p.196) That state requires self-forgetfulness, and the wicked person’s extreme egoism makes them incapable of it. Torture and cruelty as *spectacle* is the devilish anti-art of the wicked, the nearest they can come to losing themselves in a vision of beauty. The abstracted self-forgetful gaze of the aesthetic experience becomes the gloating sneer of the wicked. When Marlow interviews Brown, a few hours before his death, to question him over the meeting with Jim and its tragic outcome:

He gloated over his action. I had to bear the sunken glare of his fierce crow-footed eyes if I wanted to know; and so I bore it, reflecting how much certain forms of evil are akin to madness, derived from intense egoism, inflamed by resistance, tearing the soul to pieces, and giving factitious vigour to the body.

(LJ p.250)

Schopenhauer does not develop this line of thought – acts of cruelty as the malicious person’s distorted version of art – but it is implicit in his analysis of wickedness. Brown exhibits something of this corrupted aesthetic element in his actions. He gains nothing material in massacring Dain Waris and his men. It is not a frenzied, haphazard attack instead there is an element of staging about it:

It was not a vulgar and treacherous massacre; it was a lesson, a retribution – a demonstration of some obscure and awful attribute of our nature which, I am afraid, is not so very far under the surface as we like to think.

(LJ p.295)

Brown does not indulge in a salvationist death-bed confession and last minute will-denial; his “almost inconceivable egotism” (LJ p.287) remains undiminished. Wracked with pain and scarcely able to breath, the memory of the massacre and his thwarting of Jim are, years later still “consoled him on his deathbed.” (LJ p.294)

Brown is Jim’s nemesis who he must face to maintain his moral integrity. He is literally unable to face him: “He just stood there with nothing to say, and looking as black as thunder – not at me – on the ground.” (LJ p.282) Brown recognizes a sign of guilt – about *what* he does not know – and seizes on it. In this shrewdness resides Brown’s “Satanic gift” for searching out “the best and weakest spots in his victims”. (LJ p.281) The worldly wisdom of *Counsel and Maxims* tells us that: “The chief result gained by experience of life is *clearness of view*”. (CM p.134) Jim fails to see Brown clearly. From this worldly perspective Jim’s action is folly. A clear look and some pointed questions would establish the sort of person Brown is. While Jim does not know about Brown’s past, as the reader does, he knows about the fatal long shot, a cold-blooded execution. A man who could order such a thing once

would not hesitate to do it again. If someone exhibits “unpleasant or annoying qualities” we must ask ourselves if we are prepared to “put up with frequent and repeated exhibitions of the same qualities”, Schopenhauer writes:

For he will inevitably repeat the offence, or do something tantamount to it, should the occasion return, even though for a moment he is deep and sincere in his assurances of the contrary.

(CM p.85)

If we fail to take cognizance of such revealingly *significant* actions then we are culpable since: “To forgive and forget means to throw away dearly bought experience.” (CM p.85)

What stops Jim seeing Brown clearly is not pity or adherence to a code of honour; it is egoism. He cannot be objective about Brown’s case because he is incapable of being objective about his own. Objectivity, to use an optical analogy, demands that the object examined is in focus which requires the viewer being at an appropriate distance. Conrad turns talk of cognitive, emotional and moral “distance” into physical metaphors. Aboard the *Patna* Jim commits the same offence as the captain and the engineers, deserting his post, but tries to establish a moral distance from them by maintaining a physical distance:

But he kept his distance – he kept his distance. He wanted me to know he had kept his distance; that there was nothing in common

between him and these men [...] It is more than probable he thought himself cut off from them by a space that could not be traversed, by an obstacle that could not be overcome, by a chasm without bottom. He was as far as he could get from them – the whole breadth of the ship.

(LJ pp. 75-76)

Jim's estimation of the moral distance between himself and the crew of the *Patna*, and himself and Brown, are both wrong, since both are exaggerated. Of course Jim is morally superior to the captain and engineers, for example he is the only one with the decency to attend the maritime inquiry. He has *something* "in common" with them – they all jump ship and there is no "chasm" between them when they are crowded into a lifeboat having deserted their posts. If Jim overestimates in that case he underestimates the moral distance between him and Brown; here there *is* a moral gap.

Although in their conversation they were "separated only by the muddy bed of a creek", says Marlow they were "standing on the opposite poles of that conception of life which includes all mankind". (LJ p.277) Jim has only faced up to his offence on the *Patna* in the superficial sense of acknowledging the deed not in the profound sense of taking it to show something about his character. He is startled by Brown's claim that the offences which brought them to Patusan are the same:

'Suppose you begin. No? Well, I am sure I don't want to hear.

Keep it to yourself. I know it is no better than mine. I've lived – and so did you, though you talk as if you were one of those people that should have wings so as to go about without touching the dirty earth. Well – it is dirty. I haven't got any wings.

(LJ p.278)

Jim is no moral winged butterfly but neither is he a “repulsive beetle” (LJ p.206) or “loathsome insect” (LJ p.207) as Marlow describes Brown’s murderous ally Cornelius. Jim has never faced up squarely to the implication of his leap from the *Patna* and its resemblance to his actions aboard his training ship. He will not take ownership of them as his genuine deeds, as mirrors of his character. For a man of such refined sensibilities they constitute a tender spot which he does not want probed. Brown senses a weakness in Jim, without knowing exactly what it is. His conversation with Jim includes what Marlow calls a “sickening suggestion of common guilt” between Jim and Brown, of a “secret knowledge that was like a bond of their minds and of their hearts.” (LJ p.282) Jim could choose to face his ghost, acknowledge his past deeds as being genuine, and defy Brown. Or shirk this painful piece of self-knowledge, avert his eyes and passively collude with Brown’s interpretation of their “common guilt”. He chooses the latter course, and it is an example of what Marlow calls our “own artful dodges to escape from the grim shadow of self-knowledge.” (LJ p.58) Jim implicitly aligns himself with Brown when he tells Jewel that, while Brown and his men are

bad: "Men act badly sometimes without being much worse than others". (LJ p.288)

Conrad uses metaphors of sight to convey this problem of moral focus. For all Brown's satanic insight he admits that in Jim's case he "could not make him out". (LJ p.281) It is because of the moral gulf between them. Marlow feels that with Jim he is "fated to never to see him clearly". (LJ p.175) The mature Marlow can get Jim in focus temporarily but his younger self, still a powerful presence in the middle-aged man, is too like Jim in terms of imagination, romanticism and emotional intensity. They are too alike for Marlow to capture Jim with total clarity, as Stein captures his pinned butterflies. Marlow can capture the other people of Patusan in his linguistic net but he cannot "immobilise" Jim "under my eyes". (LJ p.240) The young Marlow was once as romantic as Jim. The novella *Youth* (1902), which he narrates, is a paean to romanticism, loosely based on Conrad's own experiences at sea:

O youth! And are we not all descendents of Don Quixote, all the wise, all the simple – all of us in the quixotism of our youth?

(Y p.199)

Marlow's character has not changed, but he has tempered his romanticism with experience and self-knowledge – just as Conrad himself did.

Marlow, therefore, can both sympathize with Jim's intensity of feeling, the defiance and assertion of youth, and get "thoroughly sick" of his self-indulgent breast-beating – "Why all these vapourings?" (LJ p.171)

Conrad and Schopenhauer believed that clarity of perception was a virtue in both life and art. Romantic effusions obscure what is in front of us. Stein says that Jim being a romantic is "very bad" and "very good too". (LJ p.155) Tanner (1963 p.56) considers only the negative aspect: "the illusions and dreams of the romantic Idealist are [...] a fatal drawback in the world of action." There is a positive aspect: the romantic's ability to see beyond the object in front of one, to see it transformed or transfigured, to see aspects of it not visible to the common-sense mundane view. These two aspects of vision are dramatized in *Lord Jim*. Accuracy of vision, seeing what is in front of one, is necessary to achieve anything in life or art, but Conrad believed that it was not sufficient to achieve greatness, in any field. This requires imaginative vision; but imagination directed, as it is in Schopenhauer's artistic genius, *outwards*. Najder differentiates between Conrad's negative view of imagination in *Lord Jim* "as a dangerous faculty, debilitating and destructive" which renders Jim "passive and then frightened" and the positive view of the "dream", as seen by Stein, as an active force leading to "external goals and ideals", so that: "One succumbs to imagination; dream forces one to do something." (Najder 1997 p.87) Najder is correct up to a point. Jim's narcissistic daydreams are purely *inwardly* directed, while on Patusan they are outwardly directed in, for example, Jim's restoring order to the island and helping the oppressed Bugis and the dispossessed people. However, I will

later argue that Jim fails to maintain this outward direction and that when it comes to choosing between his own personal inwardly directed fantasy of heroism and an outward commitment to the people of Patusan (including his wife Jewel) he opts for the former.

Stein, a romantic himself, understands this aspect of Jim's character, for he sees the potential in him and the resemblance to his younger self. Stein intones the romantic credo:

“To follow the dream, and again to follow the dream – and so – *ewig –
usque ad finem...*”

(LJ pp. 154-155)

The dream must be pursued to the end, which may be bitter. In pursuing his dream of adventure, Stein's wife and daughter died of fever and his best friend was assassinated. Conrad considers that plain accurate vision, common sense and a dogged devotion to its deliverances are admirable traits, as characters like the French Lieutenant, and Captain MacWhirr show. But the highest achievements are open only to people inspired with (outwardly directed) imaginative vision. Schopenhauer agreed: “minds without imagination will never achieve anything great”. (WWR 2 p.72) Conrad's maritime hero is Nelson whose “short and glorious career” (MS p.294) revealed that: “He had the audacity of genius, and a prophetic inspiration.” (MS p.295) The other ingredient of his success was that he demonstrated the essence of Schopenhauerian acquired character, since he

was “splendidly true to his genius”. (MS p.294) Nelson’s moral stature was achieved through putting his genius and his inspiration in the service of “his country’s fortune” not his ego. (MS p.294)

8.

Jim goes to face Doramin knowing that vengeance will be exacted on him for the death of the chief’s son Dain Waris, and is shot dead. His last word to the outside world is “nothing” (LJ p.244) and he dies “with his hand over his lips.” (LJ p.303) Marlow seeks to understand his end and finds Jim “inscrutable at heart”. (LJ p.304) Jim’s end is equivocal. He may have succeeded or failed; faced his ghost or shirked it; been true or false; faithful or faithless. The reader, like Marlow, feels that: “We ought to know.” (LJ p.303) Jim shirked his ghost aboard the *Patna*, yielding to the power of his imagination, and betrayed the craft of the sea. He did the same in the encounter with Gentleman Brown. His third test is how he deals with the consequences of his decision to let Brown and his men go free and armed.

The last time Marlow sees Jim he is at the height of his powers on Patusan, preparing to defend the fishing rights of the islanders against the Rajah who treats them as “personal slaves”, a feudal relationship that Jim has changed. (LJ p.242) Marlow, recalling Stein’s words on the imperative to follow the dream, says of Jim: “He was romantic, but none the less true.” (LJ p.243) True to what and to whom? My reading of Marlow is that he believed that Jim has succeeded in being both true to his romantic dream, and to the

claims of the people of Patusan, which includes his lover Jewel. The separate claims have, at this point, become fused into one and fulfilled in Jim's deeds. Doubt that this is the case, or at least will remain so, comes with the wording of Jim's vow:

"I shall be faithful," he said quietly. "I shall be faithful," he repeated, without looking at me, but for the first time letting his eyes wander upon the waters, whose blueness had changed to a gloomy purple under the fires of sunset. Ah! he was romantic, romantic.

(LJ p.243)

The repetition and Jim's wandering gaze indicate that the claims of the dream and the community are capable of being pulled apart if they conflict. When and if they do, to which will Jim remain true?

Jim's first reaction on hearing of Brown's massacre is to pursue him and exact revenge for the death of Dain Waris and his Bugis warriors. He does not do so because, as his faithful bodyguard Tamb' Itam tells him, the Bugis and other people of Patusan have turned against him. He can still depend on his "own people", the dispossessed he rescued from Sherif Ali, who live with him in the fort he built and where all the gunpowder on the island is stored. He can stay and fight or flee, alternatives suggested by both Tamb' Itam and Jewel. Instead he goes unarmed to his death. Jewel and Stein evaluate Jim's end differently but with equal certainty. For her, Jim was "false" (LJ p.254) like all white men, including her father, who deserted Jewel

and her native Patusan mother. They ultimately leave for their “own ends.” (LJ pp. 252-253) She reminds Jim of his pledge, which he made unasked: “Do you remember you said you would never leave me?” (LJ p.301) His desertion leaves her living a “soundless, inert life” (LJ p.304) in Stein’s house. This act appears more callous when we recall Jim’s claim that through her love he was “*made* to understand every day” that his “existence is necessary – you see, absolutely necessary” to her. (LJ p.221) Stein is equally convinced of Jim’s being true:

“No! no! no! My poor child! . . .” He patted her hand lying passively on his sleeve. “No! no! Not false! True! True! True!”

(LJ p.254)

Jim is true, relative to his personal inwardly-directed romantic dream of heroism, and false relative to his promise not to desert Jewel and to stay on Patusan. There is also the matter of Jim’s people. Watt (1979 p.345) sees Jim’s refusal to fight as showing that he wished to avoid bloodshed. This may be true in the short-term but without him the “social fabric” (LJ p.271) he has created will collapse, returning Patusan to the bloody state he found it in. The “bewilderment, fear and gloom” (LJ p.255) of the population following his death suggests that this process has already started. Things could be worse for the Bugis than before the arrival of Jim, since Dain Waris, a man with genuine leadership qualities is dead.

Having dramatized the claims of both sides Conrad confronts us with an important ethical dilemma: if we are forced to choose, which ought we to value most, and thus be loyal to: one's personal vision or the welfare of others? Jim chooses the former and if we disagree with him we judge accordingly. However we cannot do his decision justice until we know what personal vision, his dream, was. We need to know that before we answer the additional question: was his death the end of his dream or, in some way, the fulfilment of it? At this point Schopenhauer's theory of character is especially valuable in helping us to tease apart some of threads making up the complex fictional skein of Conrad's novel and help make Jim less enigmatic to us than he appears to Marlow.

9.

Jim's response to Jewel's plea that, if he will not stay and fight, the two of them should flee together, is: "There is no escape". (LJ p.301) The dominant sense of Jim's reply is not about escape from Patusan, but from himself. He discovers what all Conradian protagonists, reluctantly, painfully but inevitably do, the truth at the heart of Schopenhauer philosophy, that there is no escape from one's character:

There is nothing, absolutely nothing, that a man cannot forget, –
except *himself, his own character.*

(CM p.85)

Jim has understood this. It is a pivotal moment in his self-knowledge as, while mediating on his course of action, he remembers his past deeds. Neither we nor Marlow are privy to Jim's thoughts as he meditates on his course of action (LJ p.298) but his words immediately afterwards can be used as evidence that he has grasped the truth about his character. But has this knowledge led to an affirmation or denial of the will-to-live?

A case can be made for a type of salvationist interpretation of Jim's actions, by which he goes to his death having denied the will to live. If Jim was a will-abjurer at the time of his death, that would not require the narrator Marlow, and by implication Conrad, to endorse salvationism. It would not require Conrad to agree with Schopenhauer that giving up the will to live is the nearest thing to a *summum bonum*, and that the person who has done so now sees the world as it really is. It might be the case, however, that Jim does come to see that "the world and life can afford us no true satisfaction, and are therefore not worth our attachment to them", a discovery which "leads to resignation." (WWR 2 pp. 433-434) In this way Jim would realize that his heroic dreams could never be realized in life. However, instead of this resulting in repentance, this knowledge would go deeper than the individual character. Jim would understand (intuitively not conceptually) that the problem was not one of his *individuality* but of his (essential) *self* – and that the real problem lay in the nature of will. Jim would thus be suffering salvationist "pangs of conscience". (WWR 1 p.365)

Marlow says that when Jim believed the *Patna* was sinking it was not death Jim feared but “the emergency” he believed would ensue – “the horrors of panic, the trampling rush, the pitiful screams”, but that he may have welcomed death if it had come “in a sort of peaceful trance”. (LJ p.63) Marlow continues:

A certain readiness to perish is not so very rare, but it is seldom that you meet men whose souls, steeled in the impenetrable armour of resolution, are ready to fight a losing battle to the last; the desire of peace waxes stronger as hope declines, till at last it conquers the very desire of life.

(LJ pp. 63-64)

Jim’s death from a single bullet – clean, quick and executed when he was prepared for it – could be seen as a welcome end to the (ultimately pointless) struggle of life. For the will-denier action is futile and some of what Jim says is consonant with this state: “There was nothing to fight for”. (LJ p.299)

The destruction of Jim’s work on Patusan might be sufficient to generate the mental anguish Schopenhauer thought of as being the most intense form of suffering and break his will to live – “I have no life” he says. (LJ p.299) Jim’s decision to go unarmed to Doramin and face certain death would be interpreted in this way as an example of a phenomenon “entirely neglected by philosophers [...] the great and rapid revolutionary change in man’s innermost nature” which Schopenhauer says occurs when someone “goes

out to a violent and certain death, as in the case of execution” – not an impossible change of character, but a cessation of willing (a nullification of character) brought about by a sudden “much wider and clearer insight into eternity.” (WWR 2 p.631) A salvationist interpretation could also point to the veiled figure of opportunity which follows Jim like a shadow throughout the novel. As Jim makes his way upriver to Patusan “his opportunity sat veiled by his side like an Eastern bride waiting to be uncovered by the hand of the master.” (LJ p.177) Escaping from the Rajah’s compound it is still veiled running at his side (LJ p.182); looking at Jim for the last time Marlow sees “the opportunity by his side – still veiled.” (LJ p.244) It is only unveiled at his death. What is the opportunity? It is, the salvationist replies, an opportunity for release from the pressure of the will, relief from the pain of individuality.

Panagopoulos (1998 p.69) favours this sort of interpretation, claiming that *Lord Jim* “finally subscribes to Schopenhauer’s conception of tragedy”. He then quotes the following passage as illustrating what he believes that conception to be. It is one which considers “the greatest misfortune not as an exception, not as something brought about by rare circumstances or by monstrous characters, but as something which arises easily and spontaneously out of actions of men as something essential to them.” (WWR 1 p.254) This is indeed Schopenhauer’s preferred option from the three types of tragedy he distinguished. In each type the “great misfortune” of the tragedy is brought about differently. In the first it is produced by “extraordinary wickedness of character”; in the second by “chance or error”; in the third by “characters as they usually are” who are “in circumstances which frequently

occur” – in fact a tragedy that arises “spontaneously out of the actions and characters of men”. (WWR 1 p.254) In other words Schopenhauer prefers tragedy to be rooted in *character* with the tragic events unfolding as the characters of those involved become manifest. The audience should believe that the tragic events could happen to anyone “even to us”. (WWR 1 p.255) *Lord Jim* is obviously a tragedy of character and if that was a sufficient condition for being a Schopenhauerian tragedy then the novel would be one.

However, Panagopoulos overlooks what Schopenhauer calls the “true sense” of tragedy, which he makes clear earlier on the same page as the passage from which Panagopoulos quoted:

The true sense of the tragedy is the deeper insight that what the hero atones for is not his own particular sins, but original sin, in other words, the guilt of existence itself [...]

(WWR 1 p.254)

Schopenhauer then quotes lines from Calderón’s drama *La Vida es Sueño* (“Life Is a Dream”): “For man’s greatest offence, is that he has been born.” (WWR 1 p.254) What Panagopoulos underestimates is the importance of Schopenhauer’s belief that the greatest tragedies reveal mankind’s “original sin”, which is the religious form of his philosophical concept of “eternal justice.” In the essay “On Ethics” (SE pp. 214-215) Schopenhauer explains that “human misery” and “human badness” always “keep each other in equilibrium”. If we think of the world as a place of judgment, a “world tribunal”,

we “shall become aware of eternal justice” and “begin to understand why all that lives must pay the penalty of its existence, first in life, and then in death.”

If eternal justice was endorsed, implicitly or explicitly, by Conrad in *Lord Jim* then the novel would suggest that, for example, the victims of Brown who were terrorized, tortured, humiliated and murdered, thoroughly deserved such treatment, since they were guilty of existence or, more accurately, *willing* existence, for “all that happens or indeed can happen to the individual, justice is always done to it. For the will belongs to it; and as the will is, so is the world.” (WWR 1 pp. 351-352) With the concept of eternal justice, salvationism sounds close to Gentleman Brown’s contempt for his victims, as he delivers his own perverted form of justice to them as the “Scourge of God” (LJ p.269):

Eternal justice prevails; if they were not as a whole contemptible, their fate as a whole would not be so melancholy.

(WWR 1 p.352)

The tragic protagonist would, when his will is broken, realize that, fundamentally: “Tormentor and tormented are one”. (WWR 1 p.345) I cannot find any evidence which suggests that *Lord Jim* expresses salvationism in this strong form; one which includes Schopenhauer’s transcendental moral framework of eternal justice. This does not rule out a weaker form of salvationist interpretation, by which Jim goes to his death having denied the will to live, and there is *prima facie* evidence for such an interpretation.

10.

However, there is also a case to be made, at least equally as strong, for a worldly interpretation, which sees Jim ultimately affirming the will to live. A major problem for even the weak salvationist interpretation is Schopenhauer's claim about what happens to the individual character when the will to live is denied. He claims that the person who gives up the will to live has ceased to be an individual – "character itself is abolished in the denial of the will." (WWR 2 p.609) Schopenhauer acknowledged that this "whole suppression of the will" seemed to contradict the "[individual] will's determinations through motives according to character" but claimed to reconcile the two by saying that the individual character's withdrawal from "the power of motives does not proceed from the will, but from a changed form of knowledge." (WWR 1 p.403) Schopenhauer does not claim that that the will-denier's character *changes* – that would immediately contradict his claim that character is fixed and unchanging – but that the individual character is "entirely eliminated." (WWR 1 p.403) He appeals to an analogy between "*self-suppression of the will*" to the Christian "*effect of grace*" to explain the former:

In consequence of such an effect of grace, man's whole inner nature is fundamentally changed and reversed, so that he no longer wills

anything of all that he previously willed so intensely; thus a new man, so to speak, actually takes the place of the old.

(WWR 1 p.404)

Some philosophers believe that Schopenhauer's notion of renunciation of the will to live involves him in a real, rather than apparent, contradiction. "Given the rest of his philosophy," says Magee "there is no way in which this could happen." (Magee 1997 p.242)¹

If the worldly interpretation of *Lord Jim* is correct, then instead of a characterless "new man" being shot dead by Doramin it is Jim; with the same character he has exhibited throughout the novel. This is the interpretation which, on balance, I favour. *Lord Jim* is a brilliant, extensive and imaginatively creative realization of Schopenhauer's claim in the following passage from his essay "On Ethics":

The unchangeability of character and the necessity of action proceeding from it impresses itself with uncommon clearness upon him who on some occasion has not conducted himself as he ought, inasmuch as he has perhaps failed in decision or firmness, or courage, or other qualities demanded by the moment. Now after it is

¹ See also Atwell (1990 pp. 218-220) and Young (2005 p.193) for objections to the possibility of this, given Schopenhauer's notions of character and will. Wicks (2008 pp.128-133) outlines, and gives objections to, four possible ways of resolving the problem of will-denial. He finds the fourth preferable: it rejects absolute denial of the will to live, or its annihilation, but countenances the possibility that there can be degrees of denial. Construed in this way denial of the will is like "the experiences of overcoming an addiction, disruptive habit, obsessive need, or compulsive attraction." (Wicks 2008 p.132)

over he knows and honestly regrets his wrong conduct and thinks, perhaps, “If only that occurred to me again I would act differently!” It does occur to him again, the same thing happens, and he acts again exactly as before, to his great astonishment.

(SE p.231)

After the training ship incident Jim vows to himself that he would behave differently but then comes the incident aboard the *Patna*. He asks Marlow to give him another chance to regain his honour but the result is, Schopenhauer would believe *predictably*, the same:

Everything was gone, and he who had once been unfaithful to his trust had lost again all men’s confidence.

(LJ p.298)

This is what Stein calls “the real trouble – the heart pain – the world pain” which signifies that “you can’t make your dream come true” because of what you are. (LJ p.153) The salvationist interpretation says that what one is, one’s profound self, is not individual at all (individuality is illusory) but just universal will. Jim would realize intuitively that the problem was not just in him – but in the whole world, which is the objectification of that will.

Jim’s decision not to fight or run seems, at first glance, to support the weak salvationist interpretation, since will-denial reveals the pointlessness of action. If we look more closely, it actually brings into sharp relief Jim’s

discovery of another opportunity to regain his honour: by going voluntarily to his execution. Unlike the training ship and *Patna* episodes, where he had sought to deflect the responsibility by claiming not to have been ready, he now acknowledges that the mistake is *his* in the profound sense that it stems from his character. Jim had pledged that he was “ready to answer with his life” (LJ p.286) if harm resulted from his decision to let Brown and his men go. It does and he takes the consequence “upon his own head”. (LJ p.302) His decision is assertive and made with the full force of his individuality: “He was going to prove his power in another way and conquer the fatal destiny itself.” (LJ p.299) He abandons Jewel to go to certain death with an attitude that is diametrically opposed to the passive or characterless one we would expect from someone who has denied the will to live: “Nothing can touch me,” he said in a last flicker of superb egoism.’ (LJ p.301) And he tears himself “out of the arms of a jealous lover at the sign, at the call of his exalted egoism.” (LJ p.303) It is this egoism – exalted above the commonplace by its imaginatively-fuelled romantic heroism – which is the source of both his success on Patusan and of his failures. This is the penetrating dye – “this determinate character” – which permeates “all his actions and thoughts down to the most insignificant”. (SE p.228) Someone arguing for a salvationist interpretation might say that while the ego disappears in someone in whom there has been “a complete abolition of the will” – so that the world, and the people in it, becomes “nothing” (WWR 1 p.412) – this only applies to saints and mystics and that, for the rest, there will be some vestige of ego left. Even allowing for this, it seems very strange for Conrad, if he intended Jim to have

renounced the will to live, to have Marlow refer to Jim's egoism as being – right until the end – both “superb” and “exalted”. Those adjectives are, however, consistent with Jim remaining very much “in character” at his death. Far from being indifferent and utterly unconcerned with what is happening around him when he stands before Doramin, Jim at the very moment of his death is acutely aware of himself, his audience and the (final) impression he will make on the crowd who witness it:

They say that the white man sent left and right to all those faces a proud and unflinching glance.

(LJ p.303)

In his use of “unflinching” Conrad connects the mature Jim with the boy aboard the training ship who fantasized about performing heroic deeds and was “always an example of devotion to duty, and as unflinching as a hero in a book.” (LJ p.5) At one stroke he demonstrates the fixity of character, unfolded through our life and mirrored in our deeds. Jim has fulfilled his destiny. He has seen that in the real world his character precludes him from heroic status.

The fact that Jim now pursues his heroic quest in death rather than life should not be seen as indication of nullification of his character, but merely as adopting different means of achieving his romantic dream of honour and heroism. This interpretation has support from Schopenhauer. Although Jim gains acquired character, the highest form of knowledge of his individuality,

his character itself does not change. But his circumstances do and Schopenhauer confirms that given fixity of character, and a change of circumstances and knowledge, the *individual will* (character) can pursue a different path to achieve its ends:

But such an influence can never bring it about that the will wills something actually different from what it has willed hitherto [...] However, the former, the ability to modify knowledge, and through this to modify action, goes so far that the will seeks to attain its ever unalterable end [...] at one time in the world of reality, at another time in the world of imagination, adopting the means thereto [...] But the tendency and endeavour of the will have not themselves been changed on that account, still less the will itself. Therefore although its action manifests itself differently at different times, its willing has nevertheless remained exactly the same.

(WWR 1 pp. 294-295)

Jim remains very much *himself* at the moment of his death, exhibiting his character and still pursuing his dream of heroism. It would be typical of Jim's heroic fantasies – which he has indulged in since childhood – to have a vision of personal survival after death where he will dwell in an anglicized Valhalla or Elysian Fields, a land fit for heroes like himself, in “his own world of shades.” (LJ p.304) We must not forget Marlow's judgement on him: “Ah, he was an imaginative beggar!” (LJ p.60)

11.

Conrad's exploration of the nature of romanticism opposes Jim's immature inward-looking variety with a mature form which was tempered by the hardships of a world in which, he believed, we have to make the best of things. Jim's romanticism, when thwarted, results in the sort of youthful *Weltschmerz* felt by the young sailor who narrates his story in *The Shadow Line*:

One day I was perfectly right and the next everything was gone – glamour, flavour, interest, contentment – everything. It was one of those moments, you know. The green sickness of late youth descended on me and carried me off.

(SL p.5)

Jim's inward-directed romanticism was a temptation for Conrad in his youth, to which he sometimes succumbed, but which, in the light of experience, he realized needed to be modified. In *The Shadow Line* two extremes – the romantic and the down-to-earth – appear as the young captain's "special intensity of existence which is the quintessence of youthful aspirations" (SL p.69) and Captain Giles' advice that, "one must not make too much of anything in life, good or bad" which sounds to the younger man as a command to "Live life at half speed". (SL p.108) A working compromise can,

and must, be found. In the “Author’s Note” (1920) to his collection of short stories *Within the Tides* (1915) Conrad says that his life at sea was “far from being adventurous in itself” being more concerned with “the sober hue of hard work and the exacting call of duty, things which in themselves are not much charged with romance” (WT p.9) – so whence does the romance of his fiction – which is an expression of his temperament – derive?

I suppose, because the romantic feeling of reality was in me an inborn faculty. This in itself may be a curse but when disciplined by a sense of personal responsibility and a recognition of the hard facts of existence shared with the rest of mankind becomes but a point of view from which the very shadows of life appear with an internal glow. And such romanticism is not a sin. It only tries to make the best of it, hard as it may be; and in this hardness discovers a certain aspect of beauty.

(WT p.9)

This tempered romanticism transfigures the mundane rather than rejecting it. It is an artistic vision whose object is the world not a mystic vision where the gaze is towards a transcendent realm like St Cecilia’s in the Raphael painting Schopenhauer saw as a symbol of the “transition” to world-rejection. (WWR 1 p.267) Conrad rejected Schopenhauer’s transcendentalism and appeared to suspect mysticism of being the last resort of the egoist. Conrad saw in mystic rapture the same potential for self-indulgence that he believed was present in

compassion. In both cases it can be the state itself, and the powerful feelings which accompany it, which becomes the mystic's real focus, rather than what the state is supposed to reveal. For example, Razumov's desire for scholastic honours and a successful career become transmogrified and elevated into a mystical devotion to Russia's autocratic Czarist regime. He feels "on the point of conversion" with "the touch of grace upon his forehead" (UWE p.25) and the taciturn student becomes "overwhelmingly loquacious" but he is really in a private "discourse with himself". (UWEp.26)

This self-absorption is what Marlow perceives in Jim's romanticism during their first long talk after the maritime inquiry:

He was very far away from me who watched him across three feet of space. With every instant he was penetrating deeper into the impossible world of romantic achievements. He got to the heart of it at last! A strange look of beatitude overspread his features, his eyes sparkled in the light of the candle burning between us; he positively smiled! He had penetrated to the very heart – to the very heart. It was an ecstatic smile that your faces – or mine either – will never wear, my dear boys.

(LJ p. 60)

Conrad's use of "beatitude" is deeply ironic. Jim's transfiguration is not due to a mystic loss of self but a fantasy of heroic self-assertion, an epiphany about the "fanciful realm of recklessly heroic aspirations" (LJ p.60) untainted by

sordid reality. Jim wants to be a hero but lacks the toughness, moral not physical, to achieve it in the real world. He wants acclaim without compromise and only in death can he find this: "The dark powers should not rob him twice of his peace." (LJ p.298) Marlow, and Conrad, may be critical of Jim for giving up on life too easily but that is not the same as renouncing the will to live. Watt says that, in going to Doramin, "Jim is in effect choosing suicide". (Watt 1979 p.345) Jim does not commit suicide but his attitude, in terms of affirming the will-to-live, more closely resembles that of the suicide than of a will-denier who delivers a salvationist "gallows sermon" on his way to be executed. (WWR 2 p.631) Jim does not reject life as such but a life in which his heroic aspirations are constantly thwarted. I favour this worldly non-salvationist interpretation, but one must remember that Conrad believed that a "work of art is very seldom limited to one exclusive meaning". (CL6 p.211)

While it is clear that Conrad, via the narrator Marlow, sees something admirable in Jim's romantic aspiration to heroism, his ideal fictional hero is the protagonist of the short story "Prince Roman". The Prince's heroism is stoical and self-sacrificing, and is a by-product of his intense concern for the welfare of other people: "It was well said that his days did not belong to himself but to his fellow citizens." (CSS p.966) He became a hero but did not set out to be one. Jim's heroism is too self-regarding and he sometimes more concerned with the *feeling* of being heroic and not exclusively, perhaps even primarily, with the putative beneficiaries of his heroic actions. This fits in with Marlow's claim that: "Jim had no dealings but with himself" (LJ p.246) i.e. not with the world. Marlow goes on; "the question is whether at the last he had

not confessed to a faith mightier than the laws of order and progress". (LJ p.246) What is Jim's faith? Not the values of colonial "order" and imperial "progress" exemplified by the racist "privileged man" (LJ p.245), to whom Marlow sends a copy of his narrative and berates for refusing to countenance the "truth of ideas" which are not "racially your own". (LJ p.246) Not religious faith either, the prime example of which is the unforgiving Christian morality of Jim's father "the good old rural dean" (LJ p.57), who, in a letter to his son, writes that:

He hopes his "dear James" will never forget that "who once gives way to temptation, in the very instant hazards his total depravity and everlasting ruin."

(LJ p.248)

Marlow's response is scathing, especially to the letter's smug offer of advice on life's hazards, which emanate from a "quiet corner of the world as free of danger or strife as a tomb" and its moral parochialism which dictates that there is only "one faith, one conceivable conduct of life, one manner of dying." (LJ p.248) ¹

¹ Conrad wrote that he found Christianity "distasteful" because, despite its virtues, it lent itself too easily to "cruel distortion" in which form, "with its impossible standards, has brought an infinity of anguish to innumerable souls – on this earth." (CL 6 p.358) Schopenhauer frequently claimed that his philosophy revealed the same truths as Christianity. In his highly idiosyncratic (even heretical) interpretation, Schopenhauer portrays Christianity as being essentially pessimistic and world denying. For example, "my doctrine might be called the only true Christian philosophy". (SP p.27) In "On the Doctrine of the Denial of the Will-to-Live" (WWR 2 pp. 603-633) Schopenhauer gives a full account of what "true Christianity" consists of (WWR 2 p.615) – i.e. what I have called salvationism.

Jim's mightier faith – the faith of a man who “had no dealings but with himself” – is his dream of heroism. It is faith in his personal heroic vision, now again turned inwards, that he affirms in his death. When he learns of Brown's massacre and the collapse of his plans he loses his “faith in the future” (LJ p.247) in the possibility of sustaining his heroic status while alive and subject to all the vicissitudes of life, instead:

He goes away from a living woman to celebrate his pitiless wedding with a shadowy ideal of conduct.

(LJ p.303)

Jim's choice of preferring a “shadowy” ideal – choosing the “Eastern bride” (LJ p.303) of heroic opportunity rather than his flesh-and-blood Eastern bride Jewel – echoes a passage in Schopenhauer's aphoristic *Psychological Observations*:

The wish which everyone has that he may be remembered after his death, – a wish which rises to the longing for posthumous glory in the case of those whose aims are high, – seems to me to spring from this clinging to life. When the time comes which cuts a man off from every possibility of real existence, he strives after a life which is still attainable, even though it be a shadowy and ideal one.

(R p.93)

Such is the power Jim's "exalted egoism", that if he cannot have glory in life he will seek it posthumously. But Jim's heroic status, as I have argued, depended upon the faith which people had in him, and which he has lost. If we remember Marlow's claim that: "We exist only in so far as we hang together" (LJ p.162) then it comes as no surprise that Jim does not get the glory he sought when he decided to go alone into his own world of shades. Instead, he "passes away under a cloud, inscrutable at heart, forgotten". (LJ p.303)

Conrad's imaginative exploration of Schopenhauer's philosophy of character in *Lord Jim* is a powerful and credible depiction of human nature. The convincing portrayal of Jim's fixed character, which we follow from boyhood to manhood, is a challenge to philosophers who claim that there is no such thing as character in the robust sense that Conrad and Schopenhauer believed in.¹ The concept of repentance, regret in the light of corrected knowledge, is central to Jim's desire to show that his behaviour aboard the *Patna* was not genuinely characteristic. Brown is a rounded three-dimensional embodiment of Schopenhauer's psychological theory of cruelty. Jim's story can be seen as an unfolding of his character, in the way Schopenhauer says is true for us all, which accounts for its inevitable outcome. In §52 of *Counsels and Maxims* he said that what we commonly call "*Fate*" was, as a rule, the result of our own "foolish conduct" (CM p.122)

¹ Harman (2000 p.165) says that "there is no such thing as character"; John Doris accepts "local" character traits (Doris 2002 p.87) geared to specific situations, but denies "global" traits, of a dispositional nature, (Doris 2002 p.23). He uses *Lord Jim* as an example and claims (2002 p.161) that Jim's leap from the *Patna* did not reveal a global character trait and is thus worthy of guilt but not shame. His argument is flawed because he ignores the training ship incident in the novel which is crucial to analysis of Jim's character. For a defence of a robust notion of character see Sreenivasan (2002), Fleming (2006), Letzring, Funder & Wells (2006) and Webber (2006) (2007).

so our fate is really the unfolding of our character. Marlow describes Jim's "overwhelming destiny" in a similar way:

The imprudence of our thoughts recoils upon our heads; who toys with the sword shall perish by the sword. This astounding adventure, of which the most astounding part is that it is true, comes on as an unavoidable consequence. Something of the sort had to happen.

(LJ p.249)

While *Lord Jim* explores the value of self-knowledge and gaining acquired character, it also demonstrates that what is revealed in the process may not be palatable, either to the individual concerned or to those around him. It strongly suggests, nevertheless, that there is something admirable, even heroic, in the attempt to gain it.

CHAPTER 4

SEXUAL LOVE: THE METAPHYSICAL ILLUSION

1.

The overwhelming power of the sexual impulse is at the heart of Schopenhauer's philosophy, for it is "the kernel of the will-to-live" and, therefore, "the concentration of all willing" – it is "the desire of desires". (WWR 2 pp.513-514) In "The Metaphysics of Sexual Love", Chapter XLIV of *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer sets out to answer some of the most important perennial questions about the nature of passionate love.¹ He offers a metaphysical solution to a series of inter-related questions. Why is the sexual impulse strongest when it appears as the desire for a particular person, so that sexual love is stronger as it becomes more individuated? What is it about that particular individual that makes him or her so desirable to the lover? Why is sexual love self-sacrificing? Why does a lover feel emotionally elevated, enlarged and enriched? Why does this feeling disappear so quickly with sexual love ending in disillusion?

Schopenhauer's answers mix the psychologically acute with the imaginatively speculative. Gupta (1975 p.724) argues that by placing the

¹ As mentioned in the Introduction, I believe that Conrad's direct source for his part of Schopenhauer's philosophy was the version of this chapter which appeared in Dircks' translation of the essays. Here I refer to the more familiar and readily available Payne translation.

sexual impulse at the centre of human life Schopenhauer was an “intrepid pioneer who held ideas far ahead of his time”, influencing the work of Freud, Jung and the sexologist Havelock Ellis. Gupta sees Schopenhauer and Freud as sharing a “disenchanted view of human sexual life”, so that:

To both of them, sex remains a bargain of fools. However, so urgent and pressing is this biological need that man is rushed, headlong and thoughtless, into seeking its gratification.

(Gupta 1975 p.725)

By identifying the qualities which a lover seeks for in the beloved as being the ones which are advantageous for the survival of the species, Schopenhauer’s ideas about sexual love have been seen by Scruton (2006 p.191-192) as a forerunner of contemporary socio-biology, of which Young (2005 p.244) claims Schopenhauer to be the “grandfather” whose work anticipates that of Richard Dawkins.

Schopenhauer warns, with relish, that the “gross realism” (WWR 2 p.535) of his answers will upset some people, since despite the “sublime and ethereal figures of speech” used to describe passionate love affairs in life and literature, “all amorousness is rooted in the sexual impulse alone”. (WWR 2 p.533) Although this may appear to be too “physical” it is part of a solution which is actually a “metaphysical, indeed transcendental” one. (WWR 2 p.533) He believes that his explanation accounts for the personal importance of sexual love, why it is experienced by the lovers as “a passion exceeding

every other in intensity” (WWR 2 p.532), by saying that the lovers are experiencing its deeper non-personal importance, its importance for the species: “What is decided by it is nothing less than the *composition of the next generation.*” (WWR 2 p.534) This is “actually more important than all other aims in a person’s life”, but:

This high importance of the matter is not a question of *individual* weal and woe, as in all other matters, but of the existence and special constitution of the human race in times to come; therefore the will of the individual appears at an enhanced power as the will of the species.

(WWR 2 p.534)

There is an element of the “sublime” and “transcendent” (WWR 2 p.534) in love affairs because the sighs of the individual lovers are really “the sighs of the spirit of the species”:

The species alone has infinite life, and is therefore capable of infinite desire, infinite satisfaction, and infinite sufferings. But these are here imprisoned in that narrow breast of a mortal; no wonder, therefore, when such a breast seems ready to burst, and can find no expression for the intimation of infinite rapture or infinite pain with which it is filled.

(WWR 2 p.551)

Schopenhauer expresses what it feels like to be in love with a poet's eloquence but he grounds those feelings in the needs not just of individuals but of the human species as a whole. The "passionate love" Schopenhauer considers is not a "rational choice" but one made by "instinct". (WWR 2 p.545) Lovers have been co-opted into the service of nature's biological imperative to ensure the preservation of the species. So lovers instinctively exhibit a series of "*absolute* considerations" (WWR 2 p.545) in their choice of partners, both sexes favouring qualities like youth, beauty, health and strength for the production and nurture of children. (WWR 2 p.537)

So far, this leaves unexplained the intense individuality of sexual love. The power of the sexual impulse plus a preference for general biologically desirable qualities would suffice for the maintenance of the species. If any young, healthy, reasonably attractive lover would fit the bill why do lovers risk their lives to fulfil their passion, or commit suicide when fulfilment is denied, with a *particular* lover? (WWR 2 p.532) Schopenhauer ingeniously explains how sexual love is both about individuals (intensely so) yet is selfless in that the lovers sacrifice their own interests for that of the species. Schopenhauer says that "the more *individualized*" sexual love becomes, the "more powerful in degree it is". (WWR 2 p.537) In this way the will of the species utilizes the egoism inherent in every individual for its own *non-individual* purpose:

Egoism is so deep-rooted a quality of all individuality in general that, in order to rouse the activity of an individual being, egoistical ends are the only ones on which we can count with certainty [...] when the

individual is to be active, and even to make sacrifices for the sake of the continuation and constitution of the species, the importance of the matter cannot be made so comprehensible to his intellect, calculated as this is merely for individual ends [...] in such a case nature can attain her end only by implanting in the individual a certain *delusion*, and by virtue of this, that which in truth is merely a good thing for the species seems to him to be a good thing for himself, so that he serves the species, whereas he is under the delusion that he is serving himself [...] This *delusion* is *instinct*.

(WWR 2 p.538)

This explains how the will of the species uses individuality but not why it needs minutely particularized qualities in the lovers. For, “really passionate love” originates not in generalized “absolute considerations” but very fine-grained “relative considerations”. (WWR 2 p.546) This is because such lovers have been selected to produce a *particular* individual:

The growing attachment of two lovers is in itself in reality the will-to-live of the new individual, an individual they can and want to produce.

(WWR 2 p.536)

Their conscious considerations – mutual examination of each other’s features made with “profound seriousness” and “critical scrupulousness” (WWR 2 p.548) – and “other unconscious considerations” (WWR 2 p.549) are made

not on their own account but at the behest of: “the will-to-live” which “desires to objectify itself here in a quite particular individual that can be produced only by this father together with this mother.” (WWR 2 p.550)

The “very first formation of this new individual” begins at the “moment when the parents begin to love each other – *to fancy each other*, as a very apposite English expression has it”. (WWR 2 p.536) If we take this at face value, with Schopenhauer claiming that the “future parents’ passion” is proportionate to the “vehemence” (WWR 2 p.537) with which their yet-to-be-conceived baby desires to live, then it would be “fanciful, and in truth barely intelligible” as Scruton (2006 p.191) claims. More charitably we can interpret this figuratively, like Schopenhauer’s references to Cupid (WWR 2 p.549, p.556), because a genuine explanation cannot be articulated due to the limits of philosophical language. Schopenhauer says of this as yet unconceived child; “its existence is intended by the genius of the species for reasons inaccessible to us, since they lie in the inner nature of the thing-in-itself.” (WWR 2 p.550) The inaccessibility of these reasons results not in silence but in speculation about why minute differences in physical appearance are so important to the will of the species.

It is not interested in “quantity”, an abundance of human beings produced by “base and ignoble” non-individuated coupling through “mere sexual impulse”, but “quality”. (WWR 2 p.549) What Schopenhauer means by “quality” is the birth of human beings who resemble the original “archetype” of humankind which he believed was dark-haired and dark-skinned like “our forefathers the Hindus”. (WWR 2 p.547) The will of the species brings

together lovers whose individual physical and mental characteristics will, through a process of “correction and neutralization” (WWR 2 p.542), lead to “restoring the type of the species as far as possible”. (WWR 2 p.549) How this archetype suffered such “deteriorations”, and so requires restoration, is due to “a thousand physical accidents and moral misfortunes” (WWR 1 p.539) which remain unspecified. Schopenhauer’s reference to archetypes reminds us of his Platonism. He also makes the will of the species resemble a sighted artist rather than a blind watchmaker. From a modern Darwinian perspective this part of Schopenhauer’s argument is the least interesting but he thought it crucial. This artistic, rather than evolutionary, project of restoring the archetype of humanity, under the “guidance” of a “sense of beauty” is a way of vindicating the sexual impulse, for without aestheticization “this impulse sinks to the level of a disgusting need.” (WWR 1 p.539) In that judgment, salvationism’s attitude to sexuality sounds loud and clear. Having outlined his metaphysics of sexual love let us examine its implications for Schopenhauer’s philosophy of character.

2.

Lovers are deceived by the will of the species. The “essence of passionate love” is “that instinctive delusion” it implants in them and it vanishes when the “end of the species has been obtained” – i.e. at the moment of conception. The deception ceases and the lovers fall back into their “original narrowness and neediness”. (WWR 2 p.557) Now comes the

“extraordinary disillusionment” (WWR 2 p.540) which Schopenhauer sees as following almost without exception for those in sexual love. He is not talking about the gradual diminution of passion over a period of years but disillusion immediately after conception of the “third person” (WWR 2 p.555) who is the real focus of this whole affair. The result of unsatisfied sexual love can be “tragic” but even “satisfied passion leads more often to unhappiness than happiness” firstly because it is “incompatible with his or her other circumstances” and upsets a “plan of life”. (WWR 2 p.555)

Secondly, says Schopenhauer, because sexual love is not “a question of *individual* weal and woe” i.e. the weal and woe of the two lovers:

In fact, love is often in contradiction not only with external circumstances, but even with the lover’s own individuality, since it casts itself on persons who, apart from the sexual relation would be hateful, contemptible, and even abhorrent to the lover. But the will of the species is so much more powerful than that of the individual, that the lover shuts his eyes to all the qualities repugnant to him, overlooks everything, misjudges everything, and binds himself for ever to the object of his passion. He is so completely infatuated by that delusion, which vanishes as soon as the will of the species is satisfied, and leaves behind a partner detested for life.

(WWR 2 p.555)

If this is so then it is not surprising that: “He who marries for love has to live in sorrow”. (WWR 2 p.557) ¹

Schopenhauer appears to exile individual character to the periphery of a person’s erotic life. While he claims that individual characteristics of the beloved are of paramount importance to the lover, they are so only in virtue of being important to the will of the species. At this point we need to differentiate between sexual love, and the lover’s choice of partner, being an *expression* of a person’s character and as being *in the best interests* of that person. We can interpret Schopenhauer as saying that while sexual love always expresses a person’s character, it is never in their self-interest to indulge in it. The delusive element of sexual love pertains to self-interest – the lover believes sexual love “to be a good thing for himself”, but in reality it is “merely a good thing for the species”. (WWR 2 p.538) It does not follow that sexual love cannot be an expression of my individual character. That sexual love can vary from “a lively yet controllable inclination” to “a passion exceeding every other in intensity” (WWR 2 p.532) is a function not only of circumstance but of character. Some people will not fall in love with the intensity of Romeo and Juliet simply because it is not in their character to do so. Schopenhauer allows for degrees of “vehemence of the will” and the difference between “phlegmatic” and “passionate” temperaments. (WWR 2 p.282) Some men will be driven to rape (WWR 2 p.535) by sexual love and some frustrated lovers driven to suicide (WWR 2 p.532) but those actions

¹ Schopenhauer offers the sop that occasionally those in sexual love might also have “real friendship based on harmony of disposition”, which stems from “the individuals themselves” but says that this usually appears “only when sexual love proper is extinguished”. (WWR 2 p.558) The lucky few will find themselves attached to someone they care about as an individual person when the illusion cast by the will of the species vanishes.

supervene on their individual characters. Even when acting in the interests of the will of the species, we must still do so in our own individual way – character is inescapable.

This, however still leaves a conflict between sexual love and acquired character, which is about discovering what is in the best interests of one's individual character. Schopenhauer seems to be saying that sexual love, and any concomitant marriage, is always (or nearly always) a deed of which we will repent. The reason for the repentance is that while under the delusion of sexual love we are acting out-of-character. If that is true then it is a blow for the worldly notion of acquired character. Attaining acquired character requires us to be able distinguish between genuine deeds, which accurately reflect our character, and out-of-character deeds of which we repent. The latter are a source of pain and, at their worst, humiliation. We want to avoid out-of-character deeds but Schopenhauer is telling us that all cases of sexual love fall into that class. It seems then, that acquired character and sexual love are incompatible. If you have acquired character you will be wise enough to avoid sexual love. If you are in sexual love then this indicates that you have not acquired character – or are disregarding your hard won lessons about your individuality – for you are under a delusion which will lead you to perform out-of-character actions.

One class of deeds of which we repent are those in which we act not in accordance with our unique individual character but as “*man in general*” (WWR 1 p.303) and since in sexual love “the will of the individual appears at an enhanced power as the will of the species” (WWR 2 p.534) i.e. man in

general, we will repent of it. Deeds of which we repent are performed when we lack intellectual freedom. In such cases the intellect's job of presenting motives to our character as accurately and fully as possible is compromised. One way in which this can happen is when we are under the influence of a false motive. This motive can be "entirely imaginary" yet still determine our character to perform an action, and this is not limited to "a particular deception" but can also influence us "in general and for some length of time." (WWR 1 p.295) In Schopenhauer's account of sexual love the vision we have of the beloved is false, as is shown by the disillusion that follows conception, when the lover awakes to see the beloved as he or she *really* is – "termagants and matrimonial fiends". (WWR 2 p.555) Our intellectual freedom is no doubt compromised in sexual love, in the way Schopenhauer says that it is during the experience of intense emotion, "the sudden vehement stirring of the will" (FW p.90) and the sexual impulse is certainly vehement. Is it compromised sufficiently to render all acts of sexual love as being out-of-character? When Schopenhauer says that the sexual impulse has the power "to rob of all conscience those who were previously honourable and upright, and make traitors of those who have been hitherto loyal" (WWR 2 p.534) he makes it appear that this is so. He never says explicitly that in sexual love we act-out-of character, but the implication is clear.

Here is salvationism in full force trying to marginalize the worldly concept of acquired character. Either the worth of acquired character is diminished, since it is made incompatible with one of the most important

areas of all our lives – love and sexual fulfilment – or it is simply not worth the price one would have to pay for it, that is giving up the possibility of sexual love. Salvationism says that life is a cheat, so that the sexual impulse, the kernel of the will which upholds the world, is the ultimate cheat. In his essay *Contributions to the Doctrine of the Affirmation and Denial of the Will-to-Live*, Schopenhauer wrote:

For [...] sexual desire, especially when by fixation of a particular woman it is concentrated into the passion of love, is the quintessence of the whole rascality of this world, for it promises so unspeakably, infinitely and extravagantly much, and performs so contemptibly little.

(SE p.267)

Schopenhauer ends the chapter on sexual love with a salvationist condemnation of lovers as “the traitors who secretly strive to perpetuate the whole trouble and toil that would otherwise rapidly come to an end”. Salvationism prefers “the *denial* of the will-to-live” (WWR 2 p.560) and that includes the sexual impulse. In Chapter XLVIII we are told that celibacy is “the first and most important step in the denial of the will-to-live”. (WWR 2 p.616)

Is it possible to retain Schopenhauer’s important insights into sexual love without accepting its salvationist message, and making it compatible with acquired character? One way would be to diminish the extent of the loss of intellectual freedom in sexual love. When he refers to the sexual impulse

as a “malevolent demon” (WWR 1 p.534) and lovers being under a delusion, one is tempted to see them as having their intellectual freedom completely “*suspended*” as happens in cases of “madness” and “delirium”. (FW p.89) More reasonably we should see intellectual freedom as only being diminished as in the case of intoxication. (FW p.90) Schopenhauer surely could not dispute that while a person is obviously intellectually compromised when drunk they are still acting in character. When intoxicated by sexual love people will still be expressing (to a large degree) who they are, just as they do when intoxicated by alcohol where dispositions to violence, lasciviousness and melancholia will be manifested according to individual character. There will be clearly some types of erotic relationship which are unsuitable for us – and some lovers, likewise. These are relationships which will bring repentance with them. That does not mean we must accept salvationism’s blanket claim that *all* relationships of sexual love will be repented of. Acquired character enables us to distinguish between these two classes of lovers and relationships.

3.

Replacing Schopenhauer’s salvationist theory of sexual love with a worldly one, more amenable to acquired character, involves making it less about the will of the species and more about the individual character. One of Schopenhauer’s profound insights about sexual love is that its immense power derives from its non-conscious origins. He believed that there “must at

the root of such excessive passion be also other unconscious considerations” at work in the lover’s choice of partner. (WWR 2 p.549) The lovers are “unconscious” of these considerations because they are decided by the “genius of the species” and so are “inaccessible to us, since they lie in the inner nature of the thing-in-itself”. (WWR 1 p.550)

However, there is no obvious reason why those considerations could not derive, in whole or in part, from the unconscious individual will (character) of the lover. That would make them difficult to access, particularly if the lover’s attraction for the beloved included factors which conflicted with his or her consciously-held beliefs and desires. The lover’s manifest explanation of the beloved’s attractiveness might differ from the real, unconscious, explanation. There can be various psychological reasons why the lover is ignorant of these desires, possibly they are a source of shame or fear and so have been repressed. If the prompting of those desires, which are a true indicator of one’s innate character, was ignored and this led to the wrong choice of partner, then love could be something one repented of. The source of this repentance would, therefore, be a personal delusion (through lack of self-knowledge) not a global metaphysical delusion. A succession of failed love affairs could be indicative of a character trait. Personal and non-personal unconscious desires do not have to be mutually exclusive. One could fall in love with a person who has the qualities one *personally* unconsciously longs for and who, at the same time, meets the requirements (which one is also unconscious of) for the successful maintenance of the species.

The full panoply of Freud's psychological system is not required here; merely acceptance of the more modest claims that we have some powerful desires that are not normally (or always) accessible to consciousness; that we sometimes act in ways for which we cannot account (even when being honest with ourselves); that our actions, and the desires of which they are a manifestation, can surprise us. These claims appear imaginatively embodied in Conrad's fiction and discursively in Schopenhauer's philosophy. Janaway (1994 pp. 48-49) and Magee (1997 pp. 132-133) note Schopenhauer's anticipation of Freud's theory of repression.¹ For example, Schopenhauer says that the will – and here he means *individual* will – shows its "supremacy" over the intellect by "prohibiting the intellect from having certain representations, by absolutely preventing certain trains of thought from arising" if they would lead to disturbing and unpleasant emotions which make us "shriveled up" or "blush with shame". (WWR 2 p.208) The conscious intellect is a "confidant" of the will but is not privy to the "secret workshop of the will's decisions" (WWR 2 p.210) so that:

We often do not know what we desire or fear. For years we can be have a desire without admitting it to ourselves or even letting it come to clear consciousness, because the intellect is not to know anything about it, since the good opinion we have of ourselves would inevitably suffer thereby [...] this may go so far that a man does not even guess the real motive of his action, in fact does not regard himself as capable

¹ For others areas of Schopenhauer's influence on Freud see Young and Brook (1994), Gardner (1999) and Black (2001).

of being influenced by such a motive; yet it is the real motive of his action.

(WWR 2 p.209)

This capacity for repression may account for the disillusionment of sexual love while still making it a function of individual character. Becoming aware of this unconscious mechanism indirectly, through our actions, would also be part of coming to understand our individuality, and attaining acquired character.

Even interpreted in this broader way, Schopenhauer's metaphysics of sexual love still has important implications for his notion acquired character. Acquired character is a strategy for minimizing the risks in life and "as far as our individuality allows" avoiding "the bitterest of all sufferings, dissatisfaction with ourselves" and that involves giving up trying to obtain "the unobtainable". (WWR 1 p.307) Schopenhauer makes unobtainable the possibility of combining sexual passion with a caring relationship which is about "the individuals themselves", a relationship in which complementary "qualities of temperament" result in a "harmony of dispositions". (WWR 2 p.588) At least the chance of having such a relationship is made to seem so small that it is simply not worth the risk of trying.

As Schopenhauer portrays sexual love, it is a game in which only the will of the species wins. The wise person would decline to play:

As it stood, he concluded, no prudent and cautious man would marry in Europe. It halved one's rights and doubled one's duties. Schopenhauer would always be a prudent and cautious man.

(Cartwright 2010 p.407)

As well as salvationism, Schopenhauer's negativity-of-pleasure thesis is also an important element of his view on sexual love. Since "happiness, is really and essentially always *negative* only, and never positive" (WWR 1 p.319) the joys of sexual love can never outweigh any pain one might suffer as part of a relationship. If one does not believe this thesis, and there is no convincing reason to, then one of the reasons to avoid sexual love – that it is inevitably a mixture of intense pleasure and some pain – disappears.

If sexual love is, primarily, a relationship involving individuals *qua* individuals – rather than individuals *qua* will of the species – then its power and its ability to take someone to the emotional heights and depths, will depend upon the individual character of the lover. Schopenhauer (CM p.112) knew that "one man's meat is another's poison"; some people will find sexual love to be an "atmosphere" suitable to them, while other people won't. Suppose that Schopenhauer was wrong about sexual love, and that there *are* some winners and the reward for winning is really worth a gamble. If so, then being over-cautious and excessively prudent would be a mistake. The failure to seize the chance for sexual love would be something to be repented of, later in life. This may be Marlow's problem in *Chance*. Love is a leap into the unknown and declining to leap may eventually prove more costly, in terms of

self-interest and self-fulfilment, than not taking the plunge. Of course one ought to look before one leaps. In Conrad's fiction this involves really looking at the beloved as an individual. Being over-cautious in love runs the risk of an unfulfilled life and the possibility that the individual will never obtain the key to self-understanding which the beloved can provide. Conrad does not underplay the danger of sexual love but it is portrayed as a risk worth taking.

4.

Conrad's fiction shows an agreement with Schopenhauer regarding the power of the sexual impulse. In *Chance* the narrator Marlow frequently compares Flora's eyes to the sea, a force of nature which is deep, often beautiful but sometimes fatal. There is "unexpressed menace in the depths of the dilated pupils within the rings of sombre blue," Marlow comments. (C p.162) He likens their "dreamy, unfathomable candour" to the sea: "I have seen the sea wear such an expression". (C p.175) Roderick asks her to "trust yourself to me – to the sea – which is deep like your eyes." (C p. 170) These eyes offer an invitation to the lover to plunge, which is what Roderick does: "deep, deep, like a mad sailor taking a desperate dive from the masthead into the blue unfathomable sea so many men have execrated and loved at the same time." (C p.247) Marlow says that women are "a force of nature, blind in its strength and capricious in its power" (C p.243) which recalls Schopenhauer's description of the sexual impulse. Attempts to domesticate such a force are hazardous:

“You will say that this force having been in the person of Flora de Barral captured by Anthony ...Why yes. He had dealt with her masterfully. But man has captured electricity too. It lights him on his way, it warms his home, it will even cook his dinner for him – very much like a woman. But what sort of conquest would you call it? He knows nothing of it. He has got to be mighty careful what he is about with his captive. And the greater the demand he makes on it in the exultation of his pride the more likely it is to turn on him and burn him to a cinder...”

(C p.243)

Conrad's fiction shows awareness of Schopenhauer's distinction between undifferentiated sexual impulse and individuated sexual love. Willems' desire for Aïssa in *An Outcast of the Islands* is the former. He looks at “the swelling lines of her bosom, with the famished and concentrated expression of a starving man looking at food.” (OI p.109) The short story *Falk* is Conrad's most straightforwardly Schopenhauerian fiction, with hunger and sexual love seen as forms the same “mysterious influence” (T p.144) which brings the couple together. It also shows the individuating process at work. Falk's secret is that, as a crew member of a ship stranded in the Antarctic, he resorted to cannibalism to stay alive. At first Falk's desire is implicitly linked to cannibalism: “He was hungry for the girl, terribly hungry, as he had been terribly hungry for food.” (T p.133) Falk though is more complex and sensitive

than Willems, for “he wanted that particular girl alone”. (T p.133) We are not given access to Falk’s thoughts but he obviously sees individual qualities in the girl. The narrator perceives in Falk the “obscure beginning, the seed germinating in the soil of an unconscious need” the “first shoot” of a “discriminating love” that will begin to bud and flower. (T p.133) Falk’s guilt has made him a divided man as the narrator’s similes suggest. He is a “composite character”, a “centaur” (T p.89) with a “herculean body” and an “anchorite’s bony head”. (T p.117) Love makes him a whole man again and he and the girl, “a complete couple”. (T p.144)

Conrad’s familiarity with Schopenhauer’s metaphysics of love can be seen in *Chance* where he comically subverts the philosopher’s ideas about gender roles. Schopenhauer’s neutralizing attraction theory says that very “manly” men will be attracted to very “womanly” women (WWR 2 p.546) but it is given a parodic reversal in the Fynes. Mr Fyne is the exemplar of masculinity with his “extra-manly bass” voice (C p.112) and “manly chest” (C p.185) he is “purely masculine to his finger-tips”. (C p.111) Using Schopenhauer’s reasoning he should be married to a passive, yielding, ultra-feminine woman not the strong-minded, determined rather masculine Mrs Fyne who wears “blouses with a starched front like a man’s shirt, a stand-up collar and a long necktie.” (C p.33) That does not prevent their marriage being “perfectly successful and even happy” and producing “three healthy, active, self-reliant children, all girls.” (C p.33)

Conrad’s lovers are subject to illusions but these are not *exclusively* created by the sexual impulse. Their vision is also occluded by phantoms of

their own creation, and the form they take is influenced by the society in which they live. His male protagonists have problems seeing a woman as an individual person, rather than as a type. Conrad and Schopenhauer agreed about the primacy of perception in art. Clarity of vision as a cognitive virtue also had moral implications for them. If we want to avoid a “falsification of knowledge”, says Schopenhauer, then we must avoid seeing the object in front of us through an emotional haze or the distorting lens of “preconceived opinion”. (WWR 2 p.141) Conrad’s artistic imperative was to make the reader see and seeing clearly is part of what moral goodness consists in. Except for Emilia Gould, the aristocrats in *Nostromo* fail to see the poor as real people but it is a sign of her moral goodness that she can see “the man under the silent, sad-eyed beast of burden”. (N p.67) Seeing clearly, with all its ramifications for self-knowledge and understanding others, is the dominant trope in *Chance*. The seaman Powell tells Marlow that: “He who has eyes, you know, nothing can stop him from seeing things as long as there are things to see in front of him.” (C p.305) Conrad, through Marlow, uses the differing reactions to Flora’s eyes as a way of indicating the cognitive and sympathetic sensitivity of characters. Marlow, Roderick and Powell are all aware of the colour and quality of Flora’s eyes and are deeply affected by her gaze. Mr Franklin, with his “sentimental eyes”(C p.301), focused on his captain, mistakenly thinks Flora’s are black until corrected by Powell. (C p.227) Fyne cannot remember their colour. (C p.40)

Conrad’s male protagonists sometimes see a fantasy figure rather than a flesh and blood woman with her own individual character. Conrad

recognized that tendency in his youthful self and satirized it in the character of George in the autobiographical novel *The Arrow of Gold* (1919). George falls in love with Doña Rita whom he describes as: “She was That which is to be contemplated to all Infinity.” (AG p.263) George’s disillusionment is benign, he comes to know Doña Rita as a person, and his affair with her is a rite of passage into emotional and sexual maturity. Disillusionment and repentance can follow if the real beloved is perceived too late. In the short story *Because of the Dollars* Davidson, a man of natural kindness and “moral excellence” (WT p. 150) marries a woman who possesses a “pure, sensitive, mean little soul” whose “heart was about the size of a parched pea, and had the proportional amount of warmth”. (WT p.180) Davidson’s case resembles the example given by Schopenhauer of the disillusioned husband who finds himself wedded to “a detested partner for life.” (WWR 2 p.555) Davidson fell in love not really seeing her but focusing on her resemblance to the idealized femininity of Victorian art, “a girlish head out of a keepsake”. (WT p.154) Renouard in *The Planter of Malata* commits suicide when his love goes unrequited but he was never really in love with Felicia Moorsom, a shallow socialite with a “primly angry smile” (WT p.67), but with an illusion of his own creation: a “tragic Venus” (WT p.75); “a misty coloured shimmer of a woman made of flame and shadows” (WT 65); “a wraith, cold mist”. (WT p.75)

In *A Smile of Fortune* (1912) the unnamed narrator is a young recently-appointed ship’s captain on a trading voyage to an island in the Indian Ocean. He is attracted to Alice Jacobus, the daughter of the merchant Alfred Jacobus: “the sort of chap to procure you anything at a price.” (TLS

p.28) The use of “procure” with its sexual connotation is deliberate, for Jacobus uses his attractive young illegitimate daughter Alice as bait for the young captain. He is under an illusion but one compounded of simple sexual desire and the projection on to Alice of feminine sexual stereotypes.¹ He sees her alternately as sulky “Miss Don’t Care”, (TLS p.54) a Carmen-like “gipsy tramp”, (TLS p.60) and as a coquette whose very indifference is “seductive” (TLS p.60). The “scantiness of her attire”, a dingy diaphanous wrapper, and her luxurious but unkempt hair, make Alice resemble the denizen of a low class brothel. (TLS pp.48-49) After a prolonged pursuit she finally kisses him, but: “I was no longer moved”. (TLS p.176) Hawthorn (2007 p.86) believes this reveals that the captain’s desire for Alice is sado-masochistic. I see his detumescence as due to *seeing* Alice for the first time as she really is: vulnerable, isolated, neglected and abused. The sexual illusion is broken but it was not woven exclusively by the sexual impulse. When the sexual fantasy disappears he realizes that marriage to Alice would wreck his career. He leaves her behind but, now compromised by her father’s scheming, the captain has to purchase from him a cargo of potatoes at an exorbitant price. A potato famine on a nearby island means that the captain is able to turn a handsome profit on them, which is the ironic “smile of fortune” of the title. He is forced to reassess himself and his chosen career. He resigns his commission and returns home by passenger ship. At first this seems to endorse Schopenhauer’s view that sexual love is inimical to the lover’s own self-interest and that the young captain did the prudent thing in

¹ See Langton (2004 pp. 291-298) for a detailed analysis of such male fantasy projections, both benign and malignant.

renouncing his passion for Alice. Yet he repents of this seemingly wise decision and turns his back on the benefits it brings. His action suggests not only regret for his shabby treatment of Alice but a judgement on his own erotic pusillanimity.

5.

In the next chapter I will consider how, in *Chance*, Conrad examined two tendencies exhibited by men in their attitude to women. The first tendency was inspired by Schopenhauer's misogynistic "On Women" in which he called them the "second sex, inferior in every respect to the first" (SP p. 115) and a woman's role as limited to being "a patient and cheering companion" to her husband. (SP p.106) Schopenhauer saw women as deserving to be patronized since they never attain adult status:

Women are directly fitted for acting as the nurses and teachers of our early childhood by the fact that they are themselves childish, frivolous and short-sighted; in a word, they are big children all their life long – a kind of intermediate stage between the child and the full-grown man, who is man in the strict sense of the word.

(SP p.106)

While believing women to be "big children" now appears outrageous it was accepted by, for example, the progressive late Victorian thinker and

pioneering sexologist Havelock Ellis. In his work *Man And Woman: A Study Of Human Secondary Sexual Characters* (1894) he closely paraphrased Schopenhauer's essay several times. Compare the passage from Schopenhauer above with Ellis's claim that "Nature has made women more like children in that they may better understand and care for children". (Ellis 2007 p.450)

The essay was seen as still being germane at the end of the nineteenth century when the social, political and sexual status of women was being vociferously debated. Bailey Saunders, in his 1898 translation of a collection of Schopenhauer's essays *Studies in Pessimism*, prefaced it with a note which makes this clear:

The essay on *Women* must not be taken in jest. It expresses Schopenhauer's serious convictions; and, as a penetrating observer of the faults of humanity, he may be allowed a hearing on a question which is just now receiving a good deal of attention among us.

(SP p.7)

The status of women in society was a live issue in the period in which *Chance* is set, the turn of the century, and still was at the time of its publication in January 1914.¹

¹ That Schopenhauer's essay influenced, or at least confirmed, the beliefs of some important turn of the century British thinkers, can be seen in the work of Belfort Bax – the English translator of Schopenhauer's *Selected Essays*. Although Bax was a prominent socialist thinker and writer he attacked the emancipation of women in a series of vituperative articles and books with titles such as: "Some Current Fallacies on the Woman Question" (1897), "Why I Am an Anti-Suffragist" (1909) and *The Fraud of Feminism* (1913).

Schopenhauer's ideas about women appear in *Chance* filtered through the sensibility of the narrator Marlow. Marlow's tone is constantly shifting, as Conrad subjects Schopenhauer's ideas to irony. There may be an allusion to Bailey Saunders' warning that "On Women" must not be taken in jest in the observation by "I", the first person narrator whose words frame Marlow's central narrative, who notes Marlow's fluctuations of tone "between jest and earnest" (C p.21) and later "grim jest and grim earnest". (C p.114) Conrad makes Marlow's verbal attacks on women in *Chance* show striking similarities which those of Schopenhauer in "On Women" (SP pp. 105-123), which suggests that this essay was a direct source of Schopenhauer's thought for Conrad. For example:

1. Women are "intellectually short-sighted" and have a "weaker power of reasoning" than men (SP p.107); Marlow says they are "not rational". (C p.111)
2. Women are inferior to men in "in point of justice, and less honourable and conscientious" (SP p.109); Marlow says they have no "compunction" (C p.120).
3. A "perfectly truthful" woman is "perhaps an impossibility" for "dissimulation is innate" in them (SP p.110); Marlow says that we never hear "women speaking the truth". (C 110)
4. There is "natural feeling" of "actual enmity" between women (SP p.112); Marlow says that there is no "conditional loyalty" between women (C p.157) and that they indulge in the "eminently feminine

occupation of thrusting a stick in the spokes of another woman's wheel." (C p.114)

Chance examines, plays with and subverts Schopenhauer's polemical desire to define women by their biology – they “exist in the main solely for the propagation of the species” (SP p.111) – having second-rate minds and being innately, and ineradicably duplicitous. (SP p.110) ¹

The novel also explores a second tendency, exhibited by Roderick Anthony, which is the desire to etherealize women. Both tendencies are visible in the paintings of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, which provided Victorian Britain with its female iconography. In these paintings women are idealized as pure, virginal and passive damsels, such as Burne-Jones' wanly chaste maidens. When they tumble from their pedestals, and become sexually active single women they are shown as Magdalenes, ashamed and wretched in Rossetti's *Found* (1854) or, with religious overtones, redeemed as in Holman Hunt's *Awakening Conscience* (1853). As late as D.H. Lawrence's 1911 novel *The White Peacock*, men still describe their female lovers in terms of paintings by Burne-Jones, Millais and Waterhouse. (Lawrence 1997 p.80, p.122 and p.169) In Max Nordau's highly influential study of *fin-de-siècle* culture *Degeneration* (1895) he accused Wagner of

¹ Atwell (1997 p.154) claims that Schopenhauer's “general conception of women changes dramatically” after meeting the young sculptor Elizabeth Ney who created a bust of him in 1859. Cartwright (2010 p.544) says that “the old misogynist became enchanted by the twenty-six-year-old”, was impressed by her “artistic talents” and that this, together with meeting women who wished to discuss his philosophy with him, “may have led the philosopher to waver in his belief” about their intellectual shortcomings. If Schopenhauer did have second thoughts about women he did not commit them to print.

depicting women as either a “demoniacally beautiful” destroyer or redemptive “angelic woman”. (Nordau 1968 p.189)

In *Chance*, Conrad explores the sources of self-deception in sexual love. The young ship’s captain Roderick Anthony’s love for Flora de Barral is jeopardized by his difficulty in seeing her as she is, as a particular young woman with her own individual character, rather than as a “flaming vision”. (C p.196) Roderick’s task has been made difficult by the malignant effect of his father Carleon Anthony’s powerful personality. He is a hugely successful Victorian poet whose work is devoted to portraying women as domestic angels. Marlow prides himself in seeing women clearly. “A woman is not necessarily either a doll or an angel to me. She is a human being, very much like myself,” he says. (C p.43) While he does see Flora as an individual in a way Roderick initially does not, Marlow is also subject to an illusion. It is that he is above the erotic fray, the hurly burly of sexual love. He deceives himself about his own nature and an important part of the novel is the process by which Marlow arrives at a better knowledge of himself, his individual character, through his relationship with Flora.

CHAPTER 5

CHANCE: SEXUAL LOVE AND SELF-DECEPTION

1.

In *Chance* Captain Roderick Anthony's love for Flora de Barral is initially distorted by his idealizing chivalric view of women. Conrad draws attention to this by naming the novel's two parts "The Damsel" and "The Knight". Roderick's view is the legacy of his father Carleon Anthony, "a delicate erotic poet of a markedly refined and autocratic temperament." (C p.230) His real-life counterpart was the sentimental Victorian poet Coventry Patmore.¹ Patmore's verse cycle *The Angel in the House* appeared between 1854 and 1856, sold 250,000 copies (Pearsall 1971 p.186) and became an expected gift for every bride. (Marsh 1987 p.61) It was, says McClary (1992 p.136) enormously influential in shaping Victorian Britain's concept of the ideal woman. Fraser (1992 p.86) sees Conrad's use of Patmore as revealing his belief that: "the sentimental idealization of women [...] was deeply embedded in English middle-class culture." The opposite tendency to this idealization is Marlow's intemperate anti-feminist outbursts, early in the novel, which are clearly inspired by Schopenhauer's "On Women".

¹ Duncan-Jones (1969 pp.468-69) details allusions in *Chance* to Patmore's poetic cycle. He argues for a close biographical resemblance between Patmore and his son, and Carleon and Roderick Anthony.

Patmore's domestic angel portrayed women as "quasi-spiritual" beings "untroubled by wayward personal desires – including erotic longing". (Adams 1999 p.125) Conrad suggests that such idealizing, which portrays women as essentially passive, involves a desire to exercise power over them. Such a desire can manifest itself in many shades and degrees; from courtesy to brutality. Carleon Anthony maintained a sharp division between public and private behaviour. To strangers he was "marvellously suave in his manner", but to his wife and children he was "implacable", "arbitrary and exacting", demonstrating "the primitive cave-dweller's temperament in domestic life". (C p.32) In his poetry the violence and tyranny was repressed by a process of "etherealizing the common-place; of making touching, delicate, fascinating the most hopeless conventions of the, so-called, refined existence". (C p.146) His behaviour was anything but "refined" in private for his "long-suffering family" who escaped by any means possible: his wives in death; his son to the sea; his daughter through marriage with Fyne, after remaining "in bondage to the poet for several years". (C pp. 32-33) He "wore out two women without any satisfaction to himself, because they did not come up to the supra-refined standard of the delicacy which is perceptible in his verses." (C p.244) No real woman could.

Carleon Anthony was a "savage sentimentalist" (C p.33) and a "poet-tyrant". (C p.113) On the filial relationship Marlow comments: "Genius is not hereditary but temperament may be". (C p.146) This is perhaps a playful allusion to Schopenhauer's claim that women have "no genius" (SP p.114) and, since a child inherits its intellect from its mother, (ES p.175) Roderick

could not inherit his father's genius only his temperament, or character. (SE p.251) Roderick is not a bully towards women like his father but he does reveal in his relationship with Flora his father's "etherealizing" tendency. Roderick escapes his father's domestic tyranny and becomes one of those "silent solitary men, the voluntary, passionate outcasts of their kind". (C p.247) Marlow says that when Roderick marries Flora and rescues her from poverty by marrying her, "had no experience whatever of women". (C p.196) Roderick's romantic and erotic attitude towards women has been shaped by his father's views, and perhaps their expression through his verse, rather than by a female friend, fiancée or lover.

When Marlow summarizes Anthony's life until his meeting with Flora, he leaves the significant clause until last: "his life had been a life of solitude and silence – and desire". (C p.244) In *Counsels and Maxims* §30 Schopenhauer wrote that if "a man tries to take on a character which is not natural or innate in him [...] he will very soon discover that Nature cannot be forced, and that if you drive it out, it will return despite your efforts". (CM pp. 87-88) Roderick lives a hermit life at sea but, says Marlow; "It is well known that lurid visions haunt secluded men, monks, hermits". (C p.268) Nature and the individual character's deepest needs will not be denied. Roderick has been unable to acknowledge that he is: "Ravenous [...] a-hungering and a-thirsting for femininity to enter his life". (C p.244) Conrad expresses his agreement with Schopenhauer about the power of the sexual impulse and the effect that thwarting it can have on the individual. Roderick both idealizes

women and yet is “Ravenous” for femininity, which recalls his father’s “savage sentimentality”.

When femininity arrives in the form of Flora, his hunger cannot be satisfied – not by a “flaming vision of reality” (C p.196) – but it does not cease:

Of all the forms offered to us by life it is the one demanding a couple to realize it fully, which is the most imperative. Pairing off is the fate of mankind. And if two beings thrown together, mutually attracted, resist the necessity, fail in understanding and voluntarily stop short of the – the embrace, in the noblest meaning of the word, then they are committing a sin against life, the call of which is simple. Perhaps sacred. And the punishment of it is an invasion of complexity, a tormenting, forcibly tortuous involution of feelings, the deepest form of suffering from which indeed something significant may come at last, which may be criminal or heroic, may be madness or wisdom – or even a straight if despairing decision.

(C pp.315-316)

Marlow’s judgement echoes Schopenhauer’s warning in “On Women” about men who resist this sexual imperative:

There is no law that is older or more powerful than this. Woe, then, to the man who sets up claims and interests that will conflict with it;

whatever he may say and do, they will be unmercifully crushed at the first serious encounter.

(SP p.111)

Both Conrad and Schopenhauer see denial of “the embrace”, of sexual intercourse as the fulfilment of erotic love, can result in what Marlow calls a “tortuous involution of feelings”.

What Conrad explores through his portrayal of Roderick Anthony is not how he is duped or deluded by the will of the species into engaging in sexual love but how his he is blinded by a vision of chivalry into avoiding sexual love. Just as Jim became intoxicated by heroic romanticism so does Roderick with chivalry and his knightly persona:

The man was intoxicated with the pity and tenderness of his part. Oh yes! Intoxicated is not too strong a word for you know that love and desire take many disguises.

(C p.196)

The chivalrous knight requires a passive damsel. Without a sexual outlet for his passion it becomes transformed, by “tortuous involution”, into the exercise of power. The weaker the damsel the more strong and chivalrous the knight can be:

What seemed most awful to her was the elated light in his eyes, the rapacious smile that would come and go on his lips as if he were gloating over her misery. But her misery was his opportunity and he rejoiced while the tenderest pity seemed to flood his whole being.

(C pp.167-168)

It seems as if Flora's plight, her pitiable status, is the key to her attraction for Roderick, rather than the woman herself:

He seemed striving to look her through. It was obvious the world had been using her ill. And even as he spoke with indignation the very marks and stamp of this ill-usage of which he was so certain seemed to add to the inexplicable attraction he felt for her person. It was not pity alone, I take it. It was something more spontaneous, perverse and exciting.

(C p.168)

Conrad's depiction of the intricacies of Roderick's sexuality is masterly in its subtlety and suggestiveness. The couple are wed and take up residence on Roderick's ship, together with Flora's father, who is penniless and has been just released from prison. Roderick, however, does not consummate the marriage. Perhaps because he feels that this would be forcing unwanted sexual attentions upon a woman who accepted marriage only as an escape

from desperate financial conditions. Seen this way his sexual abstemiousness is the mark of consideration and good manners.

In Roderick's case there is also a disturbing alternative interpretation. Flora is a young woman whose self-esteem has been so vitiated by life that she contemplated suicide. Her capacity for love and affection "had been drenched in as ugly a lot of corrosive liquid as could be imagined". (C p.182) When Roderick tells Flora he loves her, she replies: "Nobody would love me [...] Nobody could." (C p.169) The last vestige of her feeling of self-worth is surely erased, her claim that she is unlovable confirmed, by Roderick's unwillingness to consummate the marriage, a gesture which recalls the "supra-refined standard of the delicacy" (C p.244) exhibited by Carleon Anthony in his verse. What this does, of course, is to make Flora more wretched and, therefore, even more pitiable. The more pitiable she is the more Roderick can "console and cherish" the sorrow she exhibits.

2.

Marlow as narrator has to imaginatively reconstruct Roderick's psychological state, based on Flora's account of their romance, Powell's description of the captain and his own speculations. He rejects the idea that Roderick's passion was a case of love at first sight:

Was he a man for a *coup-de-foudre*, the lightning stroke of love? I don't think so. That sort of susceptibility is luckily rare. A world of

inflammable lovers of the Romeo and Juliet type would very soon end in barbarism and misery.

(C p.163)

Here Conrad alludes to a claim in Schopenhauer's metaphysics of sexual love where, following Shakespeare's "Who ever lov'd, that lov'd not at first sight" (*As You Like It* III:v) he says that: "As a rule, great passions arise at the first glance" for the "spirit of the species" can discern what use a lover can be put "for its ends". (WWR 2 p.551) Roderick's love arises after deep thought, pondering on Flora, something about her, perhaps "the most insignificant little things", which have "called out" to something deep in Roderick's character, "in all his potentialities". (C p.163) Having been unable to provide a satisfactory answer to what this thing or things might be, the exasperated Marlow settles on: "But any way at a given moment Anthony must have suddenly *seen* the girl." (C p.163) The italicization suggests that it is meant in the sense of perceptive success as having accurately seen *Flora*, that individual person. This is not the case, for although "something" has certainly happened to Roderick it is: "Perhaps nothing more than the thought coming into his head that this was 'a possible woman'." (C p.163) That is, a woman to fill the gap in the Roderick's emotional life, to satisfy a hunger for love as strong as Falk's, for he too is ravenous. Unlike Falk who wanted only one "particular girl" (T p.133) Roderick at first, sees Flora not as an individual but as a member of a class of people, the lonely and unloved. He tells her: "You told me you had no friends. Neither have I. Nobody ever cared for me

as far as I can remember. Perhaps you could.” (C p.168) “I am not blind”, Roderick tells her when they are married and aboard the *Ferndale* (C p.317) but he still is with regard to Flora herself rather than Flora as waif, damsel or “possible woman”.

After the marriage Anthony does not experience the “felicity” of that “special state” which is “peculiar to common lovers who are known to have no eyes for anything except for the contemplation, actual or inward, of one human form which for them contains the soul of the whole world in all its beauty, perfection, variety and infinity.” (C p.252) The reason for this is that Roderick is “not a common sort of lover” (C p.252) and his failure to consummate his marriage to Flora results in suffering – “he was punished for it as if Nature (which it is said abhors a vacuum) were so very conventional as to abhor every sort of exceptional conduct.” (C p.252) Marlow’s reference to the hypostasized “Nature” recalls Schopenhauer’s use of it in “On Women” (SP 111) as the all-powerful force of sexuality. Roderick is still seeing Flora through the gauze of an exceptional ascetic form of chivalry. How could one consummate a marriage to a flaming vision?

Conrad refuses to simplify Roderick’s complex feelings and nature. He is neither a sexual predator nor an emotional vampire feeding on Flora’s distress. Marlow describes him with startling juxtapositions, such as: his “fiery predatory” tenderness (C p.246); “reckless sincerity” (C p.247); “rough delicacy” (C p.308); and magnanimity which is compared to a cancerous growth. (C. 308) Roderick’s plight shows the difficulty Conradian protagonists encounter through a lack of self-knowledge. He is a genuinely brave, decent

and intensely passionate man but something is inhibiting an expression of his character, all those “potentialities” (C p.163) which Flora calls out to. That something is also occluding his vision of Flora and preventing him responding to her in the way she wants, which is to see her as an individual and as a sexually desirable woman. A clue that our deeds are not genuine and authentic, Schopenhauer tells us, is that they produce the pain of repentance. Acquired character, the most complete knowledge of our individuality, aims to prevent “the bitterest of all sufferings, dissatisfaction with ourselves”. (WWR 1 p.307) Roderick’s painful ordeal results not only from the punishment of Nature, for his sexual abstinence, but also for not being genuinely himself. Roderick is trying to live up to the impossible ideal of masculinity of his father’s poetry – those “famous sonnets singing of the most highly civilized, chivalrous love” (C p.247) rather than express his own character. Instead of self-realization he opts for “self-conquest” but all this results in is, predictably, “desperate acting”. (C p.307) His father was a hypocrite who wrote about male chivalry but who bullied and tyrannized his wives and daughter. Roderick is a better man than his father, but his chivalric ideal, which he takes to excessive lengths, harms both himself and Flora.

Instead of the personal integration that comes with acquired character, Roderick finds himself disintegrating: “trying to act at the same time like a beast of prey, a pure spirit and the ‘most generous of men’”, which, says Marlow, is too “big an order” for a “common mortal.” (C pp. 307-308) If Roderick were being himself, performing deeds which truly reflected his character, his magnanimity would not be like an abnormal cancerous growth

“gnawing at his healthy substance with cruel persistence”. (C p.308) It is not that the problem would be solved if Roderick simply chose to act exclusively as a beast of prey, pure spirit or magnanimous man. Becoming just a one-dimensional *fragment* of oneself would be no better. On his wedding night he cannot think of himself and Flora as merely man and wife. He wonders if the “deep response” he feels when contemplating Flora’s face is “something more than love”:

More? Or was it only something other? Yes. It was something other. More or less. Something as incredible as the fulfilment of an amazing and startling dream in which he could take the world in his arms – all the suffering world – not to possess its pathetic fairness but to console and cherish its sorrow.

(C p.258)

The flesh and blood Flora is replaced with a nebulous vision of chivalric magnanimity and universal pity. Under the surface is an important allusion to Patmore’s vision of nuptial love. In “Love and Poetry”, one of the essays on the arts collected in *Principle in Art* (1898), Patmore considered the relationship between love and poetry and wrote that: “Love is sure to be something less than human if it is not something more [...] Nuptial love bears the clearest marks of being nothing other than the rehearsal of a communion of a higher nature.” (Patmore 1898 p.77) The misery the couple suffer

through Roderick's mystic elevation of love suggests that in striving to make him and his love *more* than human, both are actually diminished.

3.

Conrad's lovers have a harder task than the majority of people. They are isolated, often lacking a nexus of family, friends and work colleagues, which results in their lacking social and communication skills. If their conversations are stilted, clichéd or clumsy it is because they are spoken by people for whom loving relationships have not been the norm. They speak haltingly in a language which is, emotionally, foreign to them. They struggle to read the small tell-tale signs and gestures, the physical language of love. As Flora looks at Roderick when he asks if she loves him:

She tried to read something in his face, in that energetic kindly face to which she had become accustomed so soon. But she was not yet capable of understanding its expression. Scared, discouraged on the threshold of adolescence, plunged in moral misery of the bitterest kind, she had not learned to read – not that sort of language.

(C p.246)

Conrad presents us not with a “reductive image of Flora” but a complex study of a “psychologically damaged woman”, says Jones. (2007 pp.109-110) Most of Conrad's lovers are emotionally and psychologically damaged, some

irreparably. Flora's case is an extreme example of what Marlow calls "the pathos of being a woman" (C p.210) when women "feel themselves to be, encaged". (C p.246) False representations of femininity are part of that cage. Trying to either conform to, or resist, these expectations bring problems for Flora. Marlow is even-handed though. It is not just men who are capable of this sort of falsification of vision. In "sentimental regions", he says, women "shrink from or rush to embrace ghosts of their own creation the same as any fool-man would." (C p.261)

Needing to find a home for her penniless and mad father Flora agrees to marry Roderick. Her attempt at being the dutiful daughter results only in insults from the father. If Flora cannot be the de-sexualized angelic spinster of her father's Victorian iconography then she must be the reverse – a Magdalene. You have "sold yourself"; he tells Flora "you know you have." (C p.281) She is "unfortunate", he says, in a special sense; "You are that as much as if you had gone on the streets." (C pp. 284-285) Her marriage to Roderick also alienates her from the emancipated Mrs Fyne's feminism. "An offended theorist dwelt in her bosom somewhere", Marlow says of Mrs Fyne. (C p.143) Marlow reveals that, despite his protestations, he shares a milder form of Roderick's chivalrous attitude to women, believing them to be essentially passive:

And this is the pathos of being a woman. A man can struggle to get a place for himself or perish. But a woman's part is passive, say what

you like, and shuffle the facts of the world as you may, hinting at lack of energy, of wisdom, of courage. As a matter of fact, almost all women have all that – of their own kind. But they are not made for attack. Wait they must. I am speaking here of women who are really women. And it's no use talking of opportunities, either. I know that some of them do talk of it. But not the genuine women.

(C p.210)

Marlow's attitude and its resemblance to Roderick's, stems from their similarities in background (they have both captained ships in the merchant marine) and temperament. Marlow's description of Roderick as one of the "silent solitary men, the voluntary, passionate outcasts of their kind" (C p.247) also applies to *him*. His success in recreating Roderick's psychology derives in part from that similarity. If he is sometimes ironic at Roderick's expense the irony is also directed at himself. The claim that any woman who is not passive, who does attack, is not a "genuine woman" is question-begging. It suggests that Marlow may have had an encounter with such a woman and been embittered by it. This, and many other textual clues and hints, should make us wary of accepting Marlow's comments about women at face value. Doing so has led some critics and commentators to see Marlow as "an unintentional caricature of his former self", (Schwarz 1982 p.42) and a "philosopher-raconteur" who is "facile and waffling". (Watts 1984 p.138)

Wake (2007 p.108) judges that in "terms of narrative and narrating *Chance* is a very complex text indeed." That is certainly applicable to

Conrad's handling of Marlow's persona in the novel. Marlow expresses contradictory attitudes to women. He is irascible towards the "I" narrator, who frames Marlow's own story-telling, but tender towards Flora. Then there are his violent swings of mood and tone of expression. All these factors suggest to us that Marlow, like Roderick, is a man in turmoil. If the reader is sensitive to this then he or she will find that Marlow betrays an initial lack of self-knowledge and that his belated and painful path to self-understanding is the moral heart of *Chance*. Hampson (1996 p.143) notes that the narrative of *Chance* is "explicitly constructed as a series of mysteries" in a number of sub-plots. I believe that the most important mystery the reader is invited to solve is: "What is happening to Marlow?" Erdinast-Vulcan (1991 p.157) rightly claims that Marlow is "the real protagonist of the novel."

4.

Marlow claims that: "It is the man who can and generally does 'see himself' pretty well inside and out" rather than women who don't have an "abundance of experience" and so are seldom experts in "matters of sentiment". (C p.246) If this really was a rule then Marlow is an exception to it. He is astute at seeing other people but his accuracy fails when looking at himself. Acquired character leads, in the long term, to a more equable and less painful life – "as far as our individuality allows" (WWR 1 p.307). But, like many medical procedures, those long-term benefits come at the cost of short-term pain. Facing up to who we are – our individual character – can be

a painful process and many of us will find psychological strategies for evading it. Marlow erects a wall of words cemented with misogynistic rhetoric between his bluff outside and his passionate inner self's desire for love. This pose leads him to warn the novel's frame narrator that "women are not so grateful as you may think, to fellows of your kind" who espouse "chivalrous feelings". (C p.210)

In the process of telling the love-story of Flora and Roderick, Marlow reveals his own failed quest for love. We see the misogyny as a symptom of the same "invasion of complexity" and the "tormenting, forcibly tortuous involution of feelings" which he diagnosed as Roderick's problem caused by a refusal to acknowledge his desire for sexual love. Bernard Paris, in his book-length study of Marlow, omits any discussion of *Chance* because there he "seems to me to be a very different, much less fully realized figure." (Paris 2006 p.5) His outspoken nature, ironic humour and romanticism show him to be the same character as the narrator of *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* but he is older and in late middle age there is much more to look back on than forward to. This is the time of Marlow's mid-life crisis, a time for re-assessment and re-appraisal of his life. The novel's action is filtered almost exclusively through his consciousness. His unease, revealed in mercurial changes of temper and tone, is felt by the reader so that, *pace* Paris, Marlow is a fully realized character in *Chance*.

"Truth will out Mr Marlow", Flora tells him at their final meeting. Her true feelings for Anthony were revealed only "through agonies of rage and humiliation" when she felt as if she were "on the rack." (C p.328) Marlow

meets her again after several years, during which time her father committed suicide and her husband died in an accident at sea. Now she has a burgeoning romance with the retired seaman Powell. Marlow sees a woman who has suffered, but has come to understand herself through her love for Roderick. There is nothing insubstantial, equivocal or indefinite about her now:

Flora came down to the garden gate to meet me, no longer the perversely tempting, sorrowful, wisp of white mist drifting in the complicated bad dream of existence. Neither did she look like a forsaken elf [...] But she was now her true self, she was like a fine tranquil afternoon – and not so very far advanced either. A woman not much over thirty, with a dazzling complexion and a little colour, a lot of hair, a smooth brow, a fine chin, and only the eyes of the Flora of the old days, absolutely unchanged.

(C p.327)

Marlow sees her differently because of his increased self-knowledge. He was also on the emotional rack in *Chance* and painful truths had to be faced before he too, could become his true self.

Marlow repents of his decision to leave the sea. In *Counsels and Maxims* Schopenhauer wrote that the maxim “know thyself” was the first step to acquiring character, gaining the equanimity to live with ourselves and the world, and that it involves knowing one’s “real, chief, and foremost object in

life”; knowing “the part he has to play, his general relation to the world”, and this helps to keep us from “false paths.” (CM pp.17-18) We never learn why Marlow quit the sea. Often we at first refuse to acknowledge our bad decisions or seek to justify them by deceiving ourselves, and others, that actually we actually like being where the false path has led us. The frame-narrator recognizes this:

The sea is the sailor’s true element, and Marlow, lingering on shore, was to me an object of incredulous commiseration like a bird, which, secretly, should have lost its faith in the high virtue of flying.

(C p.29)

Schopenhauer says that we must stay in our “essential and real element” to avoid repenting of our actions. (WWR 1 p.296) Marlow does not and regrets it. Jones says that the “empathy with which Conrad conveys Flora’s isolation belies the popular image of his indifference to women”. (Jones 1993 p. 72) Marlow’s leaving the sea – his true element – and stranding himself on the land gives him a sense of what he sees as women’s passive role in society. When Marlow describes Flora at sea it resembles his own plight as a landlubber:

For under a cloud Flora de Barral was fated to be even at sea. Yes. Even that sort of darkness which attends a woman for whom there is no clear place in the world hung over her. Yes. Even at sea!

(C p.210)

Marlow spends his whole time on land, where there is no clear place for him, under a cloud of repentance and regret which is echoed in the longing, desperate “Even at sea!” His claim to possess a Tiresias-like “composite temperament” (C p.111) is a fanciful way of accounting for his ability to understand Flora’s powerlessness, isolation and frustration. Marlow defends her decision to marry Roderick on the grounds that, as a woman, her possible actions have been strictly circumscribed, and therefore she has “no resources but in herself. Her only means of action is to be what *she is*.” (C p. 142) Marlow’s position on land, out of his element, is no different – he must go back to sea and be what *he* is. Erdinast-Vulcan (1991 p.165) sees the novel as a “a therapeutic process, an affirmation of faith” by which Marlow moves from alienation and emotional isolation as a “passive observer” through “recuperation” as an “active participant” in Flora’s life to a final “transformation” when he becomes “a seaman again”.

While Marlow’s decision to quit the sea was clearly something of which he repented – and was able to rectify – his attitude to Flora raises issues about his character which are far more complex. His relationship with her moves gradually from a detached and ironic interest to something deeper. It is perhaps too deep for Marlow to admit consciously but he reveals it indirectly in his narration. He is emotionally re-awakened by Flora. It is lightly, airily dealt with at first: “She was an appealing and – yes – she was a desirable little figure”, he admits. (C p.152) The revelation comes in the

passage in which Marlow is ostensibly trying to find what attracted Roderick to Flora but in which he actually gives us a lover's encomium on his own behalf:

These are great mysteries, of course. Magic signs. I don't know in what the sign consisted in this case. It might have been her pallor (it wasn't pasty nor yet papery) that white face with eyes like blue gleams of fire and lips like red coals. In certain lights, in certain poises of head it suggested tragic sorrow. Or it might have been her wavy hair. Or even just that pointed chin stuck out a little, resentful and not particularly distinguished, doing away with the mysterious aloofness of her fragile presence.

(C p.163)

Marlow's attention to detail emphasized by the obsessive repetition of "or", recalls the intense and profound examination which Schopenhauer says the lover gives to the smallest detail of the beloved's appearance. (WWR 2 p.548) Roderick did not, in the early stages of their romance, really see Flora, the individual: "He seemed striving to look her through." (C p.168) It is Marlow and the young officer Powell – who at the end of the novel becomes the widowed Flora's second husband – who really see her, in the Conradian sense of paying intense attention to someone as an individual. The moment when Roderick first does this is when they are aboard ship, with Flora's father, whose maniacal hatred of Roderick (which culminates in an attempt to

poison him) makes the situation intolerable. Roderick, chivalrous as always, tells Flora that he will set her free from the bond of marriage: “I renounce not only my chance but my life”, he tells her “I, who have said I could never let you go, I shall let you go.” (C p.317) He is totally unprepared for Flora’s response – “a cry came out from her heart” – “But I don’t want to be let off,” she cried. (C p.318) Instead of seeing her primarily as a passive, suffering object for pity, Roderick now sees her as a woman, with a passionate desire for love – love for him as an individual, as a lover not a knight errant. After the thwarted murder attempt (de Barral dies swallowing the poison meant for Roderick) the couple are able to begin a relationship as man and wife.

Marlow’s ability to convincingly reconstruct Roderick’s psychology derives from the similarity of their temperaments. Both show compassion for Flora’s plight and are attracted to her sexually. Marlow is not ravenous for femininity in the same way as Roderick is; but his relationship with Flora shows that he still has an appetite. He is astute enough to realize that a relationship of sexual love with Flora is not a credible prospect. For Marlow this would be, one suspects, too near to the attempted seduction of Flora by her German employer, when she was briefly a governess. The German’s “sentimental, cautious, almost paternal manner” fools her since he was the “first expressively sympathetic person she had ever met.” (C p.137) Marlow would not want his love and genuine sympathy misinterpreted as being like the German’s “sinister enterprise”. (C p.137) Instead he becomes a matchmaker at the end of the novel, bringing together Powell and Flora.¹

¹ A similar pattern is evident in Conrad’s last complete novel *The Rover* (1924) where Jean Peyrol, an ageing bachelor sailor prematurely retired from the sea and stranded on the land,

5.

Marlow is soon reconciled to his relationship with Flora as one of affection not sexual love and he is able to undo his temporary stranding on land. Neither of these is the motive for the misogynistic outbursts, often hedged or contradicted, or the tirades and splenetic outbursts which erupt in Marlow's narration. Robert Hampson finds Marlow's talk about gender and sexuality to be "a discourse in flight from recognition [...] this is a Marlow who won't confront his desires – whatever they may be". (Hampson 1993 p.116)

Marlow's flight is the internal, emotional equivalent of those physical flights, the running away, that are made by other Conradian protagonists like Jim. I suggest that what Marlow is attempting to flee from is not merely his sexual or emotional desires but a clear recognition of his own character.

A key passage occurs when the frame narrator, after being subjected to another of Marlow's intemperate outbursts in the first part of *Chance*, says: "I had seldom seen Marlow so vehement, so pessimistic, so earnestly cynical before." (C pp. 159-160) Marlow's outburst concerns the dangers of confession and ostensibly refers to Flora's letter to Mrs Fyne, which told why she has eloped with Anthony, and her want of caution in sending it. But Marlow's vehemence is out of proportion to the declared context:

is attracted to the young orphan Arlette. At first he sees himself as a credible husband for her. It is when she twice calls him "Papa Peyrol" (R p.125) that his attitude changes. He becomes the means of bringing Arlette together with the younger man she loves, the naval officer Lieutenant Reál, another isolated and passionate sailor not unlike Roderick Anthony.

I thought that there's nothing like a confession to make one look mad; and that of all confessions a written one is the most detrimental all round. Never confess! Never, never! [...] For a confession, whatever it may be, stirs the secret depths of the hearer's character. Often depths that he himself is but dimly aware of.

(C p.159)

Marlow's explicit claim concerns the effect someone's confession has on the hearer. It also implicitly suggests that if someone confesses about their actions to themselves, "the secret depths" of their *own* character can be stirred. The process of coming to "know thyself" – a step on the path to acquired character – can be painful and so it is not surprising that we often unconsciously resist it. We know that Schopenhauer (anticipating Freud) was aware of how the *individual will* can prohibit the intellect from entertaining disturbing thoughts which would make that person "shrivel up" or "blush with shame". (WWR 2 p.208) Conrad, with his novelist's insight, demonstrates his knowledge of this phenomenon in his fiction. Whatever it is that Marlow cannot confess to himself is something that will be painful to deal with and may require him to re-assess his estimation of his own character. In *Lord Jim* Marlow talked about how each of us must shirk or face our ghost, whatever it is that we fear most. The passage above shows Marlow's tortured and angry attempt at shirking. It may be that self-recognition is his fear, one from which he is in flight.

Marlow's outburst occurred when he was talking about Flora. We have seen that Marlow is emotionally and sexually re-awakened by her. Dormant passions and secret depths have been stirred. A further clue arrives when Marlow is talking about Roderick's decision to rescue Flora by offering to marry her, which he thinks unusual for a man like Roderick:

Because men, I mean really masculine men, those whose generations have evolved an ideal woman, are often very timid. Who wouldn't be before the ideal? It's your sentimental trifle, who has just missed being nothing at all, who is enterprising, simply because it is easy to appear enterprising when one does not mean to put one's belief to the test.

(C p.163)

Here we need to consider two things about Marlow. Firstly, his similarity to Roderick in that they are both lonely, passionate men. Secondly, his obliquity – Marlow betrays things about himself while ostensibly talking about other people. It is clear that Marlow, in his relationship with Flora, is also no "sentimental trifle". We know that Roderick idealizes women, a tendency which hampers his relationship with Flora, and one suspects that the younger Marlow also idealized them. Marlow sees Roderick as a younger version of himself and that accounts, in part, for his understanding of him. If pairing off is "the fate of mankind" and failing to do so is "a sin against life", (C p.315) it is a sin which Marlow has committed. Roderick has a chance of redemption

in his marriage with Flora but the ageing Marlow has seen his chance slip away. Watts claims that Marlow's "mute aborted love-relationship" was with Kurtz's fiancée in *Heart of Darkness* (Watts 1984 pp. 138-139) but whoever the lost love was the experience has marked Marlow indelibly.

Marlow's misogyny, expressed in Schopenhauerian rhetoric, needs to be interpreted in this light. In his tirades he strikes out at those he sees as the immediate cause of his misery – women. "But it is a fact that in every man (not in every woman) there lives a lover" (C p.163) hints at the pain of an offer of love rejected and his resentment at women's "pretence of winding us round their dear little fingers, as of right" (C p.114) sounds like the protest of a man who believes he was once treated in that way. Beneath the carapace of the hard-headed women-don't-fool-me realist there is an emotionally wounded man who, perhaps, was once too timid to seize an opportunity for sexual love or idealized a woman who just wanted to be loved for *herself*.

Marlow's emotional state in the first half of the novel closely resembles the one described by Schopenhauer in his account of acquired character. If we feel that we are the victims of "outer circumstances", and that things might have been different, then we "wail and rage" about it; nothing "torments" as much as the thought that what we lament about our life could have been "warded off" – we are like "entrapped elephants, which rage and struggle fearfully". (WWR 1 p.306)

In the second half of the novel Marlow, having returned to life at sea, is calmer, less vitriolic and seems purged of the choler that was so conspicuous earlier. He claims that going away "had nothing to do with Flora

de Barral” (C p.188) when it quite clearly did. His encounter with her was the catalyst for much profound, but initially reluctant, self-examination which continued when he returned to sea. Flora also went on a journey to sea, with her new husband Roderick. Marlow says that he went “very, very far away and for a long, long time” after “a sudden sense of having wasted my time on shore long enough”:

How far Flora went I can't say. But I will tell you my idea: my idea is that she went as far as she was able – as far as she could bear it – as far as she had to . . .”

(C p.188)

The final trademark Marlovian ellipsis suggests that Marlow’s and Flora’s journeys, with the repeated “very” are of the same type, not just maritime but also interior journeys of self-discovery.

What happened to Marlow while he was away? His attitude on returning suggests that of a man resigned to his fate, having understood his character and become reconciled to it. Again, this in line with what Schopenhauer says happens to those who acquire character. They realize that life is not only a matter of “outer necessity” (circumstances) but “inner” necessity, i.e. one’s individual character:

Now as with outer necessity so with inner, nothing reconciles so firmly as a distinct knowledge of it. If we have clearly recognized once for all

our good qualities and our strong points as well as our defects and weaknesses; if we have fixed our aim accordingly, and rest content about the unobtainable, we thus escape in the surest way, as far as our individuality allows, that bitterest of all sufferings, dissatisfaction with ourselves, which is the inevitable consequence of ignorance of our own individuality, of false conceit, and the audacity and presumption that arise therefrom.

(WWR 1 p.307)

Sexual love, or a deep and lasting romantic relationship, was Marlow's "unobtainable" about which, with a greater understanding of his character, he can now rest content. Marlow returns as a man with acquired character. Marlow's self-understanding allows him to help Powell recognize what *his* character fits him for – a life with Flora. Powell has an "inward fire tended in the sanctuary of his heart" (C p.326) for Flora. Marlow is now able to bring the pair together for a marriage where he will be happy to "go to church with a friend." (C p.330) Marlow, no longer self-divided, is reconciled to his character even if its genuine expression requires him to lead a solitary life. That's who he is.

CHAPTER 6

VICTORY: "TO THINE OWN SELF BE TRUE"

1.

In §37 of the *Counsels and Maxims*, his manual of worldly philosophy and guide to acquired character, Schopenhauer warned:

You ought never to take any man as a model for what you should do or leave undone; because position and circumstances are in no two cases alike, and difference of character gives a peculiar, individual tone to what a man does. [...] A man should act in accordance with his own character, as soon as he has carefully deliberated on what he is about to do. The outcome of this is that *originality* cannot be dispensed with in practical matters: otherwise, what a man does will not accord with what he is.

(CM p.102)

Conrad's *Victory* is an imaginative examination, written with great psychological acuity, of what happens to someone who ignores this advice. Schopenhauer believed that: "Intuitively, or *in concreto*, every man is really conscious of all philosophical truths". (WWR 1 p.303) The novel is in part a vivid realization of themes from Schopenhauer's philosophy, in the way that

he thought art should express philosophical truths; not in the “abstract language of *reflection*” but in the “language of *perception*”. (WWR 2 p.406)

In 1916, a year after its publication, Conrad wrote that the novel “has come out of my innermost self” (CL5 p.655), which may help to account for its power. The protagonist Axel Heyst’s adult life has been spent in trying to live by the precepts of his philosopher father, extracts from whose book *Storm and Dust* are quoted in the text.¹ Heyst’s book advocates a creed of detachment from society; and emotional disengagement from other people. It also sees sexual love as a snare and an illusion. The parallels with elements of Schopenhauer’s philosophy are clear, but only fragments of Heyst’s philosophy are given to us, consistent with Conrad’s aesthetic aim to be suggestive rather than explicit. Conrad is even-handed in his portrayal of Heyst. There is never a suggestion that his world-condemnation is not the genuine expression of *his* character. He is not a sham like Kurtz or Brierly. We must all follow “the promptings of our own particular devil” Conrad wrote, even if that devil is one of “negation” or “contempt”. (CL 2 p.30) Better to be a genuine contemptuous pessimist than an inauthentic optimist.

Axel’s life confirms three central tenets of Schopenhauer’s philosophy of character. First, every person has an individual fixed character to which they must “on the whole” remain true. Second, if they lack knowledge of their individuality, the highest level of which is acquired character, their path through life will not “describe a straight line, but a wavering and uneven one”, so that they will “hesitate, deviate, turn back”, resulting in “repentance and

¹ Conrad does not give Heyst Senior a first name so, to avoid confusion, I refer to the son as “Axel” or “Axel Heyst” and the father simply as “Heyst”. “Heystian” philosophy is that of the father, expressed verbally or in his writings quoted in the novel.

pain.” (WWR 1 p.304) Third, they will repent of actions which have “sprung not from pure, direct impulse, but from a concept, a dogma”. (WWR 1 p.304) Axel’s lack of self-understanding results in a literally deviating path, he becomes the “veriest tramp on this earth” (V p.152):

He meant to drift altogether and literally, body and soul, like a detached leaf drifting in the wind-currents under the immovable trees of a forest glade; to drift without ever catching on to anything.

(V p.73)

Such passive, aimless drifting can be a flight from self-knowledge. Axel admits that drifting “shall be my defence against life”. (V p.73) That statement may also be an unwitting admission that drifting is a defence against, or postponement of, self-examination.¹ He wavers between adhering to his father’s advice not to participate in life, being “an independent spectator – if that is possible” (V p.150), and abandoning this position. He does this first by giving financial help to the naively unbusinesslike trader Morrison whose ship has been impounded. Axel travels with Morrison and agrees to take part in his venture, the Tropical Belt Coal Company with its central station on Samburan. Morrison returns to England and dies there of natural causes, just as the company is started. Axel is its manager on Samburan and decides to

¹ Could being a permanent drifter be an authentic expression of Axel’s character? If it were then his abandoning it not once but twice (first in his involvement with Morrison and then with Lena) is puzzling. It suggests a profound dissatisfaction with drifting that one would not expect if this was Axel’s real vocation. That he does not return to drifting after the deaths of Morrison and Lena – when there is no obstacle preventing him from doing so – also suggests that drifting was not really the “atmosphere suitable” (WWR 1 p.304) to his character.

stay on the island amidst the neglected mine works after the company fails, with his taciturn manservant Wang, a company coolie. Axel then elopes with Lena after rescuing her from the hotelier Schomberg's unwanted sexual attentions and the bullying owners of the all-female orchestra, of which she is a member, which provides the entertainment at the hotel. Three guests then arrive at Schomberg's hotel; the sinister criminal Mr Jones, his knife-wielding servant Martin Ricardo and the brutish Pedro. Jones and Ricardo are professional cardsharps, thieves and, probably, murderers. They turn Schomberg's hotel into a gambling den. Schomberg is afraid of them, having discovered that Jones has a gun, and of the possible repercussions arising from illegal gambling. He devises a plan for getting rid of them. He concocts a story that Axel is a rich man with a store of wealth on his island retreat of Samburan. Jones and his companions sail from the mainland to Samburan to rob Axel but arrive exhausted by heat and thirst – Schomberg supplied them with a barrel of salt-water for drinking. Axel invites them on the island to recuperate.

When Axel considers his rescue of Lena, he sees it as “his latest departure from the part of an unconcerned spectator.” (V p.142) He is amazed how he, a self-proclaimed “man of universal scorn and unbelief” (V p.152) could have done such a things. When he says this to Lena she retorts “You are putting it on”, to which he replies that he is not feigning: “I am not for nothing the son of my father [...] I am he, all but the genius.” (V p.152) In *Victory* Conrad invites the reader to fathom if Axel is correct in his estimation and, if so, to what extent. Is his elopement with Lena a betrayal of his true

character as a “hermit”? (V p.54) Or is it a revelation of his true character – that in fact he “was not a hermit by temperament”? (V p.27) The description of his feelings when he initially settles for an isolated life on the island of Samburan resembles the state of Schopenhauerian repentance:

And though he had made up his mind to retire from the world in hermit fashion, yet he was irrationally moved by this sense of loneliness which had come to him in the hour of renunciation. It hurt him. Nothing is more painful than the shock of sharp contradictions that lacerate our intelligence and our feelings.

(V p.54)

Against this, we must weigh Axel’s claim that: “I only know that he who forms a tie is lost. The germ of corruption has entered into his soul.” (V pp. 152-153) That sounds too close, both in content and style, to his father’s philosophical maxims to be an authentic expression of Axel’s own character. It sounds too pat, too glib to be convincing, rather as if Axel were sheltering or hiding behind the words because he fears the complications of life. This, and other similar instances, raises the suspicion that Axel’s life may not be a genuine expression of his own “individual tone”, as Schopenhauer put it (CM p.102), but an inauthentic expression his father’s philosophy which he imbibed from boyhood to manhood. In the essay “On Ethics” Schopenhauer warned that, given the fixed nature of our character, “all merely acquired, learnt, affected qualities in other words, qualities *a posteriori*, moral no less

than intellectual are, properly speaking, ungentle, empty appearance without content.” (SE pp. 226-227) Axel seems incapable of deciding which of his actions are affectations and which are genuine and original, that is having their origin in his own character rather than his father’s teachings. Here we must remember Schopenhauer’s crucial distinction between “acquired character” and an “artificially acquired” character (CM pp.88-99) which was discussed in Chapter 1, “Character in Theory”.

Axel’s vacillating between detachment from and engagement with life means that he ends up being *semi*-detached. His “detachment from the world was not complete” the novel’s opening first person narrator warns, adding: “And incompleteness of any sort leads to trouble.” (V p.27) *Victory* is neither fictionalized philosophy nor a moral allegory and so offers no cut and dried solution to the question of the authenticity of Axel’s actions – when and if he is acting out of character. This is not an error or omission but part of Conrad’s aesthetic aim which was, as we saw in *Heart of Darkness*, to make fiction symbolic, suggestive rather than explicit.

Victory is a novel which “parades itself as a literary text by numerous allusions to other texts”. (Erdinast-Vulcan 1998 p.261) One of those texts is *Hamlet*. Both play and novel have a protagonist whose actions are influenced by a dead father. Gross (1959 p.87) found “a reflection of the ghost in Shakespeare's play” in the passage where Axel reads *Storm and Dust*:

It seemed to him that he was hearing his father's voice, speaking and ceasing to speak again. Startled at first, he ended by finding a charm

in the illusion. He abandoned himself to the half-belief that something of his father dwelt yet on earth – a ghostly voice, audible to the ear of his own flesh and blood.

(V p.167)

Gross (1959 p.88) concludes that: “Heyst’s father is as compelling a force in the action of *Victory* as is the materialized ghost in *Hamlet*”. In *Hamlet* the prince’s relationship with his father is paralleled by that of Polonius and Laertes. Axel’s dying father gives him this maxim to live by: “Look on – make no sound”. (V p.134) They are the last words to his son and in them Conrad alludes to Polonius’s advice to his son Laertes in a long speech in *Hamlet*. (Act 1: scene iii) “Give thy thoughts no tongue”, he tells him. Conrad’s allusion makes an ironic point at Heyst’s expense. For Polonius’s precepts are about compromise, seeking a golden mean between extremes of behaviour. There are six instances of “but” in twenty-six lines (lines 58-84). Polonius’s praise of silence is qualified: “Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice.” Heyst’s philosophy, like Schopenhauer’s salvationism, is uncompromising. Polonius’s speech consists of commonplaces but Conrad points us in its direction because it contains the one piece of advice that Axel Heyst ought to have received from his father but did not: “This above all – to thine own self be true”.

2.

It is clear to me, as to Wollaeger (1990 p.204) and Magee (1997 p.410) that the character of Heyst's father was modelled on Schopenhauer, although not slavishly so. Watts (1993 p. 72-73) believes this was "probably" the case. Panagopoulos (1998) fails to mention any putative resemblance. Daphne Erdinast-Vulcan, in her highly influential study of Conrad's novels, is unequivocal in her claim that: "the philosophical prototype of the elder Heyst is Nietzsche rather than Schopenhauer." (Erdinast-Vulcan 1991 p.175) Since part of my interpretation of the novel is that Schopenhauer is the philosophical prototype for Heyst, her claim needs to be examined in detail.

Her argument rests on a reading of several passages from *Victory*. In (1) Axel remembers the night of his father's death, and in (2) he reads this father's book *Storm and Dust*.

(1)

His son buried the silenced destroyer of systems, of hopes, of beliefs. He observed that the death of that bitter contemner of life did not trouble the flow of life's stream, where men and women go by thick as dust, revolving and jostling one another like figures cut out of cork and weighted with lead just sufficiently to keep them in their proudly upright posture.

(V p.134)

(2)

He turned the pages of the little volume, "Storm and Dust," glancing here and there at the broken text of reflections, maxims, short phrases, enigmatical sometimes and sometimes eloquent.

(V p.167)

Erdinast-Vulcan (1991 p.175) claims that in (1) the description "destroyer of systems, of hopes, of beliefs" makes Axel's father "a Nietzschean figure".

In the Introduction we saw Owen Knowles make a strong case for some allusions to Schopenhauer being derived from two secondary sources: Wallace's biography of Schopenhauer and Maupassant's short story "Beside a Dead Man". Knowles confined his claim to *Heart of Darkness* but, I contend, they also appear in *Victory*. The archaic "contemner" in (1) occurs nowhere else in Conrad's fiction, essays or letters but it was used by Wallace (2000 p.57) when he calls Schopenhauer a "world-contemner". The whole passage is also a clear allusion to Maupassant's story, in which a German disciple of Schopenhauer describes him as "the greatest shatterer of dreams who had ever dwelt on earth". (Maupassant 1934 p.787) He adds:

Schopenhauer has marked humanity with the seal of his disdain and of his disenchantment. A disabused pleasure-seeker, he overthrew beliefs, hopes, poetic ideals and chimeras, destroyed the aspirations, ravaged the confidence of souls, killed love, dragged down the

chivalrous worship of women, crushed the illusions of hearts, and accomplished the most gigantic task ever attempted by scepticism.

(Maupassant 1934 p.788)

It would be surprising if Conrad had not known this story – given that he thought that Maupassant was “a great talent” whose art was “(almost) impeccable” and confessed that he was “saturated with Maupassant”. (CL 3 pp.53-54)

Her second claim is that in (2) the description of Heyst’s writing style resembles Nietzsche’s “notorious aphorisms”. (Erdinast-Vulcan 1991 p.175) Conrad uses the word “maxims” not “aphorisms” and the most popular work of Schopenhauer’s in English and available to Conrad was Bailey Saunders’ translation of *Counsels and Maxims*. In the Maupassant story, Schopenhauer’s disciple refers to his master’s “startling maxims”. (Maupassant 1934 p.789) The adjectives “enigmatical” and “eloquent” are as applicable to Schopenhauer as to Nietzsche.

Erdinast-Vulcan (1991 p.175) then cites two quotations from Heyst’s *Storm and Dust*, which, she says, “sound like quotations from Nietzsche”:

(3)

Of the stratagems of life the most cruel is the consolation of love – the most subtle, too; for the desire is the bed of dreams.

(V p.167)

(4)

To the unknown force of negation they prefer the miserably tumbled
bed of their servitude.

(V p.168)

These quotations not only sound like Schopenhauer, but they express two central claims of his metaphysics of sexual love. The first is that sexual love is an illusion, and the second is that lovers are dupes, unwittingly serving the will of the species. The element of sexual disgust in (3) and (4) is consistent with salvationism.¹ This, together with the allusions to Wallace's biography and Maupassant's short story, indirect sources for Schopenhauer's thought, combine to make a strong case for seeing Conrad as positively encouraging us to connect Heyst and his philosophy with Schopenhauer. Finally, what clinches the case against Erdinast-Vulcan's claim is her failure to explain why it is that, if Nietzsche was Heyst's real-life counterpart, Heyst's philosophy is so life-denying. If her contention was correct then Heyst would be the great yea-saying *affirmer* of life. Heyst's philosophy of negation sounds nothing like Nietzsche, who accused Schopenhauer of:

¹ The repetition of "bed" suggests another allusion to *Hamlet*. Hamlet's ghostly father says that lust, embodied in his wife and brother, "Will sate itself in a celestial bed / And prey on garbage" (Act I: scene v) and demands that his son: "Let not the royal bed of Denmark be / A couch for luxury and damned incest." (Act I: scene v) Hamlet internalizes his father's sentiments, exhorting his mother not to let "the bloat King tempt you again to bed" and describing her sexual liaison with Claudius as living "In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed, Stew'd in corruption, honeying and making love / Over the nasty sty!" (Act III: scene iv)

[A] viciously ingenious attempt to use the great self-affirmation of the 'will to live', the exuberant forms of life, in the service of their opposite, a nihilistic, total depreciation of the value of life.

(Nietzsche 2005 p.202)

There are other similarities between Heyst's philosophy and Schopenhauer's which add weight to this argument. An important passage of Heystian philosophy employs a financial metaphor for society, and comes as Axel is explaining his father's personal history to Lena:

I suppose he began like other people; took fine words for good, ringing coin and noble ideals for valuable banknotes. He was a great master of both, himself, by the way. Later he discovered – how am I to explain it to you? Suppose the world were a factory and all mankind workmen in it. Well, he discovered that the wages were not good enough. That they were paid in counterfeit money.

(V pp.149-150)

In the essay "Human Nature" Schopenhauer describes society in terms of a market but one in which both the goods and the money they are exchanged for are fakes:

[T]he apples are of wax, the flowers of silk, the fish of pasteboard, and that all things – yes, all things – are toys and trifles; and that of two

men whom he may see earnestly engaged in business, one is supplying spurious goods and the other paying for them in false coin.

(HN p.18)

In *Counsels and Maxims* §9 there is an extended economic metaphor in which the individual is seen as an investor and society as a loss-making business. The wise man discovers that making a profit can only be achieved by not investing in society but by living in solitude. This is the essence of Heyst's philosophy and it is easy to see how following its message leads his son to Samburan: "Accordingly, most society is so constituted as to offer a good profit to anyone who will exchange it for solitude." (CM p.29)¹ Axel continues:

There is something of my father in every man who lives long enough. But they don't say anything. They can't. They wouldn't know how, or perhaps, they wouldn't speak if they could.

(V p.150)

If one lives long enough, therefore, one will come to see the world as he did: the Heystian view of life is the natural one of old age, maturity and wisdom. It is Schopenhauer's view in *Counsels and Maxims* that "when old age is reached" we get a "clearer view, and see things as they are", our illusions are

¹ See also §33: "As paper-money circulates in the world instead of real coin, so, in the place of true esteem and genuine friendship, you have the outward appearance of it – a mimic show made to look as much like the real thing as possible." (CM p.93)

“gradually dispelled” and we realize the “futility of pleasure” and the “nullity of all things on this earth”, and:

It is this that gives almost every old man, no matter how ordinary his faculties may be, a certain tincture of wisdom, which distinguishes him from the young.

(CM p. 154)

There are important similarities between Heyst and Schopenhauer and their respective philosophies, but they are not identical. The crucial difference is that Heyst’s philosophy does not appear to have a central role for character and self-knowledge. Heyst’s philosophy of detachment, in contrast, seems to be a one-size-fits-all philosophy. Axel’s problems derive from his procrustean attempt to make himself fit his father’s philosophy.

Conrad’s exploration of Schopenhauer’s philosophical themes is subtle and dextrous. The first theme is that of detachment which Schopenhauer, in *Counsels and Maxims*, advocates as the best attitude for the individual to take in relation to society. Detachment in itself is amenable to the worldly and salvationist strands of Schopenhauer’s philosophy and he examines both possibilities. As detachment becomes more extreme, however, it moves towards the salvationist ideal of complete detachment from the world. Conrad explores a second Schopenhauer theme, which appears in the essay “Further Psychological Observations”, and subjects it to a series of variations in *Victory*. This theme is about the opposition between what is “common” and what is

“uncommon”. Both themes appear in Heyst’s philosophy. Axel’s life is spent in trying to live out that philosophy. Although the novel suggests that this is a malign rather than beneficent legacy, Conrad does not make Axel a helpless victim of his father. Axel has opportunities to assert his individual character but he does not know clearly what it is, and he appears reluctant to find out.

The third theme *Victory* explores is the opposition of action and (excessively inappropriate) reflection. It is important to distinguish between two ways in which reflection can be used in relation to character and action. First, there is the reflection we apply to our experiences. This is part of the process of gaining acquired character. Second, there is an inhibiting use of reflection which is undertaken *before* we perform an action. Reflecting in this way can become habitual, even in circumstances when reflection is either unnecessary or detrimental to the matter in hand. Axel fails to do enough of the first kind and indulges in too much inhibiting reflection of the second kind.

Conrad’s treatment of these themes is not schematic. Instead they are intertwined and appear transformed and re-harmonized in different characters, adding to the richness and complexity of the novel. Hampson (1996 p.145) calls this process “doubling” whereby Conrad makes obvious parallels between characters as a way of generating “other subtler parallels”. In *Victory* there is a network of illuminating parallels between Axel and his father; Axel and Jones; and Heyst and Jones. Once on Samburan, Jones is portrayed by Conrad as a hall-of-mirrors distortion of Axel’s father. Jones’s conversation often sounds like a megalomaniac’s version of salvationism, replete with

sexual disgust and world-contempt. Let us now consider in detail how these themes are treated in the novel.

3.

A passage in §9 of *Counsel and Maxims* encapsulates Schopenhauer's advocacy of detachment as the best strategy for life:

The less necessity there is for you to come into contact with mankind in general, in the relations whether of business or of personal intimacy, the better off you are. Loneliness and solitude have their evils, it is true; but if you cannot feel them all at once, you can at least see where they lie; on the other hand, society is *insidious* in this respect; as in offering you what appears to be the pastime of pleasing social intercourse, it works great and often irreparable mischief. The young should early be trained to bear being left alone; for it is a source of happiness and peace of mind.

(CM p.30)

The similarity to Heyst's philosophy is striking, and if this was not Conrad's source it shows his imaginative genius for being able to see the world, temporarily, through Schopenhauer's eyes. Axel gets the sort of youthful training in detachment that Schopenhauer proposes. Her early death meant that Axel "had never known his mother" and as a boy he lives in a foreign

country with his father, “an expatriated Swede who died in London”. (V p.73)
 He leaves school at eighteen and then lived with his father who was writing his last book: “Three years of such companionship at that plastic and impressionable age were bound to leave in the boy a profound mistrust of life.” (V p.73) When his father dies, Axel begins fifteen years of wandering “like a detached leaf” and practises the lessons he learned from his father. In his dealings with others he is “invariably courteous and unapproachable”. (V p.73)

Being unapproachable was the hallmark of his father whose only contact with the world was with his philosophical disciples, “the elect” (V p.150) of whom Axel is one. Also in §9, Schopenhauer notes that:

It is natural for great minds – the true teachers of humanity – to care little about the constant company of others [...] Men of great intellect live in the world without really belonging to it [...] and so, from their earliest years, they feel that there is a perceptible difference between them and other people. But it is only gradually, with the lapse of years, that they come to a clear understanding of their position. Their intellectual isolation is then reinforced by actual seclusion in their manner of life; they let no one approach who is not in some degree emancipated from the prevailing vulgarity.

(CM pp.40-41)

This was how Schopenhauer saw himself. It may also be how Heyst, in old age, saw himself. The change in perception from youth to age would account

for how Heyst, the proselytizer of isolation, had acquired a wife and son in his earlier years. Schopenhauer saw life as offering us “no choice” but that between “solitude on the one side or vulgarity on the other”, so that a “propensity to seclusion and solitude” is at bottom “an aristocratic feeling”. (CM p.40)

In §46 of *Counsels and Maxims* Schopenhauer advises courtesy to others as a way of avoiding conflict with other people, if one has to come into contact with them. It has the added advantage that one can insult them without their being aware of it:

If you are polite enough in your manner and courteous in your tone there are many people whom you may abuse outright, and yet run no immediate risk of offending them.

(CM p.108)

Axel’s courtesy is a defence strategy and so is his “smile of playful courtesy” which is made indiscriminately “to all sorts and conditions of men in the islands” (V.169) and becomes a mask which is primarily used to deflect intimacy. At their first meeting Lena asks him: “Why do you always smile when you speak?” (V p.60) Davidson anchors his ship at Samburan when he sees Axel and inquires why he is living there. In response: “He only smiled”. (V p.25) In §29 Schopenhauer warns that everyone has the talent for “making a mask out of his own physiognomy, so that he can always look as if he really were what he pretends to be.” (CM p.83) A mask allows others to dupe

us; us to dupe others; and a person to dupe him or herself. If the mask becomes fixed by habit, one takes the appearance for the reality and mistakes the mask for an accurate expression of one's true character. The third possibility is obviously a hindrance to self-knowledge.

In §29 Schopenhauer portrays all forms of engagement with other people as inherently "very risky" (CM p.35). Those "of noble character and great mental gifts" often show a lamentable lack of "worldly wisdom" and knowledge of other people, five sixths of whom they would be better off avoiding. (CM pp. 81-82) Since these others will be wearing masks one had better wear one as well. Wearing a social mask in this way is a permissible form of self-defence.¹ He does not believe that this sort of adopted prudential strategy ought to usurp the "art of understanding" oneself and acquiring the knowledge of "what is his real, chief, and foremost object in life" (CM p.17) which was emphasized in §4. He makes this quite clear in §30 when setting out the correct relationship between "acquired character and innate character" as – "*everything that is unnatural is imperfect*". (CM p.89) Hard work, constant practice and self-discipline can make us "shrewd and worldly-wise" but any attempt by "abstract principles" to over-ride genuine expression of one's character results in "*affectation*" (CM p.89) living an inauthentic life. This seems to be the case for Axel who lives *unnaturally* in accordance with his father's principles. For: "one man's meat is another's poison". (CM p.112)

Heyst's rejection of the world seems to be a genuine expression of his character, but it is exacerbated by mankind's response to his philosophy,

¹ In the same way that telling lies is, "the legitimate defence against unauthorized inquisitiveness, whose motive is hardly ever benevolent." (BM p.159)

since it “had instinctively rejected his wisdom.” (V p.73) Mankind’s response would not have surprised Schopenhauer. Axel declines to take a plunge into the stream of life:

The dead man had kept him on the bank by his side. And now Heyst felt acutely that he was alone on the bank of the stream. In his pride he determined not to enter it.

(V 135)

Conrad suggests that it may be fear rather than pride which prompts his decision. Schopenhauer argues that affectation – “trying to appear what he is not” (CM p.90) – is “cowardly, for it is based on fear”. (CM p. 89) Axel has formidable moustaches which give him a deceptive “martial presence” since he is not a “fighting man”. (V p.11) It may be that while his father rejected life, through an almost satanic pride, Axel is simply frightened of it.¹

However “no one can persevere long in a fictitious character,” says Schopenhauer, “for nature will soon re-assert itself.” (CM p.90) Axel manages until he is thirty-six but nature re-asserts itself with a vengeance in his affaire with Lena. He elopes with her to his Samburan retreat, and pondering on “the mystery of his actions”, judges that “There must be a lot of the original Adam in me, after all.” (V p.133) To which Conrad adds the

¹ Mr Jones, a distorted version of Heyst, claims to have been exiled from society – “ejected from his proper social sphere” – and is now a “rebel” who spends his time “coming and going up and down the earth.” (V p.239) Kalnins (2004b p.327) notes Conrad’s biblical allusion: “And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down in it.” (Job 1:7)

following lines which echo Schopenhauer's warning about irrepressible nature:

He reflected, too, with the sense of making a discovery, that his primeval ancestor is not easily suppressed. The oldest voice in the world is just the one that never ceases to speak.

(V p.133)

If Axel is Adam then this casts Lena in the role of the temptress Eve. It is one with which the unsophisticated eighteen-year-old, with the simple Sunday school religious beliefs, complies: "Woman is the tempter", she tells him. (V p.266) Years of imbibing his father's teaching about the snares of sexual passion and personal involvement are not easy to shake off. Even though Axel finds with Lena, "a closer communion than they had ever achieved before", his next thought is:

But even then there still lingered in him a sense of incompleteness not altogether overcome – which, it seemed, nothing ever would overcome – the fatal imperfection of all the gifts of life, which makes of them a delusion and a snare. (V p.162)

He inwardly denounces their sexual love as "the plot of plots" (V p.164) a judgment which Schopenhauer, for whom the sexual impulse was the kernel of the will to live, would have endorsed. Axel's coldness makes her cry, and:

“He had never seen her cry. It was like another appeal to his tenderness – a new seduction”. (V p.164)

Axel occupies this uncomfortable half-way house between engagement and detachment until Lena’s death. It is exhibited not just in his relationship with her but also with other people on the mainland. The hotel owner Schomberg spreads malicious rumours that Heyst was responsible for Morrison’s death and “as good as murdered him.” (V p.159) Greaney (2002 p.36) sees Axel as “the blameless prey of Schomberg’s murderous gossip” but he must bear some responsibility, if only because he is aware of it but makes no attempt to confront the perpetrators or to stop it flourishing. Axel’s response is as ambivalent as his semi-detached attitude to life. He claims to be “above the level of island gossip”. (V p.157) Is this aristocratic disdain a genuine expression of his character or is it expressed later in his desire to spit on the floor “in sheer unsophisticated disgust” at Schomberg’s “abominable calumny”? (V p.166) He claims that the opinion of his fellows is beneath contempt: “As if it could matter to me what anybody had ever said or believed, from the beginning of the world till the crack of doom!” (V p.160) Yet when action is called for against Jones, Martin and Pedro who come to Samburan to rob him, he appeals to what “the world would say” as the reason for doing nothing. He fears that “the story whispered – perhaps shouted – certainly spread out, and believed – and *believed*”, would be that he had “murdered these unoffending shipwrecked strangers from sheer funk.” (V p.272)

He shrinks from challenged Schomberg about his gossip as he does from the thought of physical confrontation with him over Lena: “In truth, Heyst had

shrunk from the idea of competition with fellows unknown, with Schomberg the hotel-keeper.” (V p.67) This lends support to an interpretation which suggests, following Schopenhauer, that the mask of affectation hides fear. In an example of character “doubling” Conrad matches Axel’s misleadingly martial moustache with Schomberg’s “great beard” (V p.19) behind which this essentially cowardly man can successfully bluster and bully until the arrival of the criminals Jones and Ricardo, professional dissimulators who see through his disguise immediately. Axel is not a coward like Schomberg but his inability to act in defence of himself and Lena is a contributory factor leading to her death. His spontaneity has been eroded over a period of years by the steady drip of his father’s caustic philosophy.

4.

In *Counsel and Maxims* Schopenhauer, in the matter of detachment, tries to adhere to his own maxim that the philosopher should inquire not prescribe. It is clear though that the ability to be emotionally “self-sufficient” and “all in all to oneself” (CM p.26), is the hallmark of nature’s aristocrats. It reveals how high an individual is “in Nature’s lists”. (CM p.28) For the “chief sign that a man has any nobility in his character is the little pleasure he takes in others’ company.” (CM p.40) In §10 Schopenhauer identified three types of aristocracy: birth and rank, wealth, and intellect, of which the third is the most distinguished. (CM p.46) In “Further Psychological Observations” Schopenhauer argued for what can be construed as a fourth type of

aristocracy – one of character. He divides humanity into two groups. The first consists of unique, highly individuated people “who stand alone” (SP p.66) and the other of people barely distinguishable from one another. There are unique individually crafted aristocrats and mass-produced “common” people. For the latter their “individual character comes to very little in reality”:

They have no special stamp or mark to distinguish them; they are like manufactured goods, all of a piece.

(SP p.66)

Schopenhauer begins (SP p.65) with a series of questions about our use of the term “common”: “Why is it that *common* is an expression of contempt?” Why do “*uncommon, extraordinary, distinguished*, denote approbation?” “Why is everything that is common contemptible?”

His first answer is that:

Common in its original meaning denotes that which is peculiar to all men, *i.e.*, shared equally by the whole species, and therefore an inherent part of its nature. Accordingly, if an individual possesses no qualities beyond those which attach to mankind in general, he is a *common man*. Ordinary is a much milder word, and refers rather to intellectual character; whereas *common* has more of a moral application.

(SP p.65)

Since there cannot be an individual with *no* individual characteristics no one would qualify as being common. Schopenhauer is aware that this bald assertion conflicts with “various passages of my works” (SP p.66) where he had said that what distinguishes animals, which possess “nothing more than the generic character of the species”, and humans is that the latter are the only beings “which can lay claim to possess an individual character.” In one of those passages he says that each of us is an individual with a unique character and “can be regarded as a special Idea, corresponding to a particular act of objectification of the will” and that act is an individual person’s “intelligible character”. (WWR 1 p.158) If we are all special in this way, how can Schopenhauer justify his two-tier system of characters?

He qualifies his first explanation by saying that commonness is a matter of degree: everyone is individual but some are more individual than others:

But in most men this individual character comes to very little in reality [...] Their thoughts and desires, like their faces, are those of the species, or, at any rate, those of the class to which they belong; and accordingly, they are of a trivial, every-day, common character, and exist by the thousand. You can usually tell beforehand what they are likely to do and say. They have no special stamp or mark to distinguish them; they are like manufactured goods, all of a piece.

(SP p.66)

Even if that were true it is difficult to see how it would have a “moral application”. There is nothing of intrinsic moral worth in being “uncommon” if that consists merely in having an easily distinguishable character, so that one stands out from the crowd. On this criterion an extremely egregious egoist (or someone exceedingly malicious) would qualify as uncommon. More charitably we might see Schopenhauer as here averting to “uncommon” people as those who have acquired character, thus making their natural character more sharply delineated. That would still not give “common” a moral application (or make being uncommon morally meritorious) for Schopenhauer thought acquired character was a morally neutral concept – “of importance not so much for ethics proper as for life in the world.” (WWR 1 p.307)

A third attempt shifts the criterion of “common” from character to the intellect. The “*common* part of us” is universal will – will as “the *thing-in-itself*” – which is “part and parcel of every creature, and the permanent element in everything”:

On the other hand, that which places one being over another, and sets differences between man and man, is intellect and knowledge; therefore in every manifestation of self we should, as far as possible, give play to the intellect alone; for, as we have seen, the will is the *common* part of us.

(SP p.67)

This still clashes with his claim that moral worth has nothing to do with intellectual qualities. His panegyric on “goodness of heart” makes this clear: it is “incommensurable with any other perfection” and it outshines “intellect, even genius” as the sun outshines a torch; and such goodness is consistent with “a complete lack of intellectual merits and culture”. (WWR 2 p.232) ¹ How can intellect be a crucial difference between individuals since it is only a brain function which means that intellectual superiority is “merely temporal, indeed scarcely more than a physical advantage”? (WWR 2 p.233) In “The Ages of Life” section of *Counsels and Maxims* the wisdom which comes with age is said to strip us of our “illusions” about the “glory of the world” including that of “worldly distinctions of great and small, high and low”. (CM p.155) The wise man would reject Schopenhauer’s common/uncommon distinction – whether based on character or intellect – as an illusion. Why doesn’t Schopenhauer? He is not blind to the problem, as his acknowledgment that it conflicts with some of his other philosophical claims shows. What is motivating him to do it?

The motive is salvationism. This becomes clear in Schopenhauer’s fourth attempt at distinguishing the uncommon from the common. In the uncommon person knowledge becomes a quieter of the will-to-live. Being common then is not really about the quality of one’s character or intellect but about whether one affirms or denies the will-to-live. The less one affirms the will-to-live, the more uncommon one is. Not being “common and vulgar” requires “every form of emotion”, joy, hate or fear, to be restrained. (SP p.67) This is not merely the nineteenth century idea of aristocratic emotional restraint, the stiff upper lip.

¹ See also (BM p.210): “moral excellence stands higher than all theoretical wisdom” and whoever is “morally noble” reveals “the deepest knowledge, the highest wisdom, however much he may be lacking in intellectual excellence.”

Schopenhauer goes much further – the ultimate target of uncommonness is “an act of self-annulment”. (SP p.69) The most uncommon person would be the saint or ascetic. It is salvationism that privileges the erasure of character over the worldly concept of acquired character, the aim of which is *enhanced* individuality.

5.

No one is too “common” to be of interest to the artist. Schopenhauer said that “the greatest minds”:

Shakespeare and Goethe, Raphael and Rembrandt – esteem it not unworthy of themselves to present and realize for us a not even striking individual in his whole speciality, down to the smallest detail, with the greatest accuracy and the most careful industry.

(SE p.281)

In his “Author’s Note” to *Chance* Conrad wrote that his task as a writer was to narrate the “infinitely minute stories about men and women” and their “simple ideas and sincere emotions”. (C p.332) In *Victory* Conrad takes Schopenhauer’s theme of what is “common” and subjects it to a series of variations, some of which dramatize issues which are only implicit in the philosophical text. Part of Heyst’s power over his son, is that Axel sees him as a great man. Heyst is uncommon in the salvationist sense. He advocates

the minimizing of willing and withdrawal from the world. He prefers to be freed from the world by the “unknown force of negation”, while the masses choose the “captivity” of love and sexuality. (V pp. 167-168) Even his unhappiness carries the mark of distinction: “One could not refuse him a measure of greatness, for he was unhappy in a way unknown to mediocre souls.” (V p.73) Jones, however, is uncommon in Schopenhauer’s initial sense of simply being very different from the mass of people. Jones has the “special stamp” of singular character, but without any moral merit. When Schomberg lies to Jones about Morrison’s death, claiming that Axel was responsible, Jones dismisses his conventional “moralising” as fit for common people, not gentlemen. He takes Axel’s allegedly murderous activities as sign that he is also an uncommon man. Jones takes this (spurious) ruthlessness as a sign that Axel has a “certain amount of character; – and independence from common feelings which is not usual.” (V p.203) He later tells Axel: “you have turned out to be something quite out of the common”. (V p.289)

Living by the tenets of his father’s philosophy has led to Axel becoming an uncommon man, but at great personal cost. Axel’s life reveals the dangers inherent in the active cultivation of an aristocratic disdain for the so-called common people, and their common feelings. Axel is estranged from his emotions and his inner nature. His emotional reactions to people and events are mediated through his habitual fastidiousness. Although attracted to Lena, he does not acknowledge her glance because people might be looking: “Heyst's dread arose, not out of shame or timidity, but from his fastidiousness.” (V p.74) He wishes to take her away from the orchestra but:

In truth, Heyst had shrunk from the idea of competition with fellows unknown, with Schomberg the hotel-keeper [...] He felt ashamed of his fastidiousness.

(V p.67)

His fastidiousness leads to a disturbing display of emotional squeamishness when it prevents Axel telling the dying Lena that he loves her:

Heyst bent low over her, cursing his fastidious soul, which even at that moment kept the true cry of love from his lips in its infernal mistrust of all life. He dared not touch her and she had no longer the strength to throw her arms about his neck.

(V p.305)

Conrad puns on the word “refined” when Axel confesses to Lena that although he knows that Jones, Martin and Pedro threaten his and her lives:

They ought to have aroused my fury. But I have refined everything away by this time – anger, indignation, scorn itself. Nothing's left but disgust.

(V p.248)

Urged to become a spectator of life by his father – “after listening to him, I could not take my soul down into the street to fight there” (V p.150) – years of passivity have corroded his ability to act spontaneously. Only his offers of help to Morrison and Lena are exceptions. He has the opportunity to disarm Jones before the latter’s badly aimed shot kills Lena, but “he did not move”. (V p. 291) He has the opportunity to shoulder Jones out of the way and get out of the gun’s range but: “His very will seemed dead of weariness.” (V p.293) The “seemed” is crucial: this is not Schopenhauer’s breaking of the will. It is not the weariness of utter resignation, as is proved by his later suicide, but weariness due to lack of use, like an invalid’s wasted muscles.

Conrad combines the themes of detachment and reflection in Axel – in becoming habitual they have debilitated him, so that even when he wants to act, and knows he ought to, he no longer can. “Action – the first thought, or perhaps the first impulse, on earth” is now seen by him as a “barbed hook, baited with the illusions”. (V p.133) While Jim was petrified by his imagination Axel is rendered passive by the excessive and indiscriminating use of reflection: “The young man learned to reflect, which is a destructive process, a reckoning of the cost”. (V p.73) Conrad is not suggesting that reflection is in itself a bad thing, or that there is nothing in our lives upon which we need to reflect. His target is reflection taken to the extreme, where it becomes a pernicious habit. In this way, *everything*, even that which can only be successful when done spontaneously, is subjected to reflection. The ability to act freely, spontaneously and unreflectively, when the occasion demands it,

is lost. He makes this clear in the “Author’s Note” to *Victory* where he wrote that Axel, “in his fine detachment had lost the habit asserting himself”:

I don't mean the courage of self-assertion, either moral or physical, but the mere way of it, the trick of the thing, the readiness of mind and the turn of the hand that come without reflection and lead the man to excellence in life, in art, in crime, in virtue, and, for the matter of that, even in love.

(V p.312)

What Conrad here has in mind resembles the sporting phenomenon called “choking”, where an action which, when done spontaneously, is performed successfully almost without exception, but is muffed, even by adept and skilful practitioners, when done *self-consciously*.

Conrad and Schopenhauer’s worldly philosophy agree that it is important to get the correct balance between action and reflection. In *Counsels and Maxims* §8 Schopenhauer uses a literary simile to capture the truly lived life and one with an imbalance between reflection and action:

Experience of the world may be looked upon as a kind of text, to which reflection and knowledge form the commentary. Where there is great deal of reflection and intellectual knowledge, and very little experience, the result is like those books which have on each page two lines of text to forty lines of commentary.

(CM p.24)

Axel's life resembles such a book with the commentary consisting of maxims from his father's philosophy. There is a debilitating imbalance in favour of reflection over spontaneous action.

6.

People are most common, says Schopenhauer, when "their nature is merged in that of the species", acting not individually but only through their "generic nature", which puts them "on a par with the lower animals". (SP p.66) Schopenhauer does not mention sex here but since what is common is will and the sexual impulse is the kernel of the will-to-live it must be the most *common* activity. The uncommon ascetic eschews it. Conrad is alive to this aspect of commonness. In his vacillation between his instinctive love for Lena and loyalty to his father's philosophy, Axel inwardly denounces their sexual love as "the commonest of snares". (V p.164)

Jones embodies not only the sexual disgust which is part of Heyst's philosophy but also distorted, but recognizable, elements of world-hating salvationism. Women induce in Jones a state of the "horrors" (V p. 81) so that he gives them a "ten mile berth" (V p.99). He reacts to the discovery that Lena is on the island with "frightened disgust". (V p.290) Conrad makes extensive play throughout the novel with Schopenhauer's image of society as a masquerade in which participants are all disguised and everyone

dissimulates. Jones' proclaimed role as extreme sexually salvationist ascetic is questioned in this way. Schopenhauer praised the "exalted" spirit of monasticism because it shared the same "fundamental conception" as his philosophy's denial of the will so that: "A true monk is a being in the highest degree honourable." (SE p.270) Schopenhauer's trope of society as a show, a masquerade, results in the cautionary:

But in by far the majority of cases the cowl is a mere mask, behind which there is as little of the real monk as there is in one at a masquerade.

(SE p.270)

The "freely spoken girls" – code for prostitutes – at the Mexican pueblo Jones was lodging at, wondered if he was "a monk in disguise". (V p.123) Conrad suggests that the pose of asceticism is Jones' disguise. His being "hounded out from society by a lot of highly moral souls" (V p.287) may be due to his penchant for sexual partners like the "ragged bare-legged boy that he picked up in the street" (V p.116) in Mexico. Jones' effeminate appearance, with his "long, feminine eyelashes" (V p.81) and his twice-mentioned "delicate and beautifully pencilled eyebrows" (V p.87) (V p.289) and air of "used-up, weary, depraved distinction" (V p.81) combine to make him appear as "both Satanic gentleman and debauched homosexual." (Hawthorn 2007 p.59) His languor, exhaustion, enervation and fits of boredom (V p.116) (V 200) (V 209) are typical *fin de siècle* qualities which loudly proclaim decadence. Conrad may

have had in mind Schopenhauer's claim that when the sexual impulse, the instinct to procreate, becomes subordinate in a man to the "the sense of beauty" then it "degenerates into the proneness to pederasty." (ES p.182) That follows from Schopenhauer's claim in "On Women" that they are the "unaesthetic sex", only beautiful to a man whose mind was "clouded by his sexual impulses". (SP p.113) While the male body can be beautiful the female body is always merely erotic, a matter of the will. A man no longer "blindfolded" (ES p.200) by the impulse to procreate would see women as they truly are: "dragons and she-devils" (ES p.201) without beauty.

At the climax of the novel Conrad combines several senses of "common" including Schopenhauer's. Lena wants to arm Axel against the threats of Jones, Martin and Pedro. Axel's gun has been stolen by his manservant Wang, so she lures Martin to their bungalow, on the pretence of a liaison, with the intention of stealing his knife. Jones realizes that Martin plans to desert him for Lena, and takes Heyst at gunpoint to the bungalow. Seeing Lena in the bungalow, when he believed her to be hiding in the forest, Axel wrongly concludes that she has betrayed him sexually with Martin. His accusation is made in terms which recall Schopenhauer's "On Women": "No doubt you acted from instinct. Women have been provided with their own weapon", he tells Lena. (V p.303) In his essay, Schopenhauer argued that as "the weaker sex" women are dependent not on "strength" but "their instinctive capacity for cunning" and an "ineradicable tendency" to lie: "Nature has equipped woman, for her defence and protection with the arts of dissimulation". (SP p.110) The irony is that while Axel believes that Lena

was using her natural “weapon” against him she is actually using it in his defence.

In his outraged denunciation Jones distinguishes between gentlemen, like himself and Axel, and the “common herd” like Martin and Lena:

“I tell you, a gentleman is no match for the common herd. And yet one must make use of the brutes. Unarmed, eh? And I suppose that creature is of the commonest sort. You could hardly have got her out of a drawing-room.”

(V p.292)

Jones extends his misogyny to women of all classes, as did Schopenhauer: “Though they're all alike, for that matter.”(V p.292) Jones urges Axel to look at Martin sitting at Lena’s feet and gazing up at her in “rapture”. (V p.294)

"Can you understand their power?" whispered the hot breath of Mr. Jones into his ear. "Can there be a more disgusting spectacle? It's enough to make the earth detestable. She seems to have found her affinity.

(V p.294)

Jones’s whisper is an infernal physical version of the voice of Axel’s father which is a powerful disembodied presence for his son. Conrad emphasizes the parallel between Jones and Heyst’s father by linking their

physical appearance. If Jones is a “masquerading skeleton” (V p.293) it is Heyst’s father behind the mask. Jones resembles Axel’s father as seen in a distorting mirror, with the latter’s “thin features” and “ivory complexion” (V p.133) wasted into the skeletal Jones who is a “heap of bones”. (V p.309) Axel remembered his father “mainly in an ample blue dressing-gown” (V p.73) and Jones wears “an old but gorgeous blue silk dressing-gown”. (V p.283) He is a “spectre in a gorgeous dressing gown”. (V p.293) Jones grips Axel with a hand like a “hard claw” (V p.294) and whispers to him, “distilling his ghostly venom” into his ear:

He has found his soul-mate. Mud souls, obscene and cunning! Mud bodies, too – the mud of the gutter! I tell you, we are no match for the vile populace.

(V p.295)

Axel’s lack of faith in Lena results in a calumny worse than the ones he had suffered from at the hands of Schomberg. Those calumnies were believed by people who had no knowledge of Axel. He, however, has lived with and loved Lena, for however brief a time. Seeing Lena with Martin at her feet – which enables her to purloin his knife – arouses a “great shame” in Axel which is “maddening” (V p.295) because he repents not only of falling into the snare of sexual love but love for such a *common* woman, “almost a child of the streets.” (V p. 62) The affaire with Lena now reveals what, under the spell of his father’s philosophy, he earlier suspected; that he was “not much more far

sighted than the common run of men.” (V p.142) He takes it to reveal the truth of his father’s philosophy: that woman is a natural dissimulator (V p.303); their love an illusion, the “sortilege of their common life” (V p.154); that “he who forms a tie is lost”. (V p.152) This tableau is a graphic “I told you so” from his father. Mud recalls the “muddy frame” (V p.133) of the original Adam. Through his sexual love for Lena, Axel discovered this original Adam was still an important part of himself. Axel’s calumny of Lena reveals the extent of the corrupting effect upon him of his father’s philosophy.

7.

The grotesque figure of Jones allows Conrad to explore a disturbing undertone in part of Heyst’s philosophy and, by implication, Schopenhauer’s. When Axel asked his father for guidance he received this reply:

“You still believe in something, then?” he said in a clear voice, which had been growing feeble of late. “You believe in flesh and blood, perhaps? A full and equable contempt would soon do away with that, too. But since you have not attained to it, I advise you to cultivate that form of contempt which is called pity. It is perhaps the least difficult – always remembering that you, too, if you are anything, are as pitiful as the rest, yet never expecting any pity for yourself.”

(V p.134)

Heyst's "full and equable" contempt resembles salvationism, with its doctrine of eternal justice, by which the "melancholy" fate of humanity is justified by the fact that we are "as a whole contemptible." (WWR 1 p.352) As a second-best option he offers pity. In English translations of Schopenhauer his moral incentive "*mitleid*" is rendered both as "compassion" and "pity" – but here Conrad is clearly not using it in Schopenhauer's sense. Schopenhauer's moral incentive has nothing to do with contempt and Conrad's description of Mrs Fyne's "pure compassion" (C p.107) in *Chance* shows that he understood this. Compassion is about what we have in common. In the case of naturalized compassion it is our shared humanity; while for Schopenhauer's metaphysical compassion, it is our common identity. Pity, when used as a synonym for compassion, is also about what we have in common. Conrad is using "pity" in its second sense as a form of contempt, as in, for example: "I pity your ignorance." I feel compassion for an equal; I feel pity (in this second sense) for an inferior. Axel says his father "was very ruthless, and yet he was not without pity", which sounds like pity in the compassionate sense, but it is immediately qualified with: "Even to fools he was not utterly merciless". (V p.150) Heyst's pity is dispensed from on high to those below. We can see how this fits in with Conrad's exploration of Schopenhauer's theme of being "common". The aristocrat or gentleman can easily feel pity for those common people who are "like manufactured goods, all of a piece." (SP p.66) In *Under Western Eyes*, Razumov (who believes he is the bastard son of an aristocrat) learns that the peasant Ziemianitch has

committed suicide. Razumov is a third-year university student of philosophy – perhaps a budding Heyst – and his pity is of this contemptuous kind:

He felt pity for Ziemianitch, a large neutral pity, such as one may feel for an unconscious multitude, a great people seen from above – like a community of crawling ants working out its destiny.

(UWE p.209)

Axel is “temperamentally sympathetic” (V p.56) that is his original nature, his character, and he demonstrates it in rescuing first Morrison and then Lena. But some of his father’s brand of contemptuous pity has seeped into him. Lena worries that pity was the motive for Axel’s rescue of her. “You took me up from pity,” she tells him. (V p.266) Or possibly a mixture of a “curiosity and pity”, she thinks to herself. (V p.296)

In the figure of Jones, Conrad explores what happens when the element of pity disappears and only the aristocratic disdain for the “common herd” (V p.292) remains. It is not a big step from Jones to the Professor, the anarchist bomber in *The Secret Agent*, who will scourge the “odious multitude of mankind” (SA p.227) and the “weak” majority who are the “source of all the evil on this earth”; he would like to “take them in hand for utter extermination.” (SA p.222) The Professor’s similarity to Jones is revealed in a letter by Conrad, written when he was planning the ending for a stage adaptation of *Victory*. This ending has Jones screaming out “I am a force” as the final curtain falls. (CL 5 p.657) The Professor claims that: “He

was a force" (SA p.227) and "*I am* the force" (SA p.222) and plans "the regeneration of the world" through violence. (SA p.227) Kill or cure is the Professor's aim. Jones tells Axel of a way to cure his "disgusting" and "detestable" attachment to his sexual love for Lena: "If I have to shoot you in the end, then perhaps you will die cured." (V p.294) In Jones, the Professor – and Kurtz with his "Exterminate all the brutes!" (HD p.155) – contempt for the common becomes megalomania. Heyst's philosophy of universal contempt prepares the ground for such extremism. The hectoring tone which Schopenhauer adopts when in full salvationist flow can sound disturbingly similar to the rants of Conrad's madmen. One can almost hear Schopenhauer's voice grow shriller as he reveals that suffering is the "panacea of our misery", (WWR 2 p.638) a "purifying lye" which cures us of our inherent wickedness (WWR 2 p.639) and that it is possible "to justify the sufferings of mankind" (SP pp.21-22) because we are all "contemptible." (WWR 1 p.352)

In *Victory* Conrad also connects Schopenhauer's thoughts about "common" people to Nietzsche, through allusion to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.¹ Conrad's rejection of Nietzsche's *übermensch* can be seen in his satirizing them as the megalomaniac Dimensionists in *The Inheritors* (1899) a Wellesian science fiction fable, which Conrad co-wrote with Ford Madox Ford. Conrad's letter of 1901 says of the Dimensionists "here's your

¹ An English translation of *Zarathustra* was published in 1896. (Thatcher 1970 p. x) Conrad could have known it directly, or indirectly through literary friends who were enthusiastic Nietzscheans such as Edward Garnett (Thatcher 1970 p. 122) and Arthur Symons. (Thatcher 1970 pp. 126-132) The American writer J.B. Huneker sent Conrad a copy of his book *Egoists: A Book of Supermen* (1909) which includes a section on Nietzsche. (CL4 p.217)

overman". (CL 2 p.344) Conrad was an individualist but he rejected what he called Nietzsche's "mad individualism". (CL 2 p.188) Zarathustra's diatribes against common people resemble Jones's not in terms of salvationism (that certainly does not apply to Nietzsche) but in their sometimes slightly hysterical attacks on the hoi polloi, the common people. A section of *Zarathustra* is called "On the Rabble". The rabble is "unclean", poison life's "well of joy" with their "lustfulness" and "filthy dreams". Zarathustra only escapes his rabble-induced nausea in the "highest regions" where the unclean cannot reach. (Nietzsche 2006 p.74)

The clearest allusion to *Zarathustra* is to Section 29 of Part 3 "On Old and New Tablets" where Zarathustra proclaims a new tablet "*become hard!*" after a long passage which includes:

"Why so hard!" – the kitchen coal once said to the diamond. "Are we not close relatives?"

Why so soft? Oh my brothers, this / ask you: for are you not – my brothers?

Why so soft, so retiring and yielding? Why is there so much denying and denial in your hearts?

(Nietzsche 2006 p.172)

In the opening lines of *Victory* the first person narrator begins:

There is, as every schoolboy knows in this scientific age, a very close chemical relation between coal and diamonds. It is the reason, I believe, why some people allude to coal as “black diamonds.”

(V p.7)

Coal and diamonds are allotropes of carbon, essentially the same yet with very different qualities, “there is a deplorable lack of concentration in coal.” (V p.7) Axel, as a former coal company manager living next to the abandoned workings, is figuratively linked to coal. He lacks the concentration, in the sense of focus, in his life. Lena begins, like Axel, as a wanderer, without purpose and alone, her plight compounded by her fear of Zangiacomo’s bullying and Schomberg’s sexual advances. Through her love for Axel she gains a sense of personal worth and genuine moral stature and becomes the novel’s diamond.¹ A final connection between *Victory* and *Zarathustra* comes in Section 30 of Part 3 of Nietzsche’s work which contains fewer than two hundred words, of which five are “victory”. Conrad alluded to, perhaps even borrowed, Nietzsche’s coal and diamond trope but transformed it. The novel’s victor is Lena – one of the “common” people – and so a pointedly ironic development by Conrad of Nietzsche’s imagery.

¹ Panagopoulos (1998 p.193) explores the novel’s opening reference to coal and diamonds and recognizes in Lena’s “development in the novel [...] the dullness of coal under pressure has become the brilliance of the diamond”. However he fails to connect Conrad’s imagery with Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*.

8.

Victory is a novel dominated by two voices – the “ghostly voice” (V p167) of Heyst’s father and the “pure and enchanting voice” (V 164) of Lena. The novel is structured around the alternative attractions of these voices between which Axel is torn. His father’s is the voice of negation and life-denial. Distorted and garbled, it speaks through Jones in a form of ghostly ventriloquism. Jones’s voice sounds as if it is “issuing from a tomb”. (V p.89) To Axel, his father is an aural rather than a lexical presence. Axel believes that having heard his father speak the philosophy out loud, he has privileged access to its meaning, not available to his father’s other acolytes:

They read his books, but I have heard his living word. It was irresistible. It was as if that mind were taking me into its confidence, giving me a special insight into its mastery of despair.

(V p.150)

His father’s ghostly interior voice moves him more than even the living one did. His reaction is like that of the Schopenhauer disciple in Maupassant’s “Beside a Dead Man” who found that:

His domination seemed to be even more sovereign now that he was dead. A feeling of mystery was blended with the power of this

incomparable spirit. The bodies of these men disappear but they remain themselves.¹

(Maupassant 1934 p.788)

Lena appeals to the original Adam in Heyst. Hers is the voice of life in its quintessential form, the sexual impulse, the “oldest voice in the world” which “never ceases to speak”. (V p.133) Adam was expelled from Eden as a punishment by God: “Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife”. (Genesis 3:17) Lena likens herself to Eve in her relationship to Heyst, “Woman is the tempter” she tells him. (V p.266) Heyst repents the loss of his solitude after letting Lena’s voice overpower his father’s. It shares music’s power to bypass Axel’s intellect, firmly under the control of his father’s teaching, and reach his impulsive, hidden self, “deep down, where our unexpressed longings lie.” (V 59-60)

Kalnins (2004a p. xxv) compares Lena’s voice to the power which Schopenhauer attributes to music, as an expression of (universal) will. Strictly speaking he attributes it to purely *instrumental* music. Music, he wrote in the essay “On the Metaphysics of the Beautiful and Aesthetics”, is the “true universal language everywhere understood” because it is the language of the will, of passions not words and concepts; and so “it says so much to the heart, while to the head it has directly nothing to say”. (SE p.291) The essay

¹ That the Maupassant story was a source for both *Heart of Darkness* and *Victory* can be seen in the links between the repeated mentions of Kurtz as a vocal presence, he is “very little more than a voice” (HD p.153), and the disembodied voice of Axel Heyst’s father. Both Kurtz and Heyst can be seen as examples of the “dead eloquence” (CL 2 pp.160-161) which Conrad despised.

has several strictures against mixing music and words. As “the most powerful of all the arts” music is “self-sufficient”. (SE p.294) Music speaks to the heart, but words are abstract concepts and require the use of the intellect. Words and music are naturally antagonistic. Axel divides himself in this way. In terms of intellect he is his father’s son. His heart belongs to Lena. This division explains why her voice (as pure sound) moves him so profoundly but her *words*, at least until the moment of her death, have relatively little impact.

They meet first at Schomberg’s hotel where she is playing with the Zangiaco Ladies Orchestra where, between numbers, the players have to socialize with the male customers. Lena’s reluctance to do so results in a sharp pinch from the harridan Mrs Zangiaco, a gesture Heyst spots. With a rare unreflective act “unchecked by any sort of self-consciousness” (V p.58) he invites her to sit with him. He appreciates the “fineness” of her features and the intriguing mixture of emotions they express; “indefinably audacious and infinitely miserable”. (V p.59) This is not her chief attraction for him:

But her voice! It seduced Heyst by its amazing quality. It was a voice fit to utter the most exquisite things, a voice which would have made silly chatter supportable and the roughest talk fascinating. Heyst drank in its charm as one listens to the tone of some instrument without heeding the tune.

(V pp. 59-60)

Axel's reaction to Lena's voice recalls Conrad's thoughts on art expressed in his "Preface" to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*. There he refers to "the magic suggestiveness of music – which is the art of arts." (PN p.146) But while Axel, in regard to Lena, wants to keep sound and sense separate, Conrad believed that task as a writer was to bring them together in a "perfect blending of form and substance" (PN p.146). If the writer cares about the musical qualities of speech, then he can bring the "light of magic suggestiveness" to bear on the "old, old words, worn thin, defaced by ages of careless usage." (PN p.146) The musical qualities of speech can, therefore, make us hear words afresh and enhance our understanding of them.

Axel finds Lena's voice "charming" (V p.62), it makes her "unforgettable" (V p.187) and leaves him "profoundly moved". (V p.66) Lena shares this quality with other Conradian heroines who exert a similar vocal fascination on their lovers. Arlette in *The Rover* has a "clear seductive voice" (R p.114) and Doña Rita's in *The Arrow of Gold* is: "of the most seductive gentleness" (AG p.85); "mysterious and penetrating" (AG p.86); "fascinating". (AG p.192) It is part of her primal appeal, a young woman men see "as old as the world" (AG p.112) and "an old enchantress". (AG p.114) Heyst wonders whether Lena is: "a little child, or whether you represent something as old as the world." (V p.271)

It is sound not sense which is the source of Lena's fascination for him. The "rare timbre" of her voice gives "a special value to what she uttered". (V p.144) Her voice "in itself comforted and fascinated" him and "made her lovable." (V 159) Schopenhauer said that the "sound of a language is really

appreciated only by one who does not understand it” since there will be no linguistic “signification” to distract from the sound itself. (SP p.77) Heyst wishes this were the case with Lena. Understanding what she says prevents him yielding to her fully:

He was moved by the vibrating quality of the last words. She seemed to be talking low of some wonderful enchantment, in mysterious terms of special significance. He thought that if she only could talk to him in some unknown tongue, she would enslave him altogether by the sheer beauty of the sound, suggesting infinite depths of wisdom and feeling.
(V p.160)

Axel has for years been enchanted by words, those of his father, whose ghostly voice is a carrier of sense, ideas and abstract concepts. Lena’s eloquence is in pure sound and is a balm to treat the corrosive effect of his father’s caustic verbalizing.

Thompson (1978 p.447) criticizes Conrad for portraying Lena as a “spiritual being” which “detracts from Lena as a ‘real’ woman with sexual and psychological needs.” Such references, though, are all filtered through Axel’s sensibility; it is he, not Conrad, who often sees Lena in this way. He has spent so many years detached from life that he sometimes has difficulty seeing people as substantial. Even when he knows that the threat of Jones and Martin is genuine he cannot wholly believe in their reality; they are “phantasms”, “apparitions”, “chimaeras” – “They have no right to be – but

they are.” (V p.248) He sees Lena as a “vaporous white figure” (V p.67), “white and spectral” and “like an appealing ghost”. (V p.68) When he holds her hands he is surprised to find them “so warm, so real, so firm, so living in his grasp”. (V pp. 68-69) Even her hug and kiss is “a sort of charming mirage in the barren aridity of his thoughts.” (V p.240) Not until Lena is dying from the “little black hole” made by Jones’ bullet under her “swelling breast” (V p.304) is this dematerializing tendency banished.

Martin Ricardo does not see her in this way. But he is a self-confessed common man, not a “gentleman” like Axel, or his “governor” Mr Jones, who has an “educated judgement” and looks at things with “the privileged detachment of a cultivated mind, of an elevated personality.” (V p. 203) Martin’s voyeuristic view reveals Lena to be physically substantial and desirable:

With her back to the door, she was doing her hair with bare arms uplifted. One of them gleamed pearly white; the other detached its perfect form in black against the unshuttered, uncurtained square window-hole. She was there, her fingers busy with her dark hair, utterly unconscious, exposed and defenceless – and tempting.

(V p.218)

Martin does not doubt her reality or see her as a spiritual being. She defeats his intended rape with a “murderous clutch” on his throat and a “suddenly raised knee” – we can guess where it landed. (V p.221) It is a physical

response which is appreciated by the ruthless Martin, whose philosophy is: “Ravish or kill it was all the same to him”. (V p.218) Lena’s action is made “from the force of instinct which is the true source of every great display of energy”. (V p.220) It is something Axel proves incapable of doing – until his death. If Thompson means “spiritual” in the sense of ethereal and other worldly, there is nothing of that in Lena with her “strong arms” (V p.221) and “fingers like steel”. (V p.220) To show Lena in this intensely physical way from Axel’s perspective would weaken Conrad’s fictional illusion by which he can veer between appreciating her “figure of grace and strength, solid and supple” (V p.166) – after their lovemaking – and then finding her in some way insubstantial.

In attending to Lena as a physical presence and soothing, spell-binding sound, Axel neglects the individual person. In her plea to him the emphasis is on the last word: “You should try to love me!” (V p.168) The narrator carefully qualifies Lena’s attraction for Heyst: “It is very clear that Heyst was not indifferent, I won't say to the girl, but to the girl's fate.” (V p.62) His rescue of Lena, like Roderick’s of Flora is an act of sympathy combined with erotic longing, but it is not initially about her as an individual. Lena instinctively grasps that this combination of sympathy and desire led him to bring her to Samburan:

“It's you who have been good, helpful, and tender to me. Perhaps you love me for that – just for that; or perhaps you love me for company, and because – well! But sometimes it seems to me that you can never

love me for myself, only for myself, as people do love each other when it is to be for ever.”

(V pp. 168-169)

The dash between “because” and “well” is the unspeakable element in *Victory’s* text, their lovemaking. Her plea ends with “Do try!” He is affected by this but it is significant just how. “These last words went straight to his heart – the sound of them more than the sense.” (V p.169) He can respond to Lena as sound but cannot fathom her as text; she is “unreadable as ever” (V p.168) to him in the very detailed, precise expression of the particular person she is:

That girl, seated in her chair in graceful quietude, was to him like a script in an unknown language, or even more simply mysterious, like any writing to the illiterate.

(V p.169)

Axel is fluent in his father’s idiolect – the language of reflection and deliberation – but not of the impulsive and instinctive language of love:

As far as women went he was altogether uninstructed and he had not the gift of intuition which is fostered in the days of youth by dreams and visions, exercises of the heart fitting it for the encounters of a world, in which love itself rests as much on antagonism as on

attraction. His mental attitude was that of a man looking this way and that on a piece of writing which he is unable to decipher, but which may be big with some revelation. He didn't know what to say.

(V p.169)

Axel's fastidiousness and years of isolation have left him ill-equipped to cope with any form of conflict, even a lover's tiff which often starts with a partner not paying sufficient attention, detailed close attention, to the other.

While Axel is attuned to the sound of Lena's voice he has a tin-ear when it comes to the nuances of what she says and crucially fails to pick up conversational cues. This is what one would expect, because of the self-divided nature between heart, to which the musical sound of Lena's voice appeals, and head, to which the ghostly voice of his father communicates in words. This makes Lena anxious and uncertain "how a conversation with him would end." (V p.143) "You will make me afraid to open my mouth presently" she tells him. (V p. 143) Not open her mouth to utter sound, which always charms him, but to utter words. He misinterprets Lena's "You should try to love me!" as an attempt to "pick an unnecessary quarrel" with him rather than as an invitation to intimacy and tenderness. (V p.169) Axel's love for Lena forces him to re-assess his life, question his father's voice and try to understand himself better. Perhaps if Lena had been spared a premature death, she could have helped him explore his "unused faculties" (V 293) and made a life with him in society.

9.

When she first meets Axel, Lena's sense of self is just as impoverished as was her early life. She has an "abandoned childhood"(V p.61); deserted by her mother as a small child, raised by her musician father, now incarcerated in a home for alcoholics, living in lodging houses in the "grip of poverty". She is as isolated as Heyst but much more vulnerable. Young, female and penniless, she does not even know clearly which part of the world she is in. She is an easy target for Zangiacomo's bullying exploitation and Schomberg's sexual harassment. Without physical and moral support she feels vulnerable. "I tell you they are too many for me", she tells Axel. (V p.62) "I am not very plucky" (V 158) she tells him, which may account for why "with no one to care if I make a hole in the water the next chance I get" (V p.62) she did not commit suicide. Lena's words echo Flora's to Marlow, about why she did not make a second suicide attempt: "I am not a very plucky girl" (C p.160) Both women prove by their later actions that they have underestimated their courage.

Lena never had a friend, so "the sensation of this friendliness going out to her" from Axel is an exciting novelty. (V p.62) Lena gives away her only possession to him – her name. We are told her Zangiacomo stage names, which allude to the soul or spirit and the Bible's redeemed prostitute, but for her life with Axel she wants a new one. Significantly it is one which privileges sound over meaning:

They call me Alma. I don't know why. Silly name! Magdalen too. It doesn't matter; you can call me by whatever name you choose. Yes, you give me a name. Think of one you would like the sound of – something quite new.

(V p.70)

Heyst arrives at the name “Lena” after “several experimental essays in combining detached letters and loose syllables”. (V p.143) Lena and Heyst are both detached and loose socially; he by choice, she by circumstance. Lena tries to construct a social identity for herself from the fragments of her life as Heyst constructs her name from the unconnected letters and syllables. Perhaps the “loose” quality of the constituents of her name alludes to her past as a “loose” woman, which would fit in with “Magdalen”. It is a suggestion Kalnins would reject: “The text also unequivocally reveals that Lena was no fallen woman”, (Kalnins 2004a p. xxviii) a judgment she bases on Lena’s assertion to Heyst that only after their intimacy does she understand the danger of Schomberg’s advances, “of what a horror it might have been”. (V p.149) Unequivocal is too strong, for Lena also tells Heyst: “I am not what they call a good girl”. (V p.152) Hampson points out that this negative description leaves the reader with considerable “interpretative freedom”. (Hampson 2001 p.233) Lena’s own thought that she was “a fiddle-scraping girl picked up on the very threshold of infamy” (V p.265) shows Conrad’s preference for suggestiveness: it would only be unambiguous if we were clear what constituted “infamy” and could determine where its threshold lay.

Until her relationship with Heyst, Lena had found her own existence “a bitter riddle”. (V p.276) Schopenhauer makes clear that a precondition for the self-fulfilment that acquired character brings is self knowledge, a person must know the “chief, and foremost object in life, – what it is that he most wants in order to be happy”. (CM p.17) For Lena, this is her love for Axel. She wants to protect him and plans to do so by obtaining for him Martin’s knife. Here love for Axel gives her “the reason for existence” and, if she was searching for a purpose to her life before, that search is now over; “her heart found its solution in a blinding, hot glow of passionate purpose.” (V p.276) It also gives her the chance to disprove her claim that she is not a plucky girl. No longer a socially isolated outcast, with “no one at your back” (V p.68), she manifests an inner strength that had lain dormant until her love for Axel. Her fight with Martin proves that Lena, with a new-found sense of worth generated by that love, can no longer be intimidated:

She was no longer alone in the world now. She resisted without a moment of faltering, because she was no longer deprived of moral support; because she was a human being who counted; because she was no longer defending herself for herself alone; because of the faith that had been born in her [...]

(V pp. 220-221)

This recalls the epigraph by Novalis which Conrad used for *Lord Jim*, which said that one's conviction "gains infinitely, the moment another soul will believe in it."

10.

Victory is a novel which has divided critics who have disagreed about every aspect of it, especially over the significance of the title. Lena succeeds in gaining the knife from Martin, adopting Eve's role as temptress and transforming it into that of conqueror:

She had done it! The very sting of death was in her hands, the venom of the viper in her paradise, extracted, safe in her possession – and the viper's head all but lying under her heel. Ricardo, stretched on the mats of the floor, crept closer and closer to the chair in which she sat.

(V p.299)

Jones' bullet, aimed at Martin, kills her and later Heyst kills himself. The text refers to her "tremendous victory" (V p.304) and Conrad, in the "Author's Note" to the novel, was clear about her "triumphant end". (V p.316)

Some literary scholars have disagreed vehemently, questioning both Lena's status as victor and exactly what it is she is supposed to have vanquished. Lena's victory is seen as "perhaps an illusory victory" (Thompson 1978 p.446); definitely "illusory" (Lodge 1964 p.196); an "illusion" (Erdinast-Vulcan

1991 p.184) and, at best, “Pyrrhic” (Watts 1994 p. xxiv). Seeing Lena’s victory as illusory or in some way compromised has resulted in some critics seeing the novel as pessimistic. Schwarz (1982 p.78) believes that: “*Victory* is an ironic title for what may well be Conrad’s most pessimistic novel”. For Purdy (1984 p.125) it is a work of “deathly pessimism”.

Let us consider Lena’s death. As she lies dying:

Her eyelids fluttered. She looked drowsily about, serene, as if fatigued only by the exertions of her tremendous victory, capturing the very sting of death in the service of love. But her eyes became very wide awake when they caught sight of Ricardo's dagger, the spoil of vanquished death, which Davidson was still holding, unconsciously.

“Give it to me,” she said. “It's mine.”

(V pp.304-305)

Purdy (1984 p.120) notes Conrad’s biblical allusion to “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” (Corinthians 1:15: 55) He believes this to be “the core of *Victory*”. Purdy (1984 pp. 122-125) interprets Lena’s act as a failed attempt to conquer death and sees Lena as a “parody of Christ”. Since there is no “authentic, saving imitation of Christ in Conrad” he sees the novel not as triumphant but as a “savage parody, a despairing sneer.” This assessment is a traduction of Lena and of Conrad’s art. It seems that Purdy would find *Victory* satisfactory only if it was a Christian allegory.

Biblical allusions and religious imagery abound in the novel, including the depiction of Lena's death, which is fitting for a girl who attended Sunday-school and retains a naïve, child-like form of Christian faith. But Conrad's treatment of her is never parodic and her victory does not depend upon any specifically religious subtext. In her death scene Conrad "entirely captures the heightened idiom of melodrama", says Hand (2005 pp. 70-71) and transforms Lena into "a tragic heroine." (2005 p.57)

Exulting, she saw herself extended on the bed, in a black dress, and profoundly at peace, while, stooping over her with a kindly, playful smile, he was ready to lift her up in his firm arms and take her into the sanctuary of his innermost heart – for ever! The flush of rapture flooding her whole being broke out in a smile of innocent, girlish happiness; and with that divine radiance on her lips she breathed her last, triumphant, seeking for his glance in the shades of death.

(V pp.305-306)

Here Conrad is using what Brooks (2000 p.120) calls the "aesthetics of hysteria" found in both melodrama and opera which aims to intensify the expression of emotion: "Opera, like melodrama, hystericizes – distorting it and arresting it in postures and gestures that speak symbolically of powerful affects". (Brooks 2000 p.122) This part of *Victory* suggests a libretto set to unheard music. The opera-loving Conrad was well aware of this, writing to his literary agent J.B. Pinker in 1915: "I think *Victory* may make a libretto for a

Puccini opera". (CL 5 p.452) Lena resembles Puccini's heroines Butterfly and Tosca, whose self-sacrificing love elevates them to tragic status.

Lena is triumphant, firstly, over what she fears the most. Through love she has come to understand herself and her true aim in life, which is her love for Axel, and this enables her to overcome her paralyzing fear of wicked people. She told Heyst of her fear of the Zangiacomos:

That sort, when they know you are helpless, there's nothing to stop them. I don't know how it is, but bad people, real bad people that you can see are bad, they get over me somehow. It's the way they set about downing one. I am afraid of wickedness.

(V p.157)

Lena, like all Conradian protagonists, has to decide whether to face or shirk her ghost, what she fears most. She faces it and conquers her fear. But her "tremendous victory", which gives the novel its title, comes in the effect her self-sacrificing love has on Axel Heyst. Lena gives Axel the dagger, the "symbol of her victory" to him and asks: "Who else could have done this for you?" To which he replies "No one in the world". (V p.305)

Some critics feel that whatever Lena has done for Heyst it is not enough. Thompson (1978 p.449) says: "she has not even sacrificed very effectively, for the man she means to save soon destroys himself in despair." Lodge (1964 p.196) believed Lena's sacrifice to be ineffective because it; "does not succeed in breaking through Heyst's 'mistrust of life'". Those who

see *Victory* as pessimistic, or even nihilistic, would do well to look at the novel's Schopenhauerian background. We saw, when discussing the case of Brierly's in *Lord Jim*, that Schopenhauer did not consider suicide as a denial of the will but an affirmation of it. Panagopoulos does consider *Victory's* Schopenhauerian connections and recognizes this point, and so sees that Axel's suicide as "far more affirmative than it appears" and Lena's victory "less pyrrhic than it would appear at first glance". (Panagopoulos 1998 pp.195-196) Axel does not deny life but *life-without-Lena*, a life without the woman he loves. His despair is consistent with what Schopenhauer in "The Metaphysics of Sexual Love" says about the desperation that results for the lover whose passion for the beloved must remain unrequited. For such a person "life itself loses all charm, and appears so cheerless, flat, and unpalatable, that disgust at it overcomes even the dread of death, so that it is sometimes voluntarily cut short." (WWR 2 p.554)

As with Jim, we are not privy to Axel's last thoughts, only his deed, by which Conrad leaves space for the reader's own imaginative response to it. Axel may repent of his lack of faith in Lena's love for him and his adherence to his father's philosophy, which he now believes is discredited. He may regret that this realization did not come sooner. He may have come to hate his emotional fastidiousness. And, of course, he is overwhelmed with guilt at Lena's death. These are deep and turbid emotional waters and it is difficult to specify which factor(s) were crucial in his decision to commit suicide. At the end of *Chance* Marlow gets Powell to agree with him that "the science of life consists in seizing every chance that presents itself". (C p.329) Axel missed

his chance of lasting love with Lena and perhaps realizes that his father's philosophical legacy is implicated in that loss. It contributed to his debilitating mistrust of life and Axel's acknowledgment of that fact is implied in his last words to Davidson:

'Ah, Davidson, woe to the man whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love – and to put its trust in life!'

(V 308)

Erdinast-Vulcan and Schwarz draw attention to the last word of *Victory*, Davidson's "Nothing!" (V p.310) The former sees it as revealing that Lena's sacrifice was "illusory" and has achieved nothing. (Erdinast-Vulcan (1991 p.184) Schwarz claims that "Nothing":

[Is] a suitable epigraph that not only summarizes what Heyst and Lena have accomplished in their desperate quest for love and happiness, but also stands as Conrad's comment on what we can achieve in this world." (Schwarz 1982 p.78)

Neither writer notices that the final word of *Victory* is the same as that of the first volume of *The World as Will and Idea* in its English translation. Conrad need not have read it to know that. Bax cites that final "nothing", and explains its significance, in his potted guide to Schopenhauer's philosophy, which prefaced his translation of the essays. (Bax 1891 pp. xl-xli) Schopenhauer

says that “nothing” is a relative, not an absolute term. The world is “nothing” only for those “in whom the will has turned and has denied itself”, whereas for those “who are still full of will” what remains after the will is abolished would be “nothing”. (WWR 1 p.412)

The fact that both books end with the same word may be a coincidence. If that is the case then I would agree with Kalnins’ interpretation that the final word means simply that for Davidson, and the “Excellency” to whom his words are addressed, the representative of the outside world, “there is nothing to be *done*” following the deaths of Lena, Axel and the three villains, but that “nevertheless the reader has witnessed the triumph of positive doing”. (Kalnins 2004a p. xxxvii) However if the novel’s final word is an allusion to Schopenhauer what does it signify? Perhaps it is that salvationism’s claim that the world and the individuals who inhabit it are nothing, is itself a life-traducing illusion. Axel’s final view is that of a man still “full of will” in his love for Lena. He is only able to devote himself to her in death. He sets fire to the bungalow and dies, his ashes mingled with hers. In the battle for Axel’s heart and mind between Lena, and her love, and his father, and his philosophy, it is she who has triumphed. The fact that Lena died in winning that battle does not, as Leavis said, make her victory “less of a victory; it is unequivocal” and it is “a victory over scepticism, a victory of life.” (Leavis 1973 p.202) The supreme irony which most literary scholars miss is Conrad’s use of Schopenhauer’s view of suicide as life-affirming to signify Axel’s final rejection of his father’s philosophy and his love for Lena.

Axel's death, for an emotionally undemonstrative man, is a grandly romantic, even operatic one. Why this fiery immolation? Because it allows him to destroy simultaneously all the material goods, "books, tables, chairs and pictures", he inherited from his father and which are a "mute and reproachful" reminder of him. (V p.135) The goods include a portrait of his father, "a wonderful presence in its heavy frame", under whose "masterful" gaze Axel had read the pages of *Storm and Dust* hearing the "ghostly voice" of his father communicating his philosophy of "universal nothingness". (V p.167) In *Lord Jim* Brierly shirked his ghost, his fear of failure, by suicide. By his suicide Axel exorcises the ghost of his father, by whose presence he has been cowed all his adult life. The blaze is the first act of Axel's newly-gained self-knowledge. Until now his life had not been an authentic unfolding of his character but a pale version of his father's. Axel no longer repents of his relationship with Lena – but of his failure to secure a future for it. If Kalnins (2004a p. xxxv) is correct in her claim that Lena was carrying Axel's child, and that he suspected that she was pregnant, her death becomes unbearably poignant and his sense of loss unendurable.

Burning his father's belongings is a symbolic act of purification. Davidson's words describing the incident suggest this: "fire purifies everything." (V p.309) Axel once "felt like a remorseful apostate" standing before these "relics", his late father's belongings, and suffered for "the failure of his apostasy" (V p.136) in his belief that in giving Morrison financial help, he had betrayed his father's philosophy of detachment. Finally he ceases to be an apostate of his father's philosophical creed of contempt and negation

and instead becomes a recusant – choosing love and the affirmation of life. At the moment of his death Axel Heyst, perhaps for the first time, truly becomes *himself*.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Schopenhauer believed that both philosophy and art are attempts to solve “the problem of existence” and the question common to them is “What is life?” which philosophy answers in the “abstract language of *reflection*” articulating “a permanent universal knowledge”, and art answers by giving us “an example” which says “Look here; this is life!” (WWR 2 p.406)

Schopenhauer’s philosophy and Conrad’s fiction show the answers garnered from the efforts of two great minds to solve the riddle – in their own distinctive ways. Schopenhauer does so explicitly, with certainty, belligerence and, occasionally, dogmatism. Conrad implicitly, suggestively sometimes symbolically but still, as I believe my interpretation of a selection of his fiction has shown, always discernibly. The work of both men is complex, rich and subtle; demanding the closest attention but rewarding it with dazzling insights into the workings of the human mind and heart.

Salvationism says that the answer to the question “What is Life?” is that it is “an error or mistake” from which we need to be saved. (WWR 2 p.605) Salvationism’s vehemence, and its pre-eminent place in *The World as Will and Representation*, makes it easy to overlook the worldly option that is also present in Schopenhauer’s philosophy, by which a person can affirm the will-to-live and make the best of his or her life. I have sought to show that “Schopenhauerian” and “salvationist” should not be treated as being synonymous. My methodological assumption that the essays were Conrad’s direct source for Schopenhauer has been confirmed during the detailed

analysis of Conrad's fiction which showed that his imaginative fictional response to issues raised in the philosophy were primarily concerned with its worldly aspect – and a repudiation of salvationism. By distinguishing between the salvationist and worldly elements I aimed to redress the balance in the direction of the essays' worldly philosophy and to show that at its heart is Schopenhauer's notion of acquired character. I have argued that Schopenhauer's metaphysics led to a conflict between his notions of sexual love and acquired character and that Conrad's fiction suggests a way of reconciling them.

Conrad's fiction has been shown to illuminate some aspects of Schopenhauer's philosophy and Schopenhauer's philosophy to help us reach a more satisfying interpretation of the fiction. In *Lord Jim*, for example, Jim's actions become more easily explicable by applying Schopenhauer's concept of repentance. Atwell found repentance to be a problematic concept when considered only in theory, but it is easier to see it as integral to Schopenhauer's notion of acquired character when embodied in the figure and deeds of Jim. Schopenhauer would surely have appreciated Conrad's achievement in *Lord Jim* in its realization of the subtlety, complexity and ambiguity of human nature which Schopenhauer thought "has depths, obscurities, and intricacies, whose elucidation and unfolding are of the very greatest difficulty." (WWR 1 p.402)

The primary connection between Conrad and Schopenhauer's work is self-knowledge and self-realization, becoming who we are, clearly and distinctly, when we gain acquired character. In explaining his notion of

character, Schopenhauer quoted Goethe's poem *Damon* which includes the line: "So must you be, from yourself you cannot flee". (FW p.50) Conrad's fiction is a thirty-year long imaginative exploration of that theme. His novels and stories are filled with people who resist recognizing their true selves but find such recognition finally inescapable. His fiction reveals that gaining acquired character, the highest form of knowledge of our individuality, is a form of *worldly* salvation. Schopenhauer's own worldly philosophy offers an alternative to his salvationism which sees life as futile, and the world as "nothing".

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