AN EXPLORATION OF THE OUTSIDER'S ROLE IN SELECTED WORKS BY
JOSEPH CONRAD, MALCOLM LOWRY, AND V.S. NAIPaul

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Abstract

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This thesis explores ways in which the outsider questions rather than confirms dominant cultural values whilst avoiding the crudity of overt politicisation. I argue that the outsider's preference for an observer's stance is not so much an act which denies responsibility to the world of his day, but rather a means of reassessing its priorities.

In Section One, I discuss Conrad's role as an outsider in the age of Empires. I demonstrate the ways in which Conrad employs narrators, frequently using strategies of irony which can be and have been read in very different ways. I argue that Conrad uses irony as a tool for condemnation rather than condonement of imperialist practice, if not its ideology.

In Section Two, I discuss Lowry as an émigré from England (so contrasting him with Conrad, the immigrant from Europe), and examine his dissenting voice which opposes bourgeois prejudice against the working class, a totalising ideology like Fascism, and a Western rationalism which sees too rigid a distinction between sanity and madness. I demonstrate how Lowry as an outsider reacts to the age of twentieth century World Wars.

In Section Three, I discuss Naipaul's role as an outsider in the age of decolonisation, when bogus liberals and false redeemers fail to rebuild the newly independent post-colonial states. As in Conrad's case, I show how a failure to read Naipaul's ironic tone of voice has given rise to radically divergent views as to what he is about. I also link Conrad and Naipaul through their cultural negotiation between the 'centre' and its peripheries.

By looking at these three writers in chronological order and offering a comparative perspective on their work, I highlight the outsider's disturbing, yet illuminating role within a historical context. I also draw attention to creative tensions between artistic concerns and a serious political purpose. I assess the outsider as observer and man of conscience rather than as a 'mere onlooker. I conclude that the outsider also fulfils a social obligation by promoting critical awareness on the reader's side by means of his defamiliarising perspective.
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THE OUTSIDER'S ROLE
‘Artists and philosophers [...] do not live in isolation, but breathe a common air, and catch light and heat from each other’s thoughts.’

Introduction

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This thesis aims to explore the outsider's role which, I argue, is not to serve but to interrogate existing social systems. I argue that the outsider is a dissenter who problematises prevailing assumptions rather than an apologist for the status quo. By tracking down the subversive energy inherent in him, I defend the outsider, often undervalued and discredited, and address the issue of 'rethinking' the literature by and about my selection of outsiders (or exiles). Given the limited space available to me, I have to confine discussion to the selected works of three of the most representative writers-in-exile - Joseph Conrad (the Polish émigré who settled in Britain), Malcolm Lowry (the English émigré who chose to be a voluntary exile from Britain), and V.S. Naipaul (the Trinidadian writer of Indian origin living in Britain but exploring a wide range of societies). I discuss their lives and works in chronological order and from a comparative perspective, focusing on their outsider status, and in the process examining those aspects of cultural contexts which may have some bearing on their modes of writing.

There are many negative labels which have been attached to the outsider, such as an 'escapist' seeking a refuge from reality, an 'irresponsible ironist' who prefers detachment to commitment and connection, an 'individual artist' who refuses to partake in collective action, and a 'universalist' who discounts allegiance to a single nation or race. Such negative views jeopardize all productive arguments about the potential which the outsider develops, such as his subversive energy and his existential struggle. It is necessary and important to weigh up the controversies which the three outsiders I am discussing generate, and to dispute some readings of them. My aim is not to reproduce the abundant information already available, but to trace these writers' artistic and intellectual vigor and intense emotional struggle which has gone largely unnoticed.

All my subsequent exploration converges on what I conceive to be the central questions - is an outsider a writer in limbo who makes a fetish of exile and dodges the
social responsibilities of his day? Or is the outsider’s preference for detachment a crippling strategy for the politics of liberation? I disagree with Edward Said who takes a dismissive view of the outsider when he sees, for instance, Joseph Conrad as an imperial hanger-on who approves of European dominance over the ‘Other’ and Naipaul as a biased writer who panders to the West. It is moreover necessary and important to question the limits of Said’s highly politicised approach concerning ‘nationalism, independence, and liberation as alternative cultural practices to imperialism’.¹ Certainly there is a serious issue at stake here, as to whether these outsiders are really capable of mobilising the power to resist dominant cultural values. I argue that the outsider can act politically without sacrificing his aesthetic and intellectual integrity. Terry Eagleton obviously sees the merit of an internal dynamics inherent in the outsider which Said belittles:

Great art is produced, not from the simple availability of an alternative, but from the subtle and involuted tensions between the remembered and the real, the potential and the actual, integration and dispossession, exile and involvement.²

There is an overwhelming need to explore the relatively uncharted space left out by an approach which calls for overt politicisation. To say the least, it is important and necessary to give a balanced view of exile or outsider status which is at once a disability and a stimulant, hazard and reward. A one-sided view will mislocate the focus for the study of the literature of exile.

The first section of this thesis is devoted to Joseph Conrad, whose works establish the paradigm according to which my discussion of Lowry and Naipaul is organized. I chose Conrad as a starting point because he opens up the debate about controversial aspects surrounding the outsider through his use of irony as the mechanism of concealment, his deployment of silence rather than lucid articulation,

and his reflective rather than aggressive stance. But as I shall argue, it is important neither to ignore nor discount the subversive energy that Conrad subtly displays. I shall draw attention to his democratic impulse which is discernible in both his intrinsic hatred for centralising power and his method of 'decentring' points of view, which is designed to resist a unifying authorial voice, another form of tyranny.

There is little dispute that Conrad is a difficult writer to read because he is an ironist above all; at the very heart of the difficulty in reading his text lies the mechanism of concealment: he never speaks precisely. Nevertheless, upon close inspection, I argue that his texts reveal a dissenting voice by exposing the ironies of Empire at a time when the doctrine of empire was largely unquestioned by Europeans. Some may argue that his subversive view is neutralised and even undermined by his use of pervasive irony, but I strongly refute the oft-repeated claim that Conrad is an irresponsible ironist. Clearly, Conrad avoids adopting an uncontestable political stance in, say, Under Western Eyes and Heart of Darkness. Instead, by his handling of irony he underlines the importance of a healthy scepticism. Martin Seymour-Smith is one of a few critics who sees the subversive function of irony: 'Irony is, or can be, exceedingly subversive, and therefore often goes unrecognised by officials - or, by critics, exactly according to the timidity of their attitudes (this can be considerable: their appointments are by the grace of "establishment" people), is captiously selected from, or, so to say, de-gutted'. 3 The fact that Conrad is an ironist does not necessarily mean that he is writing under British (or European) tutelage. While Said argues that 'Conrad dates imperialism', 4 I would argue that Conrad interrogates Empire.

None the less, because of his frequently overcharged ironies, Conrad's text resists easy scansion and demands active participation on the reader's side to investigate possible layers of meaning. As a result, the reader faces the daunting task of decoding or deciphering so as to approach, to borrow Wolfgang Iser's words, 'the

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fulfilment of the potential, unexpressed reality of text— if indeed such a reality can be reached, given the widely different cultural contexts of readers, each constructing their own readings. And indeed, failure to read an ironic tone of voice has given rise to very different interpretations of both Conrad's and Naipaul's work.

Conrad also stands accused of a failure to break silence in the face of the immediate reality of imperial domination. But paradoxically, I argue, his is frequently a subversive silence by which Conrad questions the legitimacy of imperial rule. In contrast to Achebe's and Said's disparagement of Conrad (as a racist and imperialist, charges which I investigate in my first section), in 'The Aesthetics of Silence', Susan Sontag eloquently legitimizes the artist's use of silence as 'the artist's ultimate otherworldly gesture: by silence, he frees himself from servile bondage to the world, which appears as patron, client, consumer, antagonist, arbiter, and distorher of his work'. It is thus important not to lose sight of the subversive function which irony, silence, and scepticism commonly serve.

In his two early novels, *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands*, Conrad conducts an inquiry, from the position of detached observer, into the moral legitimacy of disgraced Europeans who, despite their faith in European supremacy, degenerate into alienated isolation. I argue that Conrad's position is not to mourn the erosion of the 'ideal' of empire, but to question the legitimacy of European domination. I then move on to examine the two outsider figures, Kurtz and Lord Jim, both of whom stand outside Europe by choice and face tragic consequences. I explore Conrad's ironic distance from his white narrators as well as his white characters. I argue that Conrad sees the absurdity behind the veneration of flawed heroes, just as V.S. Naipaul will do later.

A joint consideration of *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes* examines how Conrad juxtaposes an inert conservatism with an irrational revolutionism in such a way as to expose the deficiencies of both the eastern and western European societies.


with which he was associated. From the position of outsider, he defamiliarizes both capitalist and totalitarian societies. In both novels, Conrad creates a double agent who plays an intriguing role of serving and subverting the establishment or the state, and it is of great importance to examine their double capacity for complicity with and critique of the state, since in a sense their dilemma is arguably Conrad's own. In both novels, as elsewhere, Conrad sees the absurdity behind acts of veneration which, together with political barbarism, are seen as barriers to the progress and evolution of humankind. I argue that Conrad casts grave doubt on the triumph of empire, either British or Russian, and his texts offer dissenting readings of both the state and bourgeois order. In addition, I shall argue that it would be mistaken to think that Conrad aims simply at entertaining rather than disturbing a European audience.

While Conrad settles in England, Malcolm Lowry is an English émigré, and he is the subject of my second section. I read him as one of the archetypal modern exiles, like D.H. Lawrence. In response to the ways in which Lowry has been penalised for his alcoholism and largely anti-European stance, I argue that the case made against him can be refuted by exploring his intellectual and artistic vigour which has been relatively ignored and belittled.

Unlike Conrad who conceals his subversive views behind a mask of irony, Lowry breaks silence, unequivocally expressing his solidarity with socially marginalised groups and his consistent antifascism (traits he shares with Orwell and Camus). In his very first novel Ultramarine Lowry shows his déclassé, Dana Hilliot, envisaging a classless society as an alternative to a class-bound English society, and by so doing, showing how far he has freed himself from the constraints of the dominant culture of his day. Homi Bhabha argues for the merit of crossing boundaries which the outsider Dana Hilliot has done:
The most creative forms of cultural identity are produced on the boundaries in-between forms of difference, in the intersections and overlaps across the spheres of class, gender, race, nation, generation, location.\(^7\)

Lowry displays a clarity in his perception of other classes, races, and cultures which contrasts with Conrad’s frequent obscuring of his vision; and indeed, one of the reasons why I have chosen to explore Lowry’s work is to show how very different outsiders can be in their perceptions. Just because he was outsider does not mean that Lowry has to be in sympathy with Conrad; for instance, in his letter to Downie Kirk dated ‘April or May [sic], 1951,’ Lowry makes no secrets of his disappointment about Conrad’s characteristic ‘aloofness’ in *Heart of Darkness*:

Anyhow that story - great though it is - is at least half based on a complete miscomprehension. . . . It is clear that Comrade Joseph did not allow himself to be corrupted by any savages though: he stayed in Polish aloofness on board in company with some *a priori* ideas.\(^8\)

While Conrad seeks a physical and emotional distance from the ‘Other,’ Lowry seeks a *rapprochement* by crossing boundaries.

In *Under the Volcano*, I examine the ways in which Lowry plays the outsider’s role in his contemporary world, which saw the holocaust and the rise of Fascism. His critique falls on both the failings of intellectuals and those who serve a depersonalised fascist organization. His outsider figure the Consul, in his cynical alcoholism, bears witness to the madness and drunkenness of a world bent on war and destruction. He also exposes the failings of Christianity, with its core value of love for mankind, at a time when the violence endemic in society denies brotherhood or Samaritanism. I show how Conrad, too, questions Christianity by drawing characters who either rebel against a conventional Christian milieu like Jim, the son of a parson, or betray Christian values like the despicable Gentleman Brown. I also discuss the ways in which Lowry formulates a global vision of the modern world in crisis through his reciprocal vision of home (Europe caught in the vortex of wars) and abroad (Mexico

\(^7\) Homi Bhabha, “Abstract,” *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).
under the threat of fascist vigilantes). In addition, I draw attention to Lowry’s even-handed approach to the issue of human cruelty, as when his critique falls on both German enemies and the allies (the crew on the ironically named S.S. Samaritan put the German captives into the furnace while still alive).

I make a case for *Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid* as a novel which has been undervalued. I propose to rehabilitate this underrated text by looking at some important features which are commonly found among writers who are outsiders. The protagonist Sigbjorn Wilderness is seen as a writer of in-betweenness who grasp shifting reality and sees the importance of an interaction between self and world, between life and art. I argue for the merit of 'the fluidity of consciousness' which is a product of experiences of crossing boundaries. Salman Rushdie appears to see the merit of the artist who makes use of a constant interaction between the self and the world:

> Literature is made at the frontier between the self and the world, and in the act of creation that frontier softens, becomes permeable, allows the world to flow into the artist and the artist to flow into the world.9

I demonstrate how the outsider’s private consciousness is open to large political issues such as rigid border-control which impinges on civic freedom in crossing boundaries and the climate of mistrust and suspicion created by the spy scare during the cold war era.

I then move on to discuss Lowry’s two novellas which, taken together, present the outsider’s twin impulse of fury and harmony. ‘Lunar Caustic’ illustrates the outsider’s anti-hegemonic energy. Anticipating Foucault, Bill Plantagenet questions the validity of the Western dualism which draws a clear-cut distinction between madness and sanity and even turns it upside down. In the second novella ‘The Forest Path to the Spring’, Lowry’s persona raises the issue of a dichotomy between classes, resulting in social injustice. While ‘Lunar Caustic’ is set in an urban wasteland hit by

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a summer heatwave representing Bill Plantagent's anger, 'The Forest Path to the Spring' is set in an idyllic forest where the narrator seeks spiritual rehabilitation. I weigh up the controversial issue of the outsider's hermitage which is alleged to mark a falling-off of subversive energy, and seek to show how the outsider can formulate an apocalyptic vision of the modern world in crisis in the idyllic forest and emerge as a man of conscience.

The sad saga of the neglect of Lowry is not an isolated case but exemplifies various misconceptions about the outsider who is subversive within society and retrospectively in exile. Lowry is first and foremost a social commentator, despite slipping into the double danger of cynicism and alcoholism. But he also remains an artist concerned with the shaping of his creation. Both Conrad and Lowry, it seems to me, attempt to perform a difficult balancing act between political and artistic purpose, and this gives rise to much of the criticism of their work by hostile readers.

My third and final section concentrates on the works of V.S. Naipaul, who follows an opposite path to that taken by Lowry, coming in to England while Lowry leaves it. My choice of these writers demonstrates something I hold to be important: the need to investigate the space created by the two-way cultural traffic of incoming and outgoing (and we see how many of the characters in Conrad's and Naipaul's novels are indeed outgoing, like Lowry himself). I argue that, like Conrad before him, Naipaul seeks an abode in Britain without forsaking his critical consciousness. It would be mistaken to think that Conrad and Naipaul 'venerate' English society and culture because, as their satiric vision attests, they could not be easily absorbed. Linda Anderson comments upon common interests linking both Conrad and Naipaul: 'their deracination and their ambiguous relationship with the English tradition they chose to join rather than with the culture from which they spring'.

'Conrad's Darkness', Naipaul acknowledges his indebtedness to Conrad who is a precursor in many ways:

Conrad died fifty years ago. In those fifty years his work has penetrated to many corners of the world which he saw as dark. It is a subject for Conradian meditation; it tells us something about our new world. 11

Alongside such striking affinities, there are many differences. One of them is that, whereas Conrad glimpses the Third World from a distance, Naipaul thinks that he has an inside view of it. But his detractors accuse him of dehistoricizing the Third World by blending the reality with literary imagination.

I assess Naipaul as a detached observer who raises an independent voice by refusing to compromise his impartiality; for instance, his critique falls on both the mimicry of the colonials and hypocrisy of the whites, both the Black Movement and facile liberalism. From that position, I refute some of the claims that he is a traitor who completely abandons his roots or one of the mimic men who venerate the West or a biased pro-Western writer who denigrates the 'Other.' In a different vein than Conrad's, Naipaul adopts a satiric vision which is discernible in both his first novel *The Mystic Masseur* (a satiric presentation of the Trinidadian society in which he was brought up) and his later work *The Enigma of Arrival* (which is a satiric presentation of English society which he adopts as his second home). But, as is the case with Conrad, his preference for detachment is under attack from those who argue for an unambiguous commitment to roots, traditions and anti-colonial struggle.

From his first novel onwards, Naipaul questions the notion of 'greatness' which is fabricated by a combination of manipulative skill (as, for instance, practised by the trickster Ganesh), and the naïveté of the gullible masses. Both Conrad and Naipaul expose the absurdity behind acts of veneration for false redeemers like Ganesh and Lord Jim. And as detached observers, both Conrad and Naipaul offer

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diagnoses of a ‘sick society’ as ways, arguably, which fulfil their social responsibilities.

In *A House for Mr Biswas* I explore how Naipaul presents a Camusian existentialist, Biswas, who not only rebels against the collective Hindu values represented by the Tulsi clan but struggles for independence. All three of the writers under my consideration commonly take up the issue of an extinction of individuality, a common dilemma for the outsider, and I cannot accept the ways in which the validity of their existential struggle has been dismissed by Frantz Fanon and Edward Said who tend to see the individual solely as the instrument for political struggle. But as is the case with Albert Camus, an Algerian Frenchman with divided loyalties, Naipaul focuses on individual struggle before national uprising. As John Lukacs argues, Naipaul is ‘a truth-teller, not a strident collector of injustices’. Of course, this is not to deny that both Camus’ and Naipaul’s distancing from collective action courts controversy, but their focus on the struggles of the individual can be seen as the basic battleground for useful political intervention, a liberal humanist position, admittedly, rather than a revolutionary stance. And it is important to see the helplessness of the little men caught in their existential traps.

Unlike Conrad and Lowry, Naipaul drops the mask of irony and adopts the *genre* of non-fiction, driven by an overwhelming desire to deliver what he sees as the truth about a colonial encounter which has lead not to creative interaction, but to stalemate. It has been argued that in *The Middle Passage*, for instance, Naipaul wilfully denigrates the former slave islands as incapable of self-renewal and creativity. But I argue that his anti-imperialist stance is unquestionable because he releases his anger at the shameful legacy of slavery which, together with the Belgian atrocities in the Congo and the Nazi holocaust, betrayed the conscience of mankind and disfigured the entire history of civilization. Together with Conrad and Lowry, Naipaul strongly denounces the widespread cruelty and barbarity practised in the world and emerges as a man of conscience. As in the case of Conrad, I refute some

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of what I see as ill-considered claims that he is a racist and an imperialist. I argue that he conducts an impartial inquiry into the failings of both the colonized and the colonizer. I cannot agree with Said’s claim that ‘Naipaul deliberately falsifies his material on the Third World so as to pander to the biases of a Western audience’;¹³ and I also challenge Selwyn Cudjoe’s claim that ‘Naipaul failed to give the reader the comprehensive truth about the post-colonial subject’¹⁴ - what writer could fulfil Cudjoe’s expectation? In An Area of Darkness Naipaul not only delves into his loss of identity but offers a diagnosis of India incapable of self-renewal. Here again, his critique falls not only on what he perceives as a backward-looking Indian mentality but also on a British narcissism obsessed with its imagined racial and cultural superiority. By blaming both sides for their failure to confront the present, Naipaul raises an independent voice without being partisan. In his two non-fictional works, he conducts an impartial inquiry into the failings of the colonized and the colonizer.

I argue that Naipaul universalizes his personal displacement by capturing the predicaments facing the immigrants and the expatriates. In In a Free State he explores the paradoxical nature of freedom which proves to be an illusion. I compare Naipaul with Conrad who also explores this idea of the ‘universality of displacement’ by capturing the predicaments of the displaced Europeans roaming around the world to compensate for their failure at home. Naipaul presents the ‘casualties of freedom’ of various nationalities and races, exploring the interior world of those immigrants who are driven by a destructive urge and those expatriates who emerge as vulnerable and all but imprisoned in a ‘free state.’ Naipaul maintains an even-handed approach to both colonial rage and facile liberalism.

A comparative study of Naipaul’s A Bend in the River with Conrad’s Heart of Darkness provides a historical line from colonialism to post-colonialism. In this novel, Naipaul shifts through the debris of colonialism and post-colonialism through Salim’s eyes, exploring the murky area of collaboration between an African regime...

and the collusive foreigners seeking profits, new careers, and patronage from an African tyrant. In addition, Salim maintains a dual vision of an African state which is regressing and the European metropolis where 'civilization is dead'. His anger is equally directed at both of the Europeans who are indifferent to the situation of the country and an African tyrant who is in the state of fantasy.

I go on to show the importance of comparing *A Bend in the River* with *The Enigma of Arrival* in which Naipaul examines the crumbling of an old imperial order. A comparative look at the two works will reveal Naipaul’s double distancing from both old and new worlds, in particular, his disapproval of reversions to the past, either an African tribal past or the bygone imperial past. He casts a satirical eye on both the ailing English landlord and an African tyrant, both of whom are fantastists. Naipaul’s satirical presentation of post-imperial and post-war Britain is also comparable to Conrad’s satirical presentation of a corrupt English society in *The Secret Agent*. I shall argue that Naipaul raises an independent voice in the era of post-colonialism by making use of his detachment from the old and new worlds which he sees as both prey to fantasy. This intellectual independence of the outsider has a moral dimension which I identify in all three writers in this study. My argument is that the outsider is not an onlooker but a witness who is intent on fulfilling a social function rather than dodging it, not through engagement but through detachment or distancing.
Section One: Joseph Conrad

UNDER OUTSIDER'S EYES: A STUDY OF TRANSPLANTED EUROPEANS

1

The aim of all Conrad's fiction is to destroy in the reader his bondage to illusion, and to give him a glimpse of the truth, however dark and disquieting that truth may be. His work might be called an effort of demystification. 1

As Hillis Miller, a leading exponent of "criticism of consciousness", succinctly argues, what is central to Conrad's thought can be seen as "demystification" which will serve as an effective antidote to self-deception. This approach stems from the fact that Conrad is a quintessential outsider who has a gift for maintaining a distance from the situations he describes. Above all, as an outsider himself, he raises an authentic and convincing voice regarding the predicaments of uprooted characters and, like Malcolm Lowry, explores through these predicaments the shortcomings of all forms of dictatorial authority such as political tyranny, economic monopoly, and cultural hegemony.

In the two early works that I am going to discuss - Almayer's Folly (1895) and An Outcast of the Islands (1896), Conrad dismantles the mentality of two outcast Europeans - Almayer's delusions which degenerate into childish idiosyncracy and Willems's deceptions which develop into full-blown cynicism. Almayer clings to the iron-clad system of an imperialist/capitalist ideology; Willems abandons it. Conrad offers an ambivalent view of transplanted Europeans who are reduced to behavioural extremes. For example, Kurtz becomes a puppet of dark irrational forces whilst at the same time he displays the urge to rebel against an imperialist/capitalist ideology. 2 For Conrad, the function of art appears to be to disturb and to provoke rather than to entertain an audience entrenched in the dominant ideology of his day. It is in this sense that Conrad emerges as a demystifier who raises the standard of consciousness.

It has been argued that Conrad's style deliberately obfuscates, and his use of an ironic method is not universally applauded. Edward Said remains dissatisfied with Conrad's indirect approach in favour of a more clearly articulated stance as a way of emancipating the oppressed. But as I shall be arguing, Conrad's profound understanding of the outsider position, expressing itself through ironic, often ambivalent evenhandedness, is the very quality in his writing which provokes valuable debate.

Conrad's attraction to "hyphenated" cultures arguably stems from his outsider's distaste for Western values which are monolithically constructed and logically prescribed. Edward Said's reading of Conrad's works through the spectacles of Franz Fanon is one-sided simply because his approach runs the risk of excluding what Salman Rushdie calls this "hybridity of consciousness". However, Rushdie also argues that a kind of defeatism which characterises Conrad's work is detrimental to the colonial discourse because it only serves the interests of the status quo. But in my view, Conrad's practice can be defended as follows: political commitment all too often distorts vision, whether a writer's or one of his characters', and Conrad's works both show the dangers of too rigid a commitment to ideologies and offer what these ideologies look like from the perspective of and effects on his outsider characters. To achieve this effect, throughout his work he disperses and scatters his outsiders in different geographical locations and in different (or at least superficially different) situations. More significantly, neither a single character nor a single narrator is given free rein to dictate the meaning of Conrad's text. My contention is that Conrad as outsider inextricably intertwines this process of "decentring" with an interrogation of tyrannical power.

I would argue that Conrad's disenchantment with large areas of Western imperialism is evident in his radical scepticism about language which can never encapsulate an outsider's point of view because it is contaminated by a dominant

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ideology. He frequently demonstrates the danger of a language which is used to uphold and bolster an imperial discourse. From that position, he problematises a stable relationship between language [signifier] and the world [signified] and, like other modernist writers, seeks to revitalise language. By adopting an ironic mode of writing, Conrad underlines the rhetorical function of language rather than its grammatical and logical one. The dilemma facing Conrad can be articulated as follows: whilst he is profoundly sceptical about a language which has been, as it were, colonised, he has to create a new world through a different use of that same language.

Conrad also explores, to borrow Jacques Lacan’s important notion, an “ambivalence of the mind” which is essentially heterogeneous and plural. The fact that he is keen to demolish a unitary construction of self mirrors his revolt against a tradition of Western rationalism. It is no coincidence that he explores the idea of deviations through transplanted Europeans who not only stand outside "civilised" law and order but subsequently experience miscegenation and cultural collision. Simultaneously, he remains critical of an anarchic and egocentric self which is opposed to an ordered and disciplined self. Like Kurtz who falls victim to the irrational, both Almayer and Willems lose their reasoning power, as suggested by their hero-worship, their fetishisation of money, and their blind belief in racial distinctions. Once the radically decentred self has been rendered dangerously vulnerable, Conrad's texts nudge the reader to see a "false consciousness" which worships dogma as immutable truth. At the same time, the birth of romantic outlaws acts as a subversion of that rationalism which moulds a unitary consciousness. Conrad offers a duel vision of both order and anarchy, both the malpractice and the abdication of reason.

It is very tempting to underrate Conrad's early novels as mere apprentice works. Another possible ground for dismissal might be an aura of romanticism often associated with escapist literature. Conrad brings to these early fictions elements of disorder, irrationality and obscurity - all have in their time appeared very alien to a British
audience rooted in a tradition of empiricism and rationalism, especially given their Eastern setting. However, both works reflect Conrad's strong protest at Western egocentrism. Moreover, both are valuable in exploring a condition of transplantation, a destabilising state of existence.

While there are potential benefits in considering both works as connected pieces since some of the characters and places overlap, Conrad's chronology is not sequential: the ending of *An Outcast of the Islands* precedes the opening of *Almayer's Folly* which was written earlier. Both works also offer different views of shared characters. In *An Outcast of the Islands* Almayer is younger and more sober, while in *Almayer's Folly* he degenerates into a passive dreamer, a helpless alcoholic, and an opium-eater. Unlike Almayer, Willems is pictured as a cool nihilist who is not only calculating but deceives others to satisfy his basest instincts. Indeed, whereas the opening of *Almayer's Folly* focuses our attention on Almayer who is stranded between daydreaming and wakefulness, that of *An Outcast of the Islands* underscores Willems's deviation from honesty to disgrace. As Robert Hampson argues, compared with Almayer whose egotism is expressed through a form of stubborn fantasy, "Willems's egotism is direct and unmediated."6 Both fantasies and deviations are the products of egocentrism, and are rooted ultimately in the fact that both characters stand outside the societies they touch on.

As I have suggested, Conrad explores the predicaments of transplanted Europeans who undergo a rupture of self. Both Almayer and Willems suffer from an anxiety about their European identity as white men, as well as their place in an alien environment. Almayer is a European of Dutch parentage who trades under the British flag in the region; Willems is a fugitive from a Dutch ship and hides in the wilderness. Both figures weaken their allegiance to Holland and conspire with the locals to pursue their own self-interest. Yet despite or because of their arrogance and pride as Europeans, they are cut off from the community and experience utter alienation. Almayer is circumscribed by forces beyond his control and is left alone in the "savage" place

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without any real hope of redemption. Similarly, Willems is condemned by Lingard to stay with Aissa in no-man's-land. Conrad explores the paradoxical nature of an isolation which is an emblem of freedom, a freedom both to enlarge the self and to jeopardise it.

An imperative for both Almayer and Willems is, of course, the struggle for survival. While Almayer struggles to yoke fantasy with reality, Willems initially plots and schemes, only to fall prey to his obsession with Aissa. Conrad sets a sombre mood by dramatising the tragedy which befalls Almayer and Willems who are "the twin instances of white degradation" and who fail to learn "how to be". Cedric Watts rightly identifies the root problem of Almayer's downfall, arguing that "a rather neglected aspect of Almayer's Folly is that the tragedy of Almayer is one generated by his own racial prejudice". Willems's tragedy is also triggered by an error of judgment stemming from a failure to understand racial difference which culminates in his underestimation of Aissa's capacity for violence. Although it is possible to argue that both Almayer and Willems may be the victims of circumstances, above all they are to blame because of their tendency to trust their illusions rather than learn from reality.

Adam Gillon argues, "from the beginning, Conrad's preoccupation was with men handicapped by a destructive passion or idea, ridden with guilt or doubt, isolated from society by nature, their fellow men or their own transgression." Kaspar Almayer and Peter Willems are outcast Europeans in Sambir, one of the imperial trading outposts on the river Pantai. Almayer is displaced by circumstances, while Willems is displaced by his own choice. They struggle for survival in a hostile environment, yet they fall victims to alienation. To transcend misery and suffering, Almayer indulges his fantasies and Willems pursues his romance. Both figures are divorced from the dynamic of rational thought advocated by Western culture. Whereas in The Divided Self R.D. Laing looks sympathetically at a "madness" which is close to "sanity", Conrad evokes disaster out of the kind of "rationality" which is very close to "derangement". Yet like radical thinkers

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such as R.D. Laing and Michel Foucault, Conrad aims to reposition culturally accepted versions of truth and falsehood, rationality and fantasy.

Since the world created according to the tenets of Western imperialist tradition is arguably full of lies and fabrications, it is important for the attentive reader to recognize the signals indicating truth or falsehood in Conrad’s text. According to Cedric Watts who identifies Conrad’s technique of “delay decoding”, Conrad "deliberately allows the reader to be deceived for a while, though not for as long as Almayer". A point of departure is the moment when the reader begins to establish a critical distance from idiosyncratic characters. Instrumental to such a reading is Conrad’s adoption of an ironic mode of writing. However, as I have already indicated, such a mode of writing does not appeal to all tastes: V.S. Naipaul remains highly critical of Conrad’s taste for “obscurity” and Edward Said remains dissatisfied with Conrad’s "cult of artistic autonomy"; but then these are criticisms emanating from a later age when outright political commitment and/or confrontation is the norm.

Conrad’s ironic eye is applied to his narrators as well as characters. Even a frame narrator is not empowered to prescribe a unitary meaning of the text. Cedric Watts questions the reliability of Conrad’s frame narrator in *Heart of Darkness* who takes racial prestige for granted. The "omniscient" narrator in *Almayer’s Folly* is a bigot who uses a derogatory word such as "savage" without mediation. I would argue against the claim which fails to read an ironic distance between the author and an "omniscient" narrator, if only because the "omniscient" narrators of Conrad’s novels by no means always stand for the same things. For this reason I disagree with Heliéna Krenn who, by interpreting an "omniscient" narrator as Conrad’s *persona*, argues that despite his anti-colonial attitude Conrad still remains a racist, a sexist, an imperialist, implying that she reads fiction in the same way as an article in an academic journal.

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10 Cedric Watts, *Conrad and Delayed Decoding*, *The Deceptive Text*, 46.
Whether Conrad is a racist or not is a contentious issue. In my view, Conrad is a radical thinker whose actual field of investigation is the hegemonic structure of an official ideology. I would therefore agree with Juliet McLauchlan who claims that "if we searched for a single word which, throughout Conrad's fiction, is used with the most consistent irony, the search might well end with 'civilization'". I would also endorse Cedric Watts's view that Conrad "vigorously transcends the racial and cultural prejudices of his times". Indeed, Conrad as outsider remains remarkably open-minded and neutral for his day in weighing up polarisations of civilisation/savagery, order/anarchy, rationality/idiosyncracy.

Because of his distrust of a language which serves a monolithic ideology, Conrad refuses to draw the neat and convenient conclusion which the apparatus of rationality pursues. The striking absence of logical connections, of course, destabilises his text. We see Conrad's characters swinging between two extremes - an empty rhetoric and a destructive silence, both features demonstrating the vacuity of a language which is responsible for failed communication. As I shall show later, Marlow's spinning of a tale, for instance, runs the risk of fabricating "truth" by praising Kurtz's and Jim's "greatness", while Marlow himself is given by the frame narrator in Heart of Darkness a kind of guru status. The language teacher in Under Western Eyes concedes that "words are the great foes of reality," yet with all his profound scepticism about language, he feels compelled to translate and interpret Razumov's story. So, to some extent, the credibility of Conrad's narrators is questionable.

This lack of rational certainty in the narrative mirrors the loss of rationality in Conrad's outsider characters. Conrad induces the attentive reader to observe Almayer's flight of fantasy into a splendid future whilst he is trapped in the "savage" place; as a result Almayer's Folly is a sort of a black comedy. Almayer sees his fragile dreams of

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finding gold and returning to Europe slipping away. As an alternative to actuality, he engages in fantasies which transform the unpleasant reality surrounding him, cushion him against his miserable existence, and sustain him. However, his delusions eventually debilitating him and ruin his whole life.

As I shall show later, this realm of fantasy is also a feature of V.S. Naipaul's outsiders who dream of being transported into foreign countries while they are trapped in a small island. In The Mimic Men Singh is painfully disillusioned when he actually arrives at the site of his daydreams, London, the heart of the "motherland": "the gold of imagination turned [into] the lead of reality". Similarly, Almayer realises that at sunset no tinge of gold is reflected on the River Pantai. Both writers dramatise those who cannot control the non-rational self, by culture and circumstance.

I shall now explore Conrad's texts in more depth. Almayer's Folly begins with Almayer poised on a borderline between dream and wakefulness. His tantalising hope of finding gold (the Western colonial dream of making a fortune) has deceived him into thinking that he has seen a tinge of gold on the river Pantai at sunset. He tries to kill sober consciousness in favour of wilful oblivion, forgetting misery and suffering by means of dreaming, drinking, and opium-taking - all elements of irrationality. Here, one may compare Almayer with the alcoholic Consul in Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano whose alcoholism at once mitigates misery and anaesthetises his body and soul. However, unlike Almayer, the Consul is able to maintain, despite alcoholism, a vision of global crisis.

At the outset, Almayer fixes his eyes on a tree drifting to the open sea. In contrast to his own passive reverie, the fluid movement of the uprooted tree conveys the idea of an escape from solitary confinement in the jungle of Borneo. As Leo Gurko claims, "Conrad piercingly explores the pathology of Almayer's inertia". Almayer experiences a feeling of finality as he watches the uprooted tree going down the river:

One of those drifting trees grounded on the shelving shore, just by the house, and Almayer, neglecting his dream, watched it with languid interest. The tree swung slowly round, amid the hiss and foam of the water, and soon getting free of the obstruction began to move downstream again, rolling slowly

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16 Leo Gurko, Giant in Exile (London: Frederick Muller Limited, 1965), 63.
over, raising upwards a long, denuded branch, like a hand lifted in mute appeal to heaven against the river's brutal and unnecessary violence. Almayer's interest in the fate of that tree increased rapidly. He leaned over to see if it would clear the low point below. It did; then he drew back, thinking that now its course was free down to the sea, and he envied the lot of that inanimate thing now growing small and indistinct in the deepening darkness. As he lost sight of it altogether he began to wonder how far out to sea it would drift (8).

The passage quoted above not only illustrates the widening rift between mind and body, but charts Almayer's "steady descent into psychic sloth". His drift into fantasy accelerates in proportion to his disillusionment with life. He has already deceived himself into thinking that he can reconcile what he sees as the stigma of Nina's skin colour with the glamour of potential beauty and wealth to be acquired. (He accepted a marriage of convenience arranged by Lingard for the sake of better financial prospects.) Indeed Almayer's moral confusions all stem from a half-concealed racism, taking in both wife and child, and distancing him from both Lingard and the rest of the outpost community. At the same time he fetishizes Nina's cot as an "altar in the shrine", where he is pictured as "a devout and mystic worshipper"(259). Robert Hampson comments on Almayer's distorted subjectivity:

People, as well as things, are valued by Almayer not for themselves, but only for their assigned place in his plans. Everything and everyone is subordinated and sacrificed to an ideal image of himself that he projects onto the future under cover of his love for his daughter and disguised in her form.

Once his hope is gone, he buries her footsteps leading to the shore and builds a line of miniature sandgraves. By suggesting that Almayer's "convictions" are ill-founded, Conrad exposes his outsider's fantasies through the text's strategies for demystification.

And indeed Almayer's false consciousness makes him a pathetic figure. Being shipwrecked in a "savage" place, he is obsessed with European merchandise such as clothes, a rocking-chair, a white tablecloth, gin, etc. - all items act as signifiers of "civilisation". (In Heart of Darkness the chief Accountant is also obsessive about his white suit in sweltering weather; here, European clothes function as a signifier of

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18 Leo Gurko, Giant in Exile, 62.
civilisation, too.) Furthermore, Almayer initially worships Lingard as a hero, venerates wealth and success, and clings to Europe, a centre of civilisation. His displaced hope reflects his anxiety about parentage, origins, and belonging; significantly, he half builds a replica of a European-style mansion house which is an emblem of his European identity, but fails to complete the project. In reality, Almayer cannot resolve a dichotomy between fantasies and new reality and faces tragic consequences. Milbauer hints at the pragmatic solution Almayer rejects when he argues that "for the transplanted, an equilibrium is a milestone on a path to survival".20

At this juncture, it is useful to quote R.D. Laing's insights as to the nature of fantasies which illuminate Almayer's state of mind:

In phantasy, the self can be anyone, anywhere, do anything, have everything. It is thus omnipotent and completely free - but only in phantasy. Once commit itself to any real project and it suffers agonies of humiliation - not necessarily for any failure, but simply because it has to subject itself to necessity and contingency. It is omnipotent and free in phantasy. The more this phantastic omnipotence and freedom are indulged, the more weak, helpless, and fettered it becomes in actuality. The illusion of omnipotence and freedom can be sustained only within the magic circle of its own shut-up-ness in phantasy. And in order that this attitude be not dissipated by the slightest intrusion of reality, phantasy and reality have to be kept apart.21

Through fantasising, Almayer devises a defence mechanism against the hostile outside world. However, the danger of such escapist fantasies is to invent images which are close to perversion. Clearly, Almayer's delusions are self-sustaining, yet devastating:

He absorbed himself in his dream of wealth and power away from this coast where he had dwelt for so many years, forgetting the bitterness of toil and strife in the vision of a great and splendid reward. They would live in Europe, he and his daughter. They would be rich and respected. Nobody would think of her mixed blood in the presence of her great beauty and of his immense wealth. Witnessing her triumphs he would grow young again, he would forget the twenty-five years of heartbreaking struggle on this coast where he felt like a prisoner. All this was nearly within his reach (7).

Here, to adapt Rosemary Jackson's point so as to include figures within a literary text, it is important to remember that "like any other texts, a literary fantasy is produced, and determined by, its social context".22 Almayer's obsession with gold and his belief in

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racial distinctions can indeed be associated with an imperialist/capitalist ideology. It is unbearable for Almayer to see his dream of a splendid future disappear. So, he deceives himself into thinking the "sinking sun would spread a glowing gold tinge on the waters of the Pantai" (7). It is possible to disdain Almayer's flight of fantasy as simply pathetic. But it is also possible to see, as Rosemary Jackson eloquently argues, the subversive function of the fantastic - a revolt against a tradition of rationalism.\textsuperscript{23} Whereas the rational mind sticks to a clearly defined boundary between the "unreal" and the "fantastic", Almayer, as in Laing's analysis, blurs boundaries. It is true that Conrad frequently creates for his dispossessed characters an "unreal" world of wish-fulfilling images. But his use of such images and his interest in the realm of fantasies can be seen as the poignant redrawing of actual experience from the point of view of characters permanently condemned to alienation. Indeed, Conrad often uses a natural setting to further this psychological environment:

\begin{quote}
Like the contemporary painters and sculptors, he locates his heroes in psychological environments where their thoughts and feelings are anatomized. In sum, his background are not objective re-creations of tropical realities; rather they frame and mediate specific patterns of human activity, abstracting their pathos, inconsequentiality, and absurdity.\textsuperscript{24}
\end{quote}

In other words, in response to the prevailing Western patterns of thought typified by rationalism/logocentrism, Conrad explores the function of the fantastic in his outsiders' mental processes, such as madness, irrationality and narcissism. The effect is to juxtapose the rational and fantastic elements and to expose the deficiencies of both sides.

Conrad explores the vulnerability of a Western consciousness which quickly disintegrates outside Europe. The downfall of Almayer must be understood within the cultural context of European supremacy in retreat. We need to pay attention to the rise of Jim-Eng, a Chinese, who sells opium to Almayer, renames Almayer's House "the House of Heavenly Delight", and virtually usurps Almayer's house-ownership. Conrad adds a touch of mocking poignancy by using the image that the "monkey has taken

\textsuperscript{23} See Rosemary Jackson, "Introduction," \textit{Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion}, 1-10.

\textsuperscript{24} William Bysshe Stein, "Conrad's East" \textit{Texas Studies in Literature and Language}, 7 (1965), 266.
complete charge of its master" (164). The one-eyed statesman Babalatchi, an advisor to the grief-stricken Sultan Lakamba in exile, speaks a certain truth: "white men are strong, but very foolish" (71). It is also significant that a rational inquiry conducted by a group of Dutch investigators draws the wrong conclusion: Dain is dead. Thus, I would argue that Conrad makes Almayer a representative of European victims of the colonial era, not an isolated case.

Whereas Abdulla's solid residence is built on the hilltop, Almayer's house is half-built in the swamp. Such sharp contrast epitomises the emerging power of the Arabs over the Europeans in the region. The house functions as an important metaphor, for Almayer's Folly is the name of the house and stands for the non-European perception of European identity in this "savage" place. This moment can be linked to the incident in An Outcast of the Islands where Lingard entertains Nina by building a house with cards, yet it suddenly collapses under her light breath, foreshadowing the end of Lingard's omnipotence. Similarly, V.S. Naipaul also relies upon a house metaphor to symbolise the frustrated dream of an outsider. In A House for Mr Biswas, the dispossessed Biswas buys his daughter a dolls' house as a Christmas present. This can be read as a projection of his desperate wish to possess a house of his own which is an emblem of his individuality. Yet the dolls' house is a symbol for the children of the Tulsi household. This symbolic act of destruction may suggest that individual autonomy is at stake under the Tulsi regime which demand a collective conformity. Impressively, Biswas continues the struggle to acquire a house of his own. Both Conrad and Naipaul attach much importance to a house which is tantamount to a sanctuary, but Conrad's outsiders invariably fail to secure any lasting haven.

Almayer's moral confusion is important. He trades under the British flag and builds the house for the use of the future engineers, agents, or settlers of the new British Bornean company. This is an example of his expediency: he easily turns his back on the Dutch authorities for the sake of self-interest. Moreover, he is willing to form a partnership with Dain, the Malayan prince in exile, with the vain hope of undertaking his proposed gold expedition. It is increasingly difficult to define his identity along
specifically national or racial lines because opportunism replaces patriotism. Like a secret agent, Almayer eschews a single identity and plays an intriguing role by forming and disbanding alliances with other racial groups. His opportunism supercedes a spirit of solidarity, either national or collectively European. He sells gunpowder to Dain who supplies it to the locals who try to destroy the Dutch frigate. Yet the value of Dain to Almayer lies only in the fact that he is a valuable commodity. Similarly, it emerges that the value of Lingard to Almayer lies only in the fact that he is a man of power and wealth. The possession of knowledge about navigational secrets is most valued simply because it will pave the way for finding the deposits of raw materials such as ivory, silver, and gold. Almayer is obsessed by Lingard’s small notebook under the illusion that it will help him to find gold deposits. In addition, he accepts a marriage arranged by Lingard under the illusion that his "benefactor" will safeguard his future. Conrad’s critique of the devastating effect of capitalism on human life is also well expressed in *The Secret Agent* where Verloc’s marriage with Winnie is degraded by a sort of commercial contract. Thus, imperialism/capitalism constructs the mentality of these alienated Europeans, distorts human relationships, and engenders a sense of crisis in Western culture and civilisation.

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In his Malay novels, Conrad breaks new ground in fiction by dealing with an unfamiliar, strange setting. As John Batchelor argues, "Conrad was opening up a part of the world hitherto unknown to the literary public". Some critics take the view that the Far East is annexed for imperialism by Conrad’s imagination. They tend to regard Conrad’s Malay novels as imperial romances or light holiday literature. Others take the opposite view, arguing that Conrad transcends insular taste by exploring such radical ideas as subversion, deviation, and transgression. My position is that Conrad interrogates rather than confirms imperialist ideology.

Frederic Jameson puts forward a more sophisticated argument, highlighting Conrad's uneasy positioning between entertaining (romance) and disturbing elements (cultural critique). According to Jameson, "he [Conrad] is still unstable, undecidable, and his work unclassifiable".26 Asher Z. Milbauer also argues that one of the major characteristics of transplanted writers is a tendency to deal with a "submerged entanglement of fact and fiction, past and present, reality and fantasy".27

I would like to examine some of the divergent views surrounding Conrad's Malay novels. Juliet McLauchlan rightly touches upon the central idea of "deviations", their motivation and consequences:

Recent close study has convinced me that neither [Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands], in fact, is a love story as such; that Conrad no more wrote "love stories" than he wrote "sea stories;" and that mainstream Conradian themes dominate both novels. These include the futility of seeking happiness through material wealth or through adherence to the non-values of supposed "civilization," moral isolation and corruption, through the debasement of truly civilized and human standards of honor and rectitude, and the tragic tendency of human beings to try to live by and within illusions.28

Her conclusion can certainly be applied to Lord Jim as well as the earlier works. F.R. Leavis dismissed the Patusan episode as romance on the grounds that it falls short of the high realism achieved in the Patna episode.29 As Frederic Jameson argues, Conrad stands accused of creating "the space of the degraded language of romance and daydream".30 But his use of elusive language is designed to challenge the problematic illusion of transparent language upon which an imperial discourse relies. For this reason, I am not with Leavis.

There are pitfalls when one takes a romanticised view of "Otherness" because such an approach will exclude the historical-political reality of any region where rival powers contend with each other for dominant economic, political power. Such arguments can be further reinforced by looking at Conrad's fascination with the mechanics of intrigue which operate explicitly in The Secret Agent and Under Western

30 Frederic Jameson, "Romance and Reification," 213.
Eyes. Viewed from this perspective, to regard Conrad's Malay novels as escapist literature is quite absurd. Another misconception hinges around a stereotypical view that the region is "savage", or "inferior". As I have already indicated, we can apply a Foucauldian approach to Conrad who problematises crude dichotomies between "civilisation" and "savagery", the "real" and the "unreal", "rationality" and "madness".

In Conrad's works, there is always an additional dimension of universal displacement. There is, of course, a biographical touch which cannot be ignored, and nobody can dispute that transplantation is central to Conrad's writing. Even when we shift our eyes from sea to land, Conrad's central interest in transplantation remains unchanged. It is no coincidence that Conrad explores the predicaments of exiled extremists in his political novels and sea vagabonds in his sea stories. Fernando touches upon this point:

The social and political realities in which Conrad's protagonists move, therefore, cannot be regarded as a backdrop or as merely evidence of the historical disintegration of the Archipelago at the time, and certainly not exotic detail for bored housewives, although they serve these functions very well. The visible social realities serve a uniquely symbolic function of portraying concretely some deeper aspects of the condition of the expatriate, no matter what his country of origin. 31

Conrad interrogates certain imperialist assumptions in the age of imperialism and by so doing exposes deficiencies in the imperial machine which seeks to construct a unified, stable ego. Moreover, like Henry James, Conrad makes good use of "cross-fertilisation" between cultures. So, he is attracted by two key concepts: one is, to borrow Homi Bhabha's term, "hybridity of consciousness"; the other is the "multiculturalism" that Edward Said advocates. In Conrad's works it is important to look at the emotional intensity of those who are culturally dislodged, geographically transplanted, and racially mixed. Here, it is useful to quote Jacqueline Rose's insights into the failings of both liberalism and pluralism:

As I see it, the task for literary studies is to find the forms of language, and they will have to be more than one, which allow for the connections between cultures - of affiliation, recognition, antagonism - without dissipating the voices in which they clash. In this context, pluralism - the ideal of happy coexistence - seems as useless finally as that form of liberalism which believes all cultures can be

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brought harmoniously into a single view. The rhetoric of pluralism can also be a way of concealing the depths of our conflicts. It can also be a way of promoting them.  

Indeed, Conrad explores the depth of conflict within his alienated characters such as the secret agent and cultural misfits under regime which implicitly claim unified stability. Almayer is an outcast European and Nina is of mixed race - both of them suffer from their divided loyalties. It is not for nothing that Conrad is fascinated by the intriguing role played by an informer who, according to Irving Howe, "serves the established world by prying into the world beneath it". Verloc looks inside a capitalist state, Razumov explores an autocratic state, just as Conrad's narratives pry into the inner depths of displaced individuals.

An important area of discussion that must be studied is cultural clash. Nina is suspended between two different cultural traditions represented by her parents - the Western "civilisation" which her father clings to and what he sees as a regressive savagery to which her mother belongs. Initially, she finds herself caught in the crossfire between her parents, yet gradually she leans towards her mother's tradition:

To her resolute nature, however, after all these years, the savage and uncompromising sincerity of purpose shown by her Malay kinsmen seemed at least preferable to the sleek hypocrisy, to the polite disguises, to the virtuous pretences of such white people as she had had the misfortune to come in contact with. After all it was her life; it was going to be her life, and so thinking she fell more and more under the influence of her mother. Seeking, in her ignorance, a better side to that life, she listened with avidity to the old woman's tales of the departed glories of the Rajahs, from whose race she had sprung, and she became gradually more indifferent, more contemptuous of the white side of her descent represented by a feeble and traditionless father.

Being disillusioned about "the narrow mantle of civilised morality", Nina joins her mother in rejecting what Western civilisation ostensibly stands for. Their strength is sharply contrasted with Almayer's feebleness, yet it excludes a reciprocity between different traditions.

Since Almayer offers nothing, Conrad's text inevitably encourages sympathy for Nina. Her case highlights the universal predicament of those who face the riddle of identity with regard to parentage, origins, and belonging. Whilst she is classified as a

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"white woman" among the natives, Nina is dismissed as a "half-savage" by the whites. Clearly, her true identity is never fully understood. She defies her father's authority, saying "I am not of your race" (144), yet Dain regards her as a "woman from another world" (152). Although she struggles for survival through an elopement with Dain, the future of the Dain/Nina relationship is not revealed:

With the coming of Dain she found the road to freedom by obeying the voice of the new-born impulses, and with surprised joy she thought she could read in his eyes the answer to all the questionings of her heart. She understood now the reason and the aim of life; and in the triumphant unveiling of that mystery she threw away disdainfully her past with its sad thought, its bitter feelings, and its faint affections, now withered and dead in contact with her fierce passion (123-4)

Feminist critics tend to interpret her bold decision as a "triumph" or an "emancipation". But it can equally be argued that Nina's awakening is incomplete because of her apparent ignorance of her mother's and Dain's intrigues. The word "emancipation" may carry positive overtones of a revolt against particular cultural constraints but, I would argue, it may also carry the negative overtones of anarchic spontaneity without full understanding of the odds.

Ruth L. Nadelhaft has shed light on Conrad's critique of Western patriarchal values which until recently has been an area of neglect. The gist of her argument is that Conrad depicts women as centres of resistance to male vanity and imperialist assumptions. She adopts a new approach to Conrad's early works by looking at a subversion of the male/female relationship:

It seems that there has been and continues to be a sharp disparity between the contents of these first two novels and the critical perception of them. . . . Critics seem to project onto the texts the very Western patriarchal values from which the protagonists suffer and which Conrad shows to be destructive to women and men alike.34

Certainly, Conrad's interest in problematic relationships is an area that cannot be overlooked. In Almayer's Folly Conrad presents three non-European females of different temperaments - the warrior-like Mrs Almayer, the mixed-race Nina, and the slave-girl, Taminah. He dramatises their predicaments and possibilities. To begin with,

Mrs Almayer clings to "the departed glories of the Rajahs" (38) out of hostility to Western civilisation. Her image of "the savage tigress" epitomises her powers of resistance. In terms of "noble savagery", she prefigures Kurtz's African mistress who violently resists Kurtz's departure. At the opposite pole to Mrs Almayer's opposition stands Taminah's profound resignation. As her servitude implies, Taminah is also deprived of Nina's freedom and romance. Nonetheless, she is able to "curse at the injustice of sufferings inflicted upon her" (197):

The slave [Taminah] had no hope, and knew of no change. She knew of no other sky, no other water. no other forest, no other world, no other life. She had no wish, no hope, no love, no fear except a blow, and no vivid feeling but that of occasional hunger, which was seldom, for Bulangi [her master] was rich and rice was plentiful in the solitary house in his clearing. The absence of pain and hunger was her happiness, and when she felt unhappy she was simply tired, more than usual, after the day's labour (92).

However, she witnesses Nina's rendezvous with Dain and so, in place of those absences of things to aspire to, comes to realise painfully her disadvantages, her outsider status. As a sort of a secret agent, Taminah mediates between Almayer and the Arabs and so develops a dual vision. She is hired by the Arabs - Abdulla and his nephew, Reshid, who courts Nina - to watch Nina's whereabouts and later to reveal the disturbing news of Nina's elopement to Almayer. In contrast to the self-deluded males, the text allows her to reflect on her own predicaments as well as her servitude. That she is allowed to play an active role among males reflects Conrad's subversion of conventional views of male domination.

An Outcast of the Islands is a classic study of the transplanted character who is a runaway from a Dutch ship and later an outsider in the wilderness. Lingard is once again an active ingredient. He makes Willems, a "starved cat", his protégé. What interests me is Willems's transgressive energy which offers a decadent view of colonial life in Conrad's time. Willems abandons his wife and child and betrays Lingard, a father-figure; he is enslaved by a passion for Aissa whose race he despises. So, he is
pictured as a black sheep who invents lies and devises calculations in order to meet the
demands of his basest instincts.

Whereas Almayer clings to the trappings of Western civilisation and hankers
after a return to Europe, Willems abandons his European ties. As Daniel R. Schwarz
argues, Willems's deviations are motivated by the "ennui and cynicism of the fin de
siecle,\(^\text{35}\) justifying, for example, an embezzlement with the argument that he "borrowed"
rather than "stole" the money of Hudig & Co.. He emerges as a cynic who violates all
forms of law and order which are traditionally a yardstick for Western civilisation. As
Thomas Moser claims, it may be true that the "intensity of his contempt for his hero
[Willems] deters Conrad from sentimentalizing him".\(^\text{36}\) However, we can take a more
sympathetic view of his rebellion, too, given the ways in which Conrad depicts the
shortcomings of the Western civilization which has alienated Willems. Viewed from this
perspective, as John Batchelor claims, it is reasonable to see "Willems's story as the
seed-bed for the stories of Jim and Razumov".\(^\text{37}\)

Viewed from this perspective also, we can deconstruct the mystique of the image
of Captain Lingard as a benevolent father-figure for his protégés and a representative of
humanely based law and order. He is an autocrat who tells Willems, "you are my
prisoner" or "Your life is finished". Yet his attachment to his traitor, Willems, begs
many questions because of his "queer notions of justice". He chooses not to punish
Willems not because of his "generosity" but because of strangely perverse
sentimentalism. After being betrayed by Willems, Lingard concedes that "he was a
fool".

As Leo Gurko claims, Lingard is a "sentimental egotist who receives a self-
sustaining gratification from 'arranging' and 'improving' the lives of others".\(^\text{38}\) As
Almayer's "affection" disguises his egotism, so Lingard's "benevolence" disguises his
despotism. His rescue of Mrs Almayer is close to kidnapping. Moreover, the act of

\(^{38}\) Leo Gurko, Giant in Exile, 62.
sending her to a convent school to "normalise" her manner and to adopt a European
style proves disastrously counterproductive. Lingard's case is that of the imperialist
outsider creating for his own gratification further alienation in those over whom he
exercises power.

What is at issue here is not so much altruism as egocentrism. Under the guise
of "benevolence" Lingard's power manifests itself through monopoly at sea and tyranny
over his protégés, a miniature instance of imperial practice. Both Almayer and Willems
are the victims of Lingard's capricious whims. But with the double loss of the Flash
and of his authority as a man of power and wealth, he sees his privileges and power
slipping away. Like Captain Marlow, Captain Lingard turns his eyes nostalgically
towards the diminishing power of imperialism.

Lingard "functions not as a biological father but as a social and ideological
father", the paternalistic imperialist. The fact that he gradually loses his authority as a
white "benefactor" reflects the gradual erosion of paternalism/imperialism which he
advocates and leaves his dependents doubly stranded. Interestingly, Almayer is
subservient enough to worship Lingard as a hero, yet there is an obvious danger in his
obedience. This master/disciple relationship is once again visible in the more enigmatic
Kurtz/harlequin relationship: Kurtz plays the role of spiritual mystic to his Russian
enthusiast (a very Russian relationship, as Rasputin's power would later demonstrate).
Conrad interrogates the domination/subjugation relationship which runs against a
democratic impulse. The inadequacy as objects of veneration which characterises
Lingard and Kurtz justifies Conrad's scepticism about the naïveté of idolization.

I would argue that Willems's deviations can be read as a response to the
particular cultural constraints of an apparent rationalism rooted in Western society and
embodied in Lingard. As the rule of reason fails, he falls victim to an uncontrollable
passion for Aissa, the daughter of Omar. In my view, Willems's revolt is directed
against two main targets: Victorian worship of the sanctity of marriage and a general
belief that patriarchy is an ineluctable part of the social order. Both his broken

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39 Reynold Humphrey, "Skirting the Strait and Narrow: Narrative and Representation in Conrad's An
matrimonial relationship and his betrayal of Lingard seem to justify this contention. Moreover, as I have said, in contrast to Almayer who dreams of an imaginary homeland, Willems never contemplates a return to the Europe from which he originated. That he is not sentimental about Europe reflects his complete disenchantment with Western values. However, despite his arrogant sense of superiority as a white man, he becomes defeatist. He realises painfully "I am a lost man (270)" and "death is better than strife". Finally, anticipating Kurtz, he sums up his life: "Illusion! Misery! Torment!" (276).

In contrast to Almayer who chooses wilful oblivion, Willems is able to gauge his existential despair:

Willems measured dismally the depth of his degradation. He - a white man, the admired of white men, was held by those miserable savages whose tool he was about to become. He felt for them all the hate of his race, of his morality, of his intelligence. He looked upon himself with dismay and pity. She [Aissa] had him. He had heard of such things. He would never believe such stories... Yet they were true. But his own captivity seemed more complete, terrible, and final - without the hope of any redemption. He wondered at the wickedness of Providence that had made him what he was; that, worse still, permitted such a creature as Almayer to live (109).40

His bleak analysis of his predicament is in stark contrast to Almayer's retreat into dreams, yet Willems has his blind spots: his blind belief in his racial superiority remains, as suggested by his use of the derogatory word "savage". Yet, despite this, the reality is that Willems is enslaved to Aissa whose race he despises. So he too fails to strike a balance between reason and unreason.

Significantly, An Outcast of the Islands begins with Willems's perverse view of moral uprightness:

when he stepped off the straight and narrow path of his peculiar honesty, it was with an inward assertion of unflinching resolve to fall back again into the monotonous but safe stride of virtue as soon as his little excursion into the wayside quagmires had produced the desired effect (13).

He deviates from what he himself defines as a virtuous life and he never returns to his initial position. Nowhere are his moral confusions more evident than in his perverse justification for the charge of financial irregularities, arguing that "I never stole. I

borrowed" (7). Such a comment would indeed suggest he is closer to Almayer's fantasising than may at first appear.

Willems's elusive personality defies easy categorisation. Lingard denounces Willems as an "abominable scoundrel" (204) and Almayer takes the same view, denouncing him as an "abominable brute" (238). However, as I have already suggested, it is possible to argue that Willems's irrational impulses take over as a direct response to an over-rigid morality, while in no way is this response presented as other than disastrous. Indeed, it is hard not to sympathise with him as he brands himself "the outcast of all mankind," even perceiving suicide as a "merciful release from depression". There is a frightening loss of context of self:

He was looking round for help. This silence, this immobility of his surroundings seemed to him a cold rebuke, a stern refusal, a cruel unconcern. There was no safety outside of himself - and in himself there was no refuge; there was only the image of that woman. He had a sudden moment of lucidity - of that cruel lucidity that comes once in life to the most benighted (72-3).

Willems tries to transcend his misery through his passion for Aissa, yet passion cannot release him from the structures either society or Willems himself have constructed so disastrously:

She, a woman, was the victim of her heart, of her woman's belief that there is nothing in the world but love - the everlasting thing. He was the victim of his strange principles, of his continence, of his blind belief in himself, of his solemn veneration for the voice of his boundless ignorance (270).

So I endorse the view taken by Adam Gillon, "Sexual love promises the closest union between man and woman, but, in Conrad's fiction, it usually brings pain, solitude, or destruction". It is not Lingard but Aissa who is able to deliver an effective punishment for Willems's crime of betrayal. Almayer remains puzzled over Lingard's attitude towards Willems (Lingard has imported a slab of granite to make a decent grave for his traitor.) and vents his anger at the universe which is indifferent to his scheme for success:

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'Here!' went on Almayer, speaking very loud and thumping the table. 'I want to know. You [the learned naturalist], who say you have read all the books, just tell me... why such infernal things are ever allowed. Here I am! Done harm to nobody, lived an honest life... and a scoundrel like that [Willems] is born in Rotterdam or some such place at the other end of the world somewhere, travels out here, robs his employer, runs away from his wife, and ruins me and my Nina - he ruined me, I tell you - and gets himself shot at last by a poor miserable savage [Aissa], that knows nothing at all about him really. Where's the sense of all this? Where's your Providence? Where's the good for anybody in all this? The world's a swindle! A swindle! Why should I suffer? What have I done to be treated so? (294).

The tenor of Almayer's complaints reveal his growing scepticism about Providence and by implication the Christian tenets of Western imperialism which Conrad will challenge again in An Outpost of Progress where Kayerts hangs himself on the cross of the church with his swollen tongue out, epitomising protest against such Christian values as brotherhood. It is no coincidence that the ending of Almayer's Folly points to a radical scepticism about the Christian God, as suggested by Abdulla's intrusion.

As Wolfgang Iser argues, "the author [has] to use a variety of cunning strategies to nudge the reader unknowingly into making the 'right' discoveries". This is particularly true of Conrad who, I would argue, continually invites the reader to ponder the subtleties his narrative strategies set up. Although Almayer's anger is set against Lingard's complacency, it is hard to accept his emotional outburst at face value, since his anger at Willems is fuelled by his jealousy of Lingard's "charity" for Willems. Appropriately too, Conrad filters Almayer's crude emotions through the report of a learned naturalist who mediates Almayer's version of story. The appearance of a frame listener prefigures the emergence of frame narrators in his later works displacing his outsiders still further from the reader. Such additional narrative devices are so designed to force the reader to play an active role as interpreter of Conrad's text.

Despite some conflicting views of Conrad's ideological position, whether conservative or radical, I would argue that Conrad remains a formidable cultural critic who casts a vigilant, inquisitorial eye over Western values. In an age when Western ideologies of civilization were still largely accepted, Conrad raised a big question mark.

over their validity. As Goonetilleke claims, "he [Conrad] is able to rise above conventional Western prejudices".\textsuperscript{44} Hunt Hawkins also takes a similar view that Conrad "endorsed, with however tempered optimism, anticolonial revolts".\textsuperscript{45} We cannot overestimate the advantages that Conrad commands as an outsider, distilling Western values through the lives of those who fall their victims, often wilfully but nonetheless poignantly. And this distillation grows ever more complex as we turn to \textit{Lord Jim}.

\textsuperscript{44} D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke, \textit{Developing Countries in British Fiction} (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1977), 92.

I shall now go on to explore *Heart of Darkness* (serialised 1899, published in full 1902) where again the imperialistic notion of white male European supremacy is challenged through the analysis of outsider figures, but where the techniques used are more subtle and complex than in the two earlier Malay novels. In *Heart of Darkness*, the protagonist is the main narrator, Marlow, as he narrates his journey from Europe to a remote outpost on an African river. Marlow in this tale is developed as a fully rounded character, who comes to loathe all that imperialist Belgium puts into practice while still defending what might be called the Platonic "idea" of imperialism. In the process, he has to come to terms both with his own reaction to the alien African world he enters, and with the ways in which his imaginary construct of Kurtz comes face to face with the reality, a man who is eloquent on the "idea" of imperialism, but in practice has taken to cannibal raids to procure the ivory which is the mainstay of the commerce of the area.

However, despite Conrad’s largely hostile depiction of Belgian imperialism in *Heart of Darkness*, he stands accused of being a racist. Edward Said views the novel as an "imperialist narrative" in its aesthetics and politics on the grounds that Conrad avoids speaking up for the liberation of the oppressed.¹ In a much stronger attack, Chinua Achebe also denounces the novel as a "racist novel"², and considers *Heart of Darkness* "an offensive and totally deplorable book"³. However, such accusations seem to me unfair because Achebe fails to take account of the ironic voice which often implies savage denunciation of the regime it exposes rather than stating a reasoned case. Then again, when Susan L. Blake argues that the novel must be taught "not out of deference to it, but out of self-defence"⁴, she fails to read Conrad’s strategies for aligning English readers with the oppressed as well as with the oppressors. Both criticisms have a point.

but I would argue that Conrad is more concerned with exposing the malpractices of imperialism and the effects on the Africans rather than with proposing a solution. At the same time, Euro-centric critics have tended to evade Marlow's generous view of Kurtz's idealism and the frame narrator's jingoistic attitude towards British imperialism in retreat. In my view, Conrad's balanced assessment of the two worlds deserves closer analysis; overall I would argue that he is less generous to the Europeans than to the natives. Indeed, a one-sided argument, either through Western or African eyes, tends to ignore the subtlety and complexity of the novel as a whole; André Brink is right in arguing that "if it is true that literature is by its very 'nature' dissident and oppositional, it is equally true that it can also dissipate itself in mere dissidence or oppositionality: and if an entire literature threatens to define itself purely in terms of what it is against, there is a real danger of forfeiting the very richness and polyphony that assured its cultural validity to start with".5 This claim serves as a useful reminder to those non-European critics who reject Heart of Darkness outright. As I hope to demonstrate, Conrad's work can liberate the reader from both the dogma of Euro-centrism and the pitfalls of Afro-centrism.

There are many critical disagreements about the language of Heart of Darkness, too. Conrad frequently stands accused, after F.R. Leavis, of an "adjectival insistence".6 E.M. Forster also complained that "the secret casket of his genius contains a vapour rather than a jewel".7 V.S. Naipaul adds his voice, arguing that "Conrad tends to blur rather than define his vision".8 However, as I shall demonstrate, there are very strong counter-arguments against these negative views. Marlow, after all, is shown as attempting to come to terms with an experience which has arguably traumatised his whole system of values; his tale is told as a struggle to express what he has gone through to an audience which, if we take into account the evidence of the frame narrator,

is secure, culturally and politically, in the ethos of British imperialism. The failure of Marlow's language to convey an entirely lucid sense of his cross-cultural encounters could be seen as mirroring the difficulty of communicating aboard the Nellie; as mirroring Marlow's professed aversion for interpreting the core of a story; or, very importantly, as in tune with the meditation running throughout the novel on the respective merits and/or perils of eloquence and silence together with the impossibility of getting through to those who cannot or will not share in the process of communication. Marlow, towards the end of the novel, refers repeatedly to his "choice of nightmare", between keeping faith with Kurtz despite everything or submitting to the Belgian interpretation of imperialism, and Conrad nudges that nightmare in the direction of the reader, rather than spell it out. There is a real need to read the text within a historical context, too: Conrad explores what humankind is capable of well before Nazi atrocities.

2

In Heart of Darkness, Conrad explores the rich potential in the relation between two cultures, that of the "sepulchral" city of Brussels and that of the jungle of the Congo, using as vehicle the intertwined tales of the two outsider figures, Marlow and Kurtz. Since the novel contains such complex ideas as cultural transgression, geographical dislocation, and moral collusion, it resists any attempt at simplification. As Robert Hampson rightly argues, "Africa is not the arbitrarily selected backdrop for a story about 'the break-up of one petty European mind'", 9 or again, as Peter Nazareth argues, "Conrad does not make sense to persons belonging to monolithic societies, communities whose world-view is so secure that nothing is permitted to penetrate, question and change it". 10 One of Conrad's most successful complicating strategies is to invite his reader into colluding with unexpected cultural partners. For instance, the

9 Robert Hampson, "Heart of Darkness and 'The Speech that Cannot be Silenced', " English 39: 163 (Spring 1990), 25.
novel begins with the frame narrator meditating on British history, full of pride in past achievements and the wealth of an imperial inheritance: “The dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empires”. But Marlow breaks in with an alternative revery: “this also...has been one of the dark places of the earth”. And he goes on to imagine the effect on Romans coming to early Britain, the strong withdrawing undamaged, but the more vulnerable, left alone in the wilderness, living “in the midst of the incomprehensible, which is also detestable” gradually gives way to the fascination of a life running counter to Roman “civilisation”: “imagine the growing regrets, the longing to escape, the powerless disgust, the surrender, the hate.” This is very far from the frame narrator’s comfortable dreams of past greatness; these are the hazards rather than the rewards of empire-building, the acknowledgement that the imperialist is a mere intruder into something he cannot understand, is in fact a vulnerable outsider. Later, during Marlow’s cross-country trek to the Central Station, as he passes abandoned villages, he puts his audience in the position of the oppressed: “Well, if a lot of mysterious niggers armed with all kinds of fearful weapons suddenly took to travelling on the road between Deal and Gravesend, catching the yokels right and left to carry heavy loads for them, I fancy every farm and cottage thereabouts would be empty very soon.” And a little later he compares the meaning of the drums he hears with the significance of “bells in a Christian country”. Moreover, Marlow himself is often drawn to the Africans he sees rather than to the Europeans. On the French ship approaching the Congo, he is comforted by the “wild vitality” of the black men in the boats, whose “intense energy of movement...was as natural and true as the surf along their coast”; and later he grieves for his helmsman: “it was a kind of partnership...a subtle bond had been created.” Marlow, while aware he is an outsider in Africa is, in fact, pushed into alliances which surprise and unsettle him because of his increasing rejection of all the Belgians stand for. And that is why, in my view, he is driven to the choice of nightmare, to stand by the fantasy of Kurtz’s “reputation” in Europe rather than betray him to those whose betrayal of the imperialist “idea” stinks of hypocrisy.
What is at issue here is Conrad's creation of the composite identity of his main outsider characters, Kurtz and Marlow. It is interesting to note that "All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz": educated in Britain and employed as an ivory agent by the Trading Company in Brussels, he is later sent to the interior of the Congo and finally is torn apart between mind and heart, Europe and Africa. Marlow, meanwhile, at the outset a thoroughly British adventurer, takes a job with a Belgian company, approaches the African coast on a French gun-boat and from the vantage point of the present tells his story on the yacht, Nellie, anchored on the Thames, where the frame narrator describes him as in "the pose of a Buddha preaching in European clothes and without a lotus-flower". Conrad certainly cultivates the notion of plurality with his characters, locales, and cultures.

In addition, Heart of Darkness mirrors the effects of a European age dominated by commercialism, industrialism, and capitalism; it concentrates on victims of these ideologies. The yacht anchored on the Thames may recall Britain's maritime achievements, but even the frame narrator draws a parallel between the Thames and the Congo in terms of mournful gloom - an ambivalent comparison, given Marlow's tale. Then the French gun-boat shelling the bush of the African Continent epitomises the abuse and ultimately the impotence of imperialistic power; whilst the function of the steamboat asserts power over a tribal society and the quest for ivory over and above the value of human life. At the same time, Conrad exposes the waste built into the system: Marlow is disturbed by his encounters with the boiler wallowing in the grass, the overturned railway tracks, the bucket with a hole in it, and the gradually emerging reasons for the wrecking of the steamboat.

Many critics have expressed puzzlement over what at first sight may seem an incongruous welding of the two elements of social critique and the exploration of Kurtz's complex psychology. Indeed, an exposé of imperialist atrocity and violence
runs up against a provoking concealment. However, this apparent division is seen as a true reflection of Kurtz’s and Marlow’s double identity. At the core of the narrative there is the story of Kurtz whose personality, as it were, splits: “his intelligence was clear,” says Marlow, “...but his soul was mad”; he talks about the imperialist ideals of justice and spreading “civilisation”, while merging with African tribal practice; he talks of nurturing the native community and scrawls “Exterminate all the brutes!” He is like the young Roman at the start of the tale, surrendering to and hating what fascinates, simultaneously. Marlow too, as we have seen, suffers from a confusion of loyalties. And we hear even his narrative at a remove, as the frame narrator "I" briefly intervenes both at the beginning and at the end of the novel. As in Lord Jim, but far more complicatedly, there is an absence of a single, reliable narrative voice, for Conrad’s main narrator in Heart of Darkness is the traumatised participant in every stage of the tale.

Interpreting Heart of Darkness can be likened to the solving of a riddle partly because Marlow is struggling to comprehend the enigmatic personality of Kurtz and renders his story as "inconclusive experiences". Marlow tries to weigh the possible moral impact that his journey into Africa has had on himself:

It was the farthest point of navigation and the culminating point of my experience. It seemed somehow to throw a kind of light on everything about me - and into my thoughts. It was sombre enough, too - and pitiful - not extraordinary in any way - not very clear either. No, not very clear. And yet it seemed to throw a kind of light (32).

Although he tries to assume the role of neutral enquirer, his struggles to understand the enigma of Kurtz and the mystery of Africa are painfully clear; both are alien to him. And it is to signal the difficulty of understanding, that he utters the many elusive adjectives such as “inconceivable,” “unspeakable,” “impenetrable,” “inexpressible,” “inaccessible,” and “inscrutable”. Indeed, Marlow’s repetitive use of these adjectives not only mirror his imperfect understanding of what he experiences but refuse the reader greater access than he himself commands; one way, I would argue, of countering any tendency on the reader’s part of adopting an uncritical imperialist stance.
On the reader's side, it is very important to read between the lines of Marlow's narration. For instance, he initially accepts the view of Kurtz offered by the accountant, despite a complicated reaction to the man:

I shook hands with this miracle, and I learned he was the Company's chief accountant, and that all the book-keeping was done at this station. He had come out for a moment, he said, "to get a breath of fresh air." The expression sounded wonderfully odd, with its suggestion of sedentary desk-life. I wouldn't have mentioned the fellow to you at all, only it was from his lips that I first heard the name of the man who is so indissolubly connected with the memories of that time. Moreover, I respected the fellow. Yes; I respected his collars, his vast cuffs, his brushed hair. His appearance was certainly that of a hairdresser's dummy; but in the great demoralization of the land he kept up his appearance. That's backbone. His starched collars and got-up shirt-fronts were achievements of character (45-6).

Indeed, Marlow aligns himself too closely with his own construction of Kurtz which is that of the heroic adventurer and upholder of a romantic idealism about the civilising mission of empire. Yet Marlow's direct comment that Kurtz is a "remarkable man" merely echoes the accountant's phrase and undermines his credibility as an "impartial" narrator. Indeed, his inflated view of Kurtz is based on rumours uttered by many characters who in themselves Marlow dismisses, such as "a first-class agent," "a very remarkable person," "a bearer of light," "a universal genius," "a prodigy," "an exceptional man," and "an emissary of pity, and science, and progress". Furthermore, his commitment to his choice of nightmares involves self-confessed lying to Kurtz's fiancée that the last word uttered by Kurtz was "your name"; and he also deceives the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs, when he deliberately rips off Kurtz's postscriptum to his report, "exterminate all the brutes" to shield the "idealist" Kurtz from any disgrace. Marlow is neither able to shatter the comforting myth held by the 'Intended' (her name may be read as representing the intention to carry on the professed ideology of Imperialism) nor to reveal Kurtz's aberration. Certainly, as experience with the narrators of the Malay novels shows, and as this text suggests by the problematising of Marlow's position, it would be a grave mistake to equate Marlow as Conrad's spokesman. Nonetheless, Marlow's position arguably can be seen as an attempt as a desperate attempt to keep his balance, to detach himself, as
Naipaul argues, by adopting "the satirical vision of the outside". Unlike Kurtz who actually "goes native", Marlow withholds commitment both to "the whited sepulchre" of Brussels and to the primitive world of the jungle: ultimately, he arguably adopts Forster's stance of choosing his friend, whether it be Kurtz, the helmsman, or even the Intended; as Douglas Hewitt argues, "his [Conrad's] works gain much of their force from the sense that he is exploring his own contradictions". Critics often fail to recognise "the strategic use of the distance between Conrad and his narrators". Edward Said rightly argues that "[being] never the wholly incorporated and fully acculturated Englishman, Conrad therefore preserved an ironic distance in each of his works".

In a similar fashion, the frame narrator's ostensibly unironic commentary must be subjected to close scrutiny. In the light of Conrad's characteristic manner of providing narrators who offer no conclusions, and also bearing in mind Marlow's early alternative vision to the frame narrator's initial revery we can I think legitimately challenge the frame narrator's affectionately patronising tone toward Marlow. So, once again, it is vital for the reader to keep a distance between author and the frame narrator who props up an imperialist ideology. However, it would equally be an incomplete reading to focus on the Belgian atrocity in the Congo, for the two prime narrators are British, and are at the very least sympathetic to some aspects of an imperialist ideology, its theory if not its practice.

Marlow assumes the double role of demystifier and problematiser. His conflicting position between who exactly are "us" and "them" stimulates debate. On the one hand, he observes the violence committed by the white colonialists, for example, the spiked heads of the rebels and the chained natives of the contract labourers. This atrocity contradicts Christian ethical values. On the other hand, he upholds an idealism which has no empirical backing in his tale:

13 Robert Hampson, "Heart of Darkness and 'The Speech that Cannot be Silenced'," 22.
14 Edward W. Said, "Two visions in *Heart of Darkness,* Culture and Imperialism," 27.
The conquest of the earth, which mostly means that taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea: and an unselfish belief in the idea - something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to (31-2).

Is he agreeing, as Jeremy Hawthorn argues, "it [idealism] serves as a smokescreen for the most appalling brutalities and hypocrisies"?15 The text stimulates more questions than answers.

4

And in the end the questions all stem from language - the use of language reduced to the propagandistic tool of a dominant ideology, of language which strives to express what that dominant ideology does not admit, and questions concerning the relative merits of eloquence and silence which the failures of communication or revelations of hypocrisy render urgent. Edward Said's view, that Conrad was "a self-conscious foreigner writing of obscure experiences in an alien language,"16 may be reductive but does give a clue to the acute sensitivity to language and its limitations which Marlow displays. He uses both encoded and pre-verbal language in such a way as to expose the inadequacies of language: for instance, colonial discourse (the language of intrigue and reports) is set against the non-verbal language expressed through howling, murmuring, imperfectly heard incantations, outcries. Marlow experiences the all too frequent total failure of communication between Africans and Europeans and often responds with silence. And he often debates the issue of communication; for instance, when thinking about his forthcoming meeting with Kurtz, he realises "I had never imagined him as doing, you know, but as discoursing". And he imagines Kurtz's preeminent gift to be "the gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an

impenetrable darkness.” The construct of Kurtz is already ambivalent then, Marlow acknowledging that eloquence is not necessarily the prerogative of moral superiority. Later we will see Kurtz’s eloquence in his report, although significantly, “the peroration was magnificent, though difficult to remember, you know. It gave me the notion of an exotic Immensity ruled by an august Benevolence. It made me tingle with enthusiasm. This was the unbounded power of eloquence - of words - of burning noble words” - yet all this is subverted by the scrawled postscript of “Exterminate all the brutes!” And on another occasion, when Marlow is trying to persuade Kurtz to return to the boat, he realises “I had to deal with a being to whom I could not appeal in the name of anything high or low”; he finds their conversation at this point, conducted in “common everyday words - the familiar, vague sounds exchanged on every waking day of life”, to have acquired in this jungle context “the terrific suggestiveness of words heard in dreams, of phrases spoken in nightmares”. And yet Marlow earlier sees the perils of silence: “how can you imagine,” he asks his English audience, secure in the structures of their society, “what particular region of the first ages a man’s untrammelled feet may take him into by the way of solitude - ...by the way of silence - utter silence, where no warning voice of a kind neighbour can be heard whispering of public opinion?” As we have found before, Conrad does not provide answers.

Marlow’s empirical enquiry achieves little in penetrating the inner life of Africa which is alien to him. At the same time, what he has experienced in the Congo turns him into something like Gulliver on his return to Europe:

I found myself back in the sepulchral city resenting the sight of people hurrying through the streets to flinch a little money from each other, to devour their infamous cookery, to gulp their unwholesome beer, to dream their insignificant and silly dreams. They trespassed upon my thoughts. They were intruders whose knowledge of life was to me an irritating pretence, because I felt so sure they could not possibly know the things I knew. Their bearing, which was simply the bearing of commonplace individuals going about their business in the assurance of perfect safety, was offensive to me like the outrageous flauntings of folly in the face of a danger it is unable to comprehend. I had no particular desire to enlighten them, but I had some difficulty in restraining myself from laughing in their faces, so full of stupid importance. I daresay I was not very well at that time. I tottered about the streets - there were various affairs to settle - grinning bitterly at perfectly respectable persons. I admit my behaviour was inexcusable, but then my temperature was seldom normal in these days. My dear aunt’s endeavours to “nurse up my strength” seemed altogether beside the mark. It was not my strength that wanted nursing, it was my imagination that wanted soothing (113-114).
It is significant perhaps that our last view of him is as a permanent outsider to his native culture; the frame narrator this time sees him in the "pose of a meditating Buddha" and does not this time mention European dress or the absence of the lotus flower.

5

Conrad shows how easy it is for an imperialist society to paradoxically condemn its servants abroad to the outsider status which may undo them. He shows the danger of imposing standardised responses to other than European ways of life upon isolated subordinates locked into the professional, administrative and managerial strata. When a dominant ideology aims to normalise multiple beliefs, and to perpetuate a narrow, bigoted view of other races, religions, and cultures, both individual integrity and heterogeneity are at stake. The colonial discourse forms a large network of surveillance, control and supervision to maintain cultural hegemony; the colonialist is reduced to a cog in the machinery of bureaucracy. For example, the chief accountant is able to make exact entries in his book-keeping whilst he is indifferent to the misery of the sick agent lying in the same room; he is white-suited in the African jungle and creates a replica of desk-life there. Behind his duty "under the propaganda-machine of Imperialism," there is a crucial failure in humanity, as shown by his "fetishisation of facts and figures".

Kurtz's tortured development as outsider in the jungle goes of course far beyond this: he converts from submission to the established stratification system to assertion of an absolute charisma. Linda R. Anderson rightly claims that "for Conrad the idea of freedom was paradoxical; by projecting themselves beyond the restraints of ordinary life, by freeing themselves from every social tie, his characters also experience a terrifying sense of isolation and emptiness. Freedom also implied the destruction of inner meaning." With the hindsight of the Intended's revelation, Kurtz can be seen as

17 Jeremy Hawthorn, Joseph Conrad: Narrative Technique and Ideological Commitment, 163.
18 Reynold Humphries, "Language and 'Adjectival Insistence' in Heart of Darkness," 123.
the victim of a capitalist society which disapproves of his engagement to his fiancée due to his apparent lack of wealth: "He [Kurtz's cousin] had given me [Marlow] some reason to infer that it was his impatience of comparative poverty that drove him out there" (119). So, behind his personal decision to leave for the Congo with the official duty of collecting ivory, there is his need to achieve fame, wealth, and promotion within a society where materialism and capitalism have become the dominant forces. He is valued by the Company for his services as a first-class ivory agent who possesses the commercial secrets of the region; yet, as Kurtz's reputation highlights, both commercial profit and personal interest are pursued in the name of idealism - imperialism's double standard.

Another aspect of Kurtz is his exercise of absolute power over the natives. He carries out ivory raids and presides over "unspeakable rites", implicitly involving human sacrifice to mark triumphant expeditions. There is a deep pathos behind Kurtz's failure to return home in glory. Through a dramatisation of the duplicity of Kurtz's self (the institutional self and the instinctual self), Conrad suggests that both normalisation by a rigid social structure and an extreme individualism are inadequate. I endorse Eagleton's claim that Conrad dramatises "the conflict between romantic individualism and social organicism".21

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In Heart of Darkness, none survive unscathed unless we except the young Russian, that strange intrusive absurdity from Dostoyevsky's The Idiot who both acts as Kurtz's good samaritan and seems to bear a charmed life. The Intended may keep her view of Kurtz's idealism intact, but Marlow's frightening realisation that her final gesture mirrors the tragically outflung arms of the African woman suggests she has lost

as much as she has been spared. Outsiders are rife in this work: those whom imperialism abandons at its trading posts as much as those who elect, at least in part, to adopt outsider status. The reader does indeed have to play a major role in exploring the deep structure of the text, for its surface is compounded of lies, rumours, silence, misinterpretations, contradictions, and distortions. The futility of language is highlighted in Kurtz who, an eloquent speaker, utters one final unspecific cry. Like Kurtz, Marlow is a compulsive speaker who nonetheless avoids offering a direct moral message to his listeners. The frame narrator touches upon this point: “To him [Marlow] the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine” (30). Conrad’s text both engenders and bears witness to a deep sense of crisis as communication breaks down.

The outsider figures in this novel are darker and more complex than those I have already explored, their interpretation further complicated by the controversies centring on current debate about racism and imperialism. I would myself argue that the key to Marlow’s compassion for Kurtz is at the beginning of the tale where the young “decent citizen in a toga” coming to Britain “feels all that mysterious life of the wilderness... The fascination of the abomination - you know, imagine the growing regrets, the longing to escape, the powerless disgust, the surrender, the hate.” This compassion for the conqueror turned outsider, the recognition of the desperate need to belong while helplessly aware of what is being abandoned, is a terrifying glimpse of the kind of mind that could turn to ethnic cleansing and holocaust. Kurtz crosses a line which Marlow himself can glimpse. We have come a long way from the relatively acceptable tragedies of Almayer and Willems.
Like Conrad's other novels that I have been discussing, *Lord Jim* (serialised 1899-1900, published in full 1900) demands the reader's active interpretative role in dealing with the central character, the outsider Jim, and the main narrator, Marlow, among others. Like Kurtz, Razumov, and Verloc, Jim is an enigmatic character whose frame of mind does not offer itself for simple interpretation since it is never unequivocally articulated. In addition, like the teacher of languages in *Under Western Eyes* and Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow in *Lord Jim* is a flawed narrator whose interpretations of Jim are never to be trusted entirely. Marlow's fabrication of both Jim's and Kurtz's "greatness" causes confusion and blurs vision. This lack of clarity has engaged critics in a ceaseless debate about the intricate issues raised in the text.

As in his other works, in *Lord Jim* Conrad adopts a pluralistic approach to the issues of individual, cultural, and national identity. It is scarcely disputable that the playing of conflicting roles characterises many of Conrad's outsider characters: Verloc is a secret agent committed to domestic concerns; Razumov is a state spy in sympathy with revolution; Kurtz is an admired ivory agent who not only brings Europe into disrepute but degrades himself by his personal greed; Jim is an outcast who achieves lordship overseas. Furthermore in *Lord Jim* and *Under Western Eyes*, as in *Heart of Darkness*, there is the presence of a further complicating factor: the unreliable narrator with a developed character of his own. The same conflicting roles which the outsider protagonists play in these novels manifest themselves in the narrators interpreting the outsiders, that is to say the teacher of languages in *Under Western Eyes* and Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* for they frequently find themselves poised precariously between spectator stance and emotional involvement. As a result, they prove capable of simultaneous condemnation and admiration, complicity and humanity, with regard to the central characters under their observation. Both Jim's transgression and Marlow's complicity illustrate the fact that the self is in a constant state of flux. What is
more, the complexity of Conrad's cross-cultural experiences helps to establish a heterogeneous view of the "Other". Indeed, as all these novels illustrate, Conrad poses a question as to how far it is possible to construct a coherent, single identity, racially and culturally.

A superficial reading of Lord Jim might suggest that the novel ultimately advocates and reinforces an imperialist ideology designed to justify domination over "inferior" non-whites. Jim emerges as a "white ruler" who, like Kurtz, enacts the imperial fantasy of exacting homage from the "Other". Just as the fate of the eight hundred Islamic pilgrims on board the Patna is dictated by the handful of white crew who abandon the rusty steamer in the emergency, the fate of the Patusan community depends on the whim of both the "white lord" (Lord Jim) and the disreputable outlaw (Gentleman Brown).

Both the Patna and the Patusan community are spaces which not only encompass different races and religions but stage a clash between opposites: Christianity and Islam, Western and Eastern values, us and them, and so on. Contrary to John Batchelor's claim, Lord Jim is more than a "psychological drama" in which an inquisitive narrator tries to resolve the enigma of Jim or a "bildungsroman" which charts Jim's spiritual transformation from youth into maturity. For, as the novel develops, it becomes clear that Marlow's "Western eye" and parochial attitude come close to mirroring those of Big Brierly who, at the Public Inquiry, appears more concerned about the reputation of the Merchant Navy than the fate of the pilgrims.

Arguably, Conrad neither promulgates the Jim-myth nor reinforces the superiority of the whites. Indeed, he contests and subverts their superiority by examining the degenerating moral climate. The white officers misjudge the entire situation of the Patna which is on the brink of sinking in the Arabian Sea and prematurely desert the ship carrying the pilgrims; in Patusan Jim fatally misjudges the English pirate and so betrays the Malay community. Both the act of desertion of the ship and Jim's failure to protect his adopted community demonstrate that white

1 In contrast to my approach, John Batchelor discusses Lord Jim from a narrow perspective. See his "Lord Jim: Creative Love," The Edwardian Novelists (London: Duckworth, 1982), 45-57.
supremacy is an illusion. These two incidents instead construct Jim as trusting in crisis to European whites who represent the worst traits of their kind, self interest and exploitation. As a result, Jim’s image as Marlow’s exemplary young British officer and later as Patusan’s white lord is irrevocably destroyed, and he is left with outsider status in both cultures.

Conrad’s exploration of the problematic nature of imperialist assertions develops primarily through the complexities of Jim’s behaviour, complicated still further by Marlow’s interpretation. Strikingly, Jim is the only outsider protagonist in all the novels I am discussing who is unequivocally British, and interpreted by a narrator of the same race and culture. Unlike Kurtz who in some ways prefigures Jim, Jim is the son of an Anglican parson (while “all Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz”). Furthermore, Conrad places Jim as an officer in the British merchant service at a time when such officers were expected to observe the highest standards of professional conduct. Jim, then, at the outset is a far cry from the outsider figures of the earlier novels, standing for God and country, his only weakness a fantasy of turning out a hero in some sea drama.

The decision to jump from the Patna changes everything. Jim is officially branded as a coward and by this judgement loses not only his career but, crucially, his image of himself “as unflinching as a hero in a book”. In his own eyes as well as professionally he becomes an outsider, and is in danger, at least in theory, of sliding down into the state of an Almayer or a Willems, since by the proclaimed standards of his culture, he is a reject.

However, Lord Jim is a very different novel from its two Malay predecessors. Importantly, it is set in a much larger context with a greatly increased cast of characters, so that Jim’s fateful leap overboard which so damages his view of himself is set against the German skipper’s view of the Muslim passengers he will abandon (“look at all dese cattle”), and again Big Brierly’s lack of concern for their fate. Equally Jim’s impulsive leap after his fellow whites, despite his fantasy of “saving people from sinking ships,”
calls in question much more pressingly than Almayer’s gap between action and dream the British myth of British superiority. The Muslim pilgrims are instead saved by a “miracle” of their own, these people with their alien belief:

At the call of an idea, they had left their forests, their clearings, the protection of their rulers, their prosperity, their poverty, the surroundings of their youth, and the graves of their fathers. They came covered with dust, with sweat, with grime, with rags - the strong men at the head of family parties, the lean old men pressing forward without hope of return; young boys with fearless eyes glancing curiously, shy little girls with tumbled long hair; the timid women muffled up and clasping to their breasts, wrapped in loose ends of soiled headcloths, their sleeping babies, the unconscious pilgrims of an exacting belief (17).  

Poor Jim, however, by his leap, turns away from “the call of an idea”, the idea of British superiority (it is worth noting that Marlow sees the Muslims as going on pilgrimage “at the call of an idea”, just as in Heart of Darkness he defended imperialism at the least because of the “idea” behind it; this might suggest that Marlow’s approval of the “idea” in the earlier work should be treated with some degree of caution). In the event, it is the two Malay helmsmen aboard the Pama who calmly conduct their duties in the face of the crisis, while later the pilgrims regard the whole incident as a severe test of their faith. Again, in the panic-stricken community of Patusan, this faith which is alien to Jim manifests itself when the locals chant the Koran in the face of the white invaders’ aggression. Earlier they had echoed Marlow’s initial assessment of Jim as a superior man with supernatural powers: ”He had descended upon them from the clouds” (174), but in crisis their faith reasserts itself when Jim turns away from them, again fatally putting his trust in the appearance of European values, the “decency” of Gentleman Brown. He becomes doubly an outsider and can only offer himself to death. Strikingly too, it is Dain Waris, the chieftain’s son described as having a “European mind” who is killed; like the helmsman shooting a European weapon at African attackers on Marlow’s boat in Heart of Darkness, this part abandonment of his own kind marks him out as a victim. (And why the name Dain? Is it coincidental or did Conrad choose to echo or resurrect the Dain who eloped with Almayer’s daughter, so letting the curse of mixed allegiances claim another victim?)

2 All page references in this text are to the Penguin Edition (1957).
As Jakob Lothe concedes, *Lord Jim* is "an exceptionally complex literary text".\(^3\) Pointing out the intricate thematic and narrative web of the novel, Albert Guerard also argues that "the reading of this novel is a combat".\(^4\) Amongst several factors to be considered, above all, there is the enigma of Jim which at once captures our imagination and baffles commentators and readers alike. Moreover, the difficulty of solving Jim's tantalising identity has been compounded by the tensions created amongst the narrators: while Marlow sympathises with Jim's plight and takes a fatherly view of him, other narrators (an omniscient narrator and the privileged reader) denounce Jim's deviance. So, the reader is offered a polarised view of Jim - a "hero" and an "outlaw" - and as a result is left contemplating an open verdict.

Jim's identity is constructed in an interesting way. As the chief mate on the *Patna*, he is a subordinate who is taught to observe the maritime code, but he later transforms himself into a dashing leader who is, on the face of it, free to do as he wishes. His potential, or "ability in the Abstract", is tested both on the *Patna* (within the ranks) and in Patusan (in command). Jim emerges as a rebel reacting to Western values: he breaks with a provincial English culture represented by a parsonage which is an "abode of piety and peace"; shows contempt for the court which tries to punish him for a violation of the maritime code; dismisses an audience at the court as "fools". Earlier, when the crew of the *Patna* deride Jim as a "coward," a "lunatic," and an "idiot" because his mind is suspended between thinking and doing, Jim fights back by dismissing them as "mean mongrels". His emotional distance from his fellow seamen is visible: "he rubbed shoulders with them, but they could not touch him; he shared the air they breathed, but he was different" (25). As Martin Ray contends, "his [Jim's] denial of his surname is a rejection, a necessary forgetting, of his family and of European culture and all its codes."\(^5\) Jim's disillusionment with Western values is clearly delineated and

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emerges as one of the important features of the text; yet, as I have argued, in moments of crisis his first impulse urges him towards fellow Europeans.

Jim's shadow, Gentleman Brown, also abandons home and family. He is the son of a baronette who fails to live up to noblesse oblige: he runs off with the wife of an English missionary he abducted and betrays his fellow Englishman, Jim, who has guaranteed him a safe passage out of Patusan. Contrary to his title "Gentleman", he is an outlaw whose mind is driven by moral anarchy. Marlow denounces Brown as "a blind accomplice to the Dark Powers". His deep frustration at his unsuccessful expeditions finds its expression in a form of revenge on the world:

Brown was a latter-day buccaneer, sorry enough, like his more celebrated prototypes; but what distinguished him from his contemporary brother ruffians, ... was the arrogant temper of his misdeeds and a vehement scorn for mankind at large and for his victims in particular (265).

Interestingly, Brown is not remorseful, but rather triumphant, about "an act of cold blooded ferocity". On the surface level, Brown's malevolence, like Kurtz's atrocity, is opposed to Jim's benevolence, but on a deeper level, as Bruce Henricksen rightly observes, "Jim and Brown are two sides of the same historical phenomenon, the white man's impact on other races and cultures; something of this parodic kinship is suggested in their respective 'titles,' Lord and Gentleman". 6 Inevitably both titles, bestowed on such characters, ironise the qualities they supposedly stand for in the culture of Conrad's day. Brown challenges Jim by arguing that there is a thin screen between his failed life and Jim's successful one; that "we are all equal before death" (287):

And there ran through the tough talk a vein of subtle reference to their common blood, an assumption of common experience; a sickening suggestion of common guilt, of secret knowledge that was like a bond of their minds and of their hearts (291).

As Robert Hampson observes, Brown is "the catalyst whose presence precipitates Jim's unresolved conflicts". 7 Brown also serves as a mirror in which Jim finds reflected his

stigmatised past. Both Englishmen, whilst taking different approaches, stand outside the society which raised them. Their extremism can be seen as a disavowal of Victorian Temperance.

As a rebel within society, Jim confronts his trial and refuses to speak. His defiance in the courtroom reveals a disjuncture between the public verdict which denounces his "disgraceful" behaviour and the private faith (fantasy?) which vindicates his "self-righteous" behaviour. Here, his silence does not mean that he is abjectly deferring to a dominant ideology. Rather his silence is a subversive one which carries contempt for the magistrates' court which demands only facts and evidence. Predictably, he chooses to be the maker of his own laws out of conviction that an organised society, to borrow Terry Eagleton's words, "curtails subversive individualism and the anarchic imagination". Otto Bahlmann rightly compares Jim's romantic rebellion to a "Camusian revolt against nihilism": "In an existential world, we remember, the individual is the sole arbiter of value, arrived at through anguished deliberation prompted by the inner judge of conscience". Jim's revolt is also very evocative of Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov who initially believed that "criminals" are the superior ones having the right to commit breaches of morality. A similar reaction to society is discernible in other of Conrad's characters. As we shall see, in The Secret Agent Stevie's willingness to carry the bomb mirrors his radical protest at the law and order which only protects the rich; in Under Western Eyes Victor Haldin's bold act of bomb-throwing reflects his hatred of the autocratic Russian regime.

The notion that existing rules and practices are fundamentally flawed is expressed in The Secret Agent where the police actually commit a miscarriage of justice. Conrad calls into question the standards of conduct of the police, the crew of the Patna, and the jury at the court, focusing on, to borrow Foucault's words, "the complicity of knowledge and power" in dealing with the "criminals". It is symbolic that an effective punishment is not implemented by a society which has already lost its moral authority; Big Brierly drowns himself with his dawning realisation that his life-long dedication to a

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flawed legal system has been a sham commitment. It is important to recall these points when looking at how Marlow conducts an unofficial Inquiry about Jim. Marlow defends Jim, saying "its [the public inquiry's] object is not the fundamental why, but the superficial how" (48). Even Marlow then, on the face of it the representative of rational behaviour in this work, sympathises with Jim who has "the doubt of the sovereign power enthroned in a fixed standard of conduct" (44) and shows signs of condoning Jim's rebellion against Western values. Is this some sort of result of Marlow's experiences in *Heart of Darkness*? A tempting question, but unanswerable.

And there is also the unresolved issue of whether Jim is an imperialist or not. Whilst Jim's anti-social behaviour affirms his solid status as a rebel who challenges a Western cultural matrix, his idealism smacks of white paternalism. Like Kurtz, Jim breaks with Imperialism's ideological tenets, while he functions as a white imperialist. In the opening paragraph of *Lord Jim* an omniscient narrator describes Jim as "a charging bull" (9) which epitomises Jim's single-mindedness; Marlow keeps reminding us that Jim is "a stalwart figure in white apparel" (174) or "one of us". Indeed, Marlow makes a clear racial assessment of the young man, which proves to be inadequate in explaining Jim's divided loyalty. Furthermore, Marlow's approval of Jim's racial prestige and heroic performance is an area of critical debate. Robert Ducharme argues that *Lord Jim* "casts a nostalgic glance at the world of aristocratic heroism and religious belief".10 I cannot endorse this view which only reflects Marlow's position rather than Conrad's text overall. Terry Eagleton speaks of Conrad's ambivalence: "Conrad neither believes in the cultural superiority of the colonialist nations, nor rejects imperialism outright".11 This line of argument may be true, but it does not do full justice to Conrad's arguably ironic view of Jim and Marlow. Bruce Henricksen puts forward a more sophisticated argument, focusing on Marlow's vacillating attitude: "In telling the 'legend' of Jim in Patusan, Marlow tries to recover something of the early days of imperial expansion, but his skepticism concerning the legend is also a skepticism about

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imperialist ideology itself. 

And again, I must protest that Marlow cannot be interpreted conveniently as Conrad's spokesman, even if he does share some of Conrad's known views; his ambivalence is too finely integrated into the text, running as it does in counterpoint to Jim's. I would argue that the text exposes both the merits and limits of Marlow's "Western perspective".

Unlike Marlow who maintains racial distinctions, Jim breaks the rigid Victorian polarity of "one of us" and "one of them". Nonetheless, his loyalty to the natives remains problematic: "he seemed to love the land [Patusan] and the people with a sort of fierce egoism, with a contemptuous tenderness" (189). Jim's sympathetic approach to Brown also highlights his divided loyalty which precipitates his downfall. Jim, a less haunting but ultimately equally tragic figure as Kurtz, vacillates between "us" and "them" without being firmly rooted in either side.

Jim's blurring of distinctions invites condemnation from both sides, yet entices sympathy, too. At an early stage, on the training ship, Jim, then a naval cadet, fails to jump to the rescue; on the *Patna*, Jim, now the chief mate, jumps away from the threatened passengers into a life-boat. In handling Brown, Jim shows an imaginative response which in practice does not work out as he expected, but there is an unarticulated rationale behind what he does (given his illusion that Brown's nickname of "Gentleman" means something). At the moment of crisis, rather than fight back, he undertakes to negotiate with Brown to avoid disaster. Again, in handling the *Patna* crisis, Jim suffers from a discord between his imaginative faculties and his paralysed action. In the emergency he hesitates to take decisive action to avoid causing total panic among the sleeping pilgrims and he is held by someone who pleads for a water bottle. Although such unexpressed niceties fail to impress the court, the fact that Jim wrestles with the tension between thinking and doing invites a certain sympathy.

Nonetheless, it is important not to overlook Jim's limitations. Robert Hampson argues that "fantasising becomes the dominant mode of being and prevents effective intervention in the real world". As Marlow comments in the end of the novel: "he goes

12 Bruce Henricksen, "Lord Jim and the Pragmatics of Narrative," 100.
away from a living woman to celebrate his pitiless wedding with a shadowy ideal of conduct" (313). Here, Marlow is blinded because he is nostalgic about the masculine code of "lost honour" pursued by Jim. His invention of Kurtz's and Jim's "greatness" fails to take account of the contradictory side of their idealism. Jim's unchecked idealism echoes Kurtz's lack of restraint. In fact, Jim's romantic heroism is hard to distinguish from defeat. Jacques Berthould views Jim as "a mixed version of the hero and the clown" and calls the novel "a sort of black comedy". In addition, Martin Ray speaks of Jim's ambivalence, arguing that the title Lord Jim embodies opposite ideas: aristocratic and plebeian; distinguished and commonplace; elevated and down-to-earth; butterfly and beetle. In the end, his fascination lies in the fact that he, like Kurtz, is so much harder to comprehend than Almayer or Willems while having a certain affinity with both.

Another critical controversy centres around the novel's binary structure. Some critics emphasise deep division, others look at subtle cohesion:

Since the second part does not have a close thematic and structural relation to the first, the impressive though flawed book breaks into two and degenerates into a romantic adventure story.  

Far from being in any way weak, the division into two settings and the multiple symmetries determine the reader's response in ways which are both strong and exquisitely skilful.

I wish to align myself with those who argue that the narrative has structural "symmetry" because of precisely the same qualities that have led others to insist on structural "division". Many critics have dismissed Lord Jim as a deeply flawed novel by singling out the Patusan episode where Conrad deals with another race (the Malays), land (a remote part of the world which is cut off from civilisation), and language (a figurative...
language which is opposed to the analytical language used in the *Patna* episode) - all would be alien to Conrad’s white audience. I would suggest that such accusations reveal a narrow view of the "Other". The reasons for defending the structuring of the narrative are manifold. As we can see, Jim’s idealism is tested both on the *Patna* and in Patusan in quite different ways, hinging around two extremes of constraint and release. His success in Patusan accelerates the pace of the narrative which was held back by his hesitation in the *Patna* episode. Whereas in the first part Jim is largely passive in response, in the second part he is extremely active. Conrad sets up a certain paradox in both Jim’s silent passivity and his action: his silence in the first part reflects the degree of his rebellion and his later activity reflects the degree of his romantic fantasies.

There is also the "tripartite division of the novel's narrative"\(^{18}\) which creates interpretative gaps amongst three different narrators - Marlow, the privileged "reader," and an omniscient narrator. Critics and readers alike need to pay close attention to an area of tension created by different views of Jim. Martin Ray regards the novel as "a damaged mosaic with blank areas"\(^{19}\) and Hillis Miller as "a complex design of interrelated minds".\(^{20}\) To begin with, an omniscient narrator (chapters 1-4) maintains an ironic detachment from Jim, a fallen hero:

> Afterwards, when his keen perception of the Intolerable drove him away for good from seaports and white men, even into the virgin forest, the Malays of the jungle village, where he had elected to conceal his deplorable faculty, added a word to the monosyllable of his incognito. They called him Tuan Jim: as one might say - Lord Jim (10).

It is useful to recognise the limits of an omniscient narrator who translates "Tuan" as "Lord". Christopher GoGwilt argues that the Malay "Tuan" is used as rather "a polite form of respect than a grand title to political rule".\(^{21}\) So the "omniscient" narrator is not infallible; he fails to grasp cultural differences. Then, Marlow begins to address his version of the story to a group of English "gentlemen" (Chapters 5-35) gathered at Charley’s. Marlow’s listeners are apparently indifferent to Marlow’s tale (with the

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exception of the privileged man who shows an interest). Here, it is worth noting that Conrad adopts a very similar mode of narration to that in *Heart of Darkness* where Marlow addresses his tale to a group of representatives of a capitalist society who are apparently sleeping (with the exception of a frame narrator). But unlike Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* who spins a tale throughout, Marlow in *Lord Jim* switches his oral narration into a written narration (Chapters 36-45) which contains the story of Jim's dramatic climdbdown and which is addressed to the privileged man, one of the former listeners, who, while cynical about British values, takes a derogatory view of the "Other":

...I don't suppose you've forgotten," went on the letter. "You alone have showed an interest in him [Jim] that survived the telling of his story, though I remember well you would not admit he had mastered his fate. You prophesied for him the disaster of weariness and of disgust with acquired honour, with the self-appointed task, with the love sprung from pity and youth. You had said you knew so well "that kind of thing," its illusory satisfaction, its unavoidable deception. You said also - I call to mind - that "giving your life up to them" (them meaning all of mankind with skins brown, yellow, or black in colour) "was like selling your soul to a brute." You contended that "that kind of thing" was only endurable and enduring when based on a firm conviction in the truth of ideas racially our own, in whose name are established the order, the morality of an ethical progress. "We want its strength at our backs," you had said. "We want a belief in its necessity and its justice, to make a worthy and conscious sacrifice of our lives. Without it the sacrifice is only forgetfulness, the way of offering is no better than the way to perdition." In other words, Possibly! You ought to know - be it said without malice - you who have rushed into one or two places single-handed and came out cleverly, without singeing your wings. The point, however, is that of all mankind Jim had no dealings but with himself, and the question is whether at the last he had not confessed to a faith mightier than the laws of order and progress (254-5).

The passage quoted above sounds very much like a diagnosis of Kurtz who cries: "exterminate all the brutes!" (87). Both he and Marlow's addressee reveal their racial bias as white imperialists. The dogmatic view advocated by the privileged "reader" echoes the nihilistic view of Kurtz who abandons the entire project of educating and civilising the "Other".

By juxtaposing the narrowly-defined collective values advocated by the privileged "reader" (ultimately representing "little Englandism") with the individual values pursued by Jim, Marlow, in some ways an apologist for colonialism, creates tensions and appears to embrace ideological openness. Interestingly, like *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim* is not obviously addressed to a wide audience partly because of Marlow's invention of Jim's "greatness". An air of arrogance is partly suggested by the position held by the privileged "reader" (he lives in the roof-top room facing the sea and
he is likened to a "lighthouse keeper above the sea") and by Jim (who is pictured as a military strategist looking down on the terrain from mountain-top hills or a self-righteous rebel looking down on an audience packed in the courtroom from the witness box). But importantly, unlike Jim who becomes a perpetual outsider, the privileged "reader" is firmly located in the tradition of European civilisation represented by Church bell and tower clock. Being a white supremacist, the privileged man denounces strongly Jim's private faith which takes him into unknown territory. Nonetheless, the privileged reader is not privileged to have the last word on Jim's enigma.

And then there is the omniscient narrator who takes a stern moralistic view of Jim. The fact that such narrators (in Heart of Darkness as well as in the Malay novels) are not given individualised names may well suggest that they are more or less guided by the collective values of their own culture(s). But given the patchwork of narrative voices in Lord Jim, any single view fails to achieve authority. Indeed, Bruce Henricksen speaks about a collapse of a single authentic narrative voice:

"Lord Jim, while unified by the centrality of Marlow's voice - but a voice plagued with doubts and uncertainties - anticipates a postmodern dispersal into perpetually decentered textuality; it can be read as a critique of singular metanarratives that would totalize and finalize their objects."

Nonetheless, despite the limits of his "Western eye", the narratorial skills of Conrad's Marlow cannot be easily dismissed. Marlow has to be given credit for his editing and distilling of many different views. As Goonetilleke argues, "Jim's situation is presented from a diversity of perspectives and subject to a variety of judgments, all of which are more or less qualified, with no overall or final verdict being reached or being possible." A similar role is played by the teacher of languages in Under Western Eyes and Marlow in Heart of Darkness - both are Englishmen whose perspectives are guided by empiricism. However, Marlow's English perspective, penetrating as it may be, inevitably inspires less confidence when dealing with such alien subjects as Africa and the East. Like the Ancient Mariner, Marlow, as in Heart of Darkness, narrates a tale

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22 Bruce Henricksen, "Lord Jim and the Pragmatics of Narrative," 86.
imbued with follies as well as insights. Being aware of the limitations of any narrator, Marlow in *Lord Jim* says: "the last word is not said - probably shall never be said" (171). So, as Hillis Miller points out, Marlow enacts a characteristic "weaving movement of advance and retreat [which] constitutes and sustains the meaning of the text".24

Thus, it is futile to attempt to pin down at what points Marlow's narration is trustworthy or not. As regards the *Patna* episode, Marlow's psychological penetration is arresting (he is after all a sea captain himself), but in the Patusan episode where he moves into territory literally and figuratively alien to him, Marlow's empirical consciousness is rather limiting. He regards Jim as a "specimen" to be precisely analysed and he decides to consult Stein, the entomologist, about Jim. Initially, by adopting such European criteria as "one of us" and "the code of seamanship," Captain Marlow denounces Jim's violation of the maritime code and conversion into "one of them". Then, despite great differences in age, temperament, and outlook, Marlow is gradually drawn to Jim and finally takes a generous view of him. As *Lord Jim* advances, "Jim becomes Marlow's protégé rather than the object of his dispassionate investigation".25 Like a secret agent, Marlow plays an intriguing double role; this moral grey area is important in the construction of the central enigma.

Alongside such follies, there is Marlow's humanity, too. When Jim desperately needs "an ally, a helper, an accomplice" (266), Marlow is responsive whilst wishing to dispose of him. The empiricist Marlow (who at this point has distinct echoes of Lingard) distances himself from the romanticist Jim, while simultaneously forming an emotional bond which enables Jim to sustain his dismal existence. Jakob Lothe argues that "Friendship can serve as a means of withstanding the constant threat of moral and existential isolation".26 When he first sees the accused Jim in the court-room, Marlow is very impressed by Jim's silent defiance. Interestingly, Marlow resorts to the method of eye contact with Jim, which may suggest that both of them are aware of the inadequacy of language, both oral and written. In Conrad's works overall, subversive silence is

used as a more powerful weapon than eloquent articulation. Verloc and Kurtz are eloquent orators, but their talents for articulation are misused for inventing lies. By contrast, despite his stammering, Stevie in *The Secret Agent* is able to envisage a valid vision of the world. Nonetheless, silence can become a destructive force, too, because it isolates one from a community.

5

Steve Ressler draws attention to "the danger of trusting Marlow as a reliable guide to Conrad's vision". This valid claim can also be applied to Stein, a wealthy German merchant and learned philosopher displaced in the Malay jungle. He appears precisely in the middle part of the narrative and provides a structural link. Critics have predominantly viewed Stein in a positive light: as "a trustworthy commentator", or a "mentor", "cultivated individualist", "a counsellor" according to Marlow. However, there is a negative side of him, too. As his German name Stein suggests, his life is sterile: he is a political exile who has finally settled in the Malay jungle where he, like a Buddha (an image associated with Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*), practises solitary meditation; he is also an entomologist who collects specimens of butterflies and beetles which, despite their beauty, are dead. Stein's resignation stems from the end of his visionary quest. His futility was prefigured more tragically in Kurtz's pessimistic outcry, while at the very end of *The Secret Agent*, the Professor will also be overwhelmed by a sense of futility as he walks alone among the crowds. The doomed visions embraced by these characters are a form of idealistic defeat (regardless of the ethical value of their defeated ideals); the realisation of their fruitless commitment to a futile cause is the very source of nihilism.

Despite his life style of self-imposed exile and his ability to get on with the Malay natives, Stein remains an outsider, an imperialist who owes his living to the trading posts he keeps going in the most remote places, but bequeathes his entire

collection of specimens to a museum in his small hometown in Germany. As an agent of commercial imperialism, Stein tries to maintain and preserve the commercial advantages of the whites in the region. He has inherited a fortune from a Scotsman and he will hand over his wealth to his heir-apparent, Jim, who is a European like him. Furthermore, his natural-scientific classification of specimens, like Marlow’s belief in racial distinctions, suggests that his mind is basically guided by a Western mode of thought in the East, even though he asserts faith in "the mighty Kosmos in perfect equilibrium". So, in the light of his contradictory image, there is an obvious danger in accepting Stein’s authority uncritically.

Stein then is a yet another "living paradox" whose elusive identity baffles the reader as well as Marlow. Stein’s German romanticism, like Russian mysticism, is alien to an English narrator of Conrad’s era. As a clash of two different philosophical traditions suggests, there are difficulties for Marlow when it comes to decoding Stein’s elusive remarks about Jim, such as “he is romantic”: does he speak as a fellow European or as a disciple of a specifically German romanticism? Then again, he encourages Jim to pursue his romantic dream out of his belief that only dreams will sustain a dismal existence: "In the destructive element immerse!... To follow the dream, and again to follow the dream - and so - ewig - usque ad finem..." (164). Yet he appears uncertain of his asserted belief, as Marlow says: "the whisper of his conviction seemed to open before me a vast and uncertain expanse" (164). Marlow’s puzzlement stems from the very complex nature of Stein’s philosophical abstractions. What is more, on a pragmatic level Stein’s light-hearted advice leads Jim not to redemption but to the path of self-destruction; and ironically, the pistol that Stein gave to Doramin as a token of friendship actually kills his protégé, Jim.

The erosion of Stein’s authority is expressed by the melancholic mood surrounding his house. Like Kurtz, Stein can neither avoid nor transcend the cruel reality of death. Marlow gradually switches his initial respect into disregard for Stein and records his negative impressions:

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Only one corner in which stood his writing-desk, was strongly lighted by a shaded reading-lamp, and the rest of the spacious apartment melted into shapeless gloom like a cavern. Narrow shelves filled with dark boxes of uniform shape and colour ran round the walls, not from floor to ceiling, but in a sombre belt four feet broad. Catacombs of beetles. (156).

Later on, Marlow revisits him and records a similar impression:

You know Stein's big house and the two immense reception-rooms, uninhabited and uninhabitable, clean, full of solitude and of shining things that look as if never beheld by the eye of man? They are cool on the hottest days, and you enter them as you would a scrubbed cave underground... I was chilled as if these vast apartments had been the cold abode of despair (261).

Significantly, the novel ends with a brief mention of Stein's plight as he awaits death:

Stein has aged greatly of late. He feels it himself, and says often that he is "preparing to leave all this; preparing to leave..." while he waves his hand sadly at his butterflies (313).

The three passages quoted above chart the gradual erosion of Stein as an active agent. The dominant image of death will be echoed in the Intended's sitting room with its sterile atmosphere and in Verloc's doomed domestic interior.

In conclusion, I believe that these four novels demonstrate how Conrad's strength lies in the strategies he uses to problematise accepted icons of his day in a wide range of areas. The construction of the outsider figures in these novels lies at the core of these strategies, as these characters demonstrate the effects of the dominant culture on those who do not conform with its expectations. Furthermore, narrators play an increasingly important part in interrogations of the cultural context of Conrad's own day until, in Lord Jim, none of the narrators is given a dominant voice; a univocal interpretation of the text is made impossible. And there is a further development for, as I have shown, Lord Jim does not exclusively deal with a fixed, enclosed space like a single trading post, but takes in both England and uncharted territories of the East and so renders more immediate the clash of different worlds.
In these novels, Conrad charts the sea and the trading posts associated with it as arenas where self-interest serves as a guiding principle among merchants of diverse nationalities. *Lord Jim*, like *Heart of Darkness*, contains this theme but also moves beyond it, since Jim subordinates commercialism to romantic idealism. And it is in this development that we can see how *Heart of Darkness* paves the way for *Lord Jim*. As Tony Tanner rightly observes, "the realists have no ideals - thus their lives are ugly. But the idealist has no grip on reality: he cannot live properly at all".30 Jacques Berthould also argues that "one of the most striking insights of *Lord Jim* is the recognition that heroic reverie is not essentially different from blind panic".31 This view not only serves as a reminder of the danger of Marlow's emotional attachment to a fallen hero, but testifies to Conrad's preference for tales about enigmas which problematise accepted codes of values.

However, it would be misleading to assume that Conrad is concerned to champion the marginalised over the dominant group. A usurpation of power is far from being his vision; instead his novels concentrate on the riddles posed by diversity, plurality, ambivalence, and subtlety. By portraying Kurtz and Jim for the most part ambivalently, Conrad not only reflects a crisis in the Western cultural matrix but achieves fresh psychological and artistic subtleties.

THE OUTSIDER WITHIN SOCIETY: A SUBVERSION OF THE CENTRALISING POWER

The two last works by Conrad which I am going to examine are both centred in Europe: *The Secret Agent* (1907) and *Under Western Eyes* (1911). As we have already seen, the quality of cultural dislocation lies at the heart of Conrad's works, he himself being a Polish émigré, writing in English, speaking French in the final years of European colonialism, and having experienced the grim reality of the Czarist Russian Empire which had absorbed Poland during his own lifetime. Interestingly, Conrad never wrote about his native Poland and its people, but in *The Secret Agent*, set in England, and in *Under Western Eyes*, exploring Russian society at home and abroad, he brings elements of subversion right inside the European citadels of imperial powers; his outsiders do not just share the same nationality as those whom they oppose, they operate from within. In these works, he challenges and unmasks certain aspects of authority already explored in earlier works but now brought closer to home: the potent forces of capitalism and corruption in England together with political tyranny and revolution within Russian society. Conrad has inevitably attracted the labels of "bloody foreigner" ridiculing English society, not to mention "Polish Russophobic." But these epithets fail to do justice to the artistic metamorphosis which typifies his texts where he transforms his personal loathing of Russia, the oppressor of Poland, into a subtle investigation of a moral dilemma, and avoids overt criticism of England, his adopted country, by dwelling on unsavoury aspects of its society which the Establishment could not possibly condone. As always, he adopts a remarkably even-handed approach.

We have already seen in earlier works how Conrad's interest in problematising authority extends to a wide range of spheres, such as political oppression, economic exploitation, cultural hegemony, dogmatic creeds, a unitary language, and a single

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authorial voice. It is tempting to see his creative impulse as triggered by his early experience of political tyranny; subsequently he hates, to borrow Bakhtin's words, "verbal and ideological unification and centralization."2 As has already become clear, most of Conrad's complex texts raise questions on how to read them, and one viable way is to track down his scepticism which, in his letter to John Galsworthy dated 11 November 1901, he describes as "the tonic of minds, the tonic of life, the agent of truth - the way of art and salvation."3

Nonetheless, there is a perennial argument as to whether Conrad's deracination is a handicap or an advantage. For instance, Raymond Williams takes a hostile view of Conrad's dabbling with societies other than his own, arguing that Conrad is "making gestures" in looking at English society in The Secret Agent and Russian society in Under Western Eyes.4 By contrast, Terry Eagleton takes a positive view, arguing that Conrad was able to "survey it [English society] from a broader perspective."5 Williams denounces the absence of a whole experience anchored in one's roots, while Eagleton argues for the presence of a fresh perspective taken by an outsider. I shall be arguing that Conrad does have a whole experience anchored in his roots, which is a full understanding of what it means both to experience imperialist oppression and later to be an outsider, and that it is this which gives his "fresh perspective" such power to provoke and unsettle.

Indeed, both The Secret Agent and Under Western Eyes were ill received in England by critics and public alike; they sold badly. The most likely reason behind this poor critical reception was that English insularity prevented the audience from appreciating the critique of European institutions (for instance, imperial rule in Russia, police corruption in England) embedded in both works. So there is a good

case for an approach which concentrates on the outsiders in these novels and gives an outsider reading, thus combatting parochialism.

Moreover, as when dealing with earlier texts, I shall be arguing against a tendency to divorce politics from artistic concerns. F.R. Leavis, for example, called *The Secret Agent* "a classic and a masterpiece" (in terms of the deployment of ironies) and *Under Western Eyes* "a very distinguished work" (in terms of the handling of multiple narrative points of view)\(^6\), but he does not explore the implications of the subject matter in any depth. This undesirable separation poses more problems than it answers because an important area of the socio-political dimension has gone largely unexamined. As I shall demonstrate, in terms of the democratic impulse of decentralisation, both politics (the liberation of the oppressed from the tyranny) and artistic presentation (a respect for the reader's democratic participation in constructing the meaning of the text) are mutually dependent and internally related.

2

In *The Secret Agent* Conrad examines the political, economic and moral condition behind the façades of such smug assumptions in English society as respectability, liberty and normality. For example, Verloc's decent image of a respectable gentleman directly contradicts his duplicitous image as a double agent; the imported creed of anarchism challenges and undermines English conservatism; and the corrupt police fail to stand firm against the "outlaws." Conrad explores a dark side of London, the metropolis at the heart of British Empire, focusing on lazy bourgeoisie, fanatical anarchists and corrupt police. Indeed, London is pictured as a "monstrous town" where capitalists exploit the proletariat, and the claustrophobia often found on board Conrad's ships in crisis is transported to this metropolitan novel as it deals with such issues as social inequality and moral corruption; expressing implicitly moral outrage at an inimical social system.

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Adolf Verloc, the principal among a group of outsiders of this novel, is an intriguing character whose multiple identities defy uniformity: he is a "natural-born British subject" (59) with "traces of French descent" (47). Since he links the domestic (his business of running a pornography shop) with the public (his other business of travelling to the Continent as a delegate for an international conference on anarchism), he is from the outset a contradictory figure. Whilst he struggles to remain a "commonplace, conventional, domesticated petit bourgeois," he wishes also to remain a "confessed anarchist." Governed by self-interest, he tries to maintain the status quo by choosing to remain at once a largely passive anarchist who is paid by his "bullying brute" and a police informer in exchange for protection. Thus, behind the façade of respectability, he hides his hypocrisy which is evident in his true identities as discredited spy as well as deceitful husband. He offers a bleak view of the outsider, playing the system, and yet his playing merely reflects the contradictions of the society he inhabits: pornography condemned as criminal, yet tolerated (at a price) behind a veneer of moral probity and respectability, a kind of tolerated subversion behind the veneer of incorruptible conservatism. As Martin Seymour-Smith argues, The Secret Agent is "a savage and wounding account of English society." Indeed, there is a deliberate challenge to the convention of so-called "decency" on the home front.

I would argue that Conrad brings to bear his experience not only of England but of societies other than English, and creates, as in earlier works, a so-called "contact zone" where diametrically opposed ideas collide with each other. Verloc mediates between two sides, yet is eventually caught in the middle and faces catastrophic consequences; Winnie represents at once enslavement to an idea of protection within the household and liberation from it into ultimate disaster. This important notion of paradox is again discernible in Conrad's handling of settings.

London, which was conventionally presented at the time as the stronghold of law and order, is revealed as an enclave for political activists who defy the law; the back-parlour of Verloc's house becomes a gathering place for the anarchists. The same principle is applied to the use of settings in Under Western Eyes: Geneva, which was by tradition a symbol of democratic institutions, is shown as a nest for the exiled revolutionaries. And above all, as with the novels already discussed, the complexity which characterises Conrad's texts can be read as a corollary to his own experience of "in-betweenness".

Moreover, as in the earlier novels, I would argue that Conrad remains even-handed. A close reading of these two novels shows that no one group of characters can be taken on trust. For instance, if the existence of the anarchists in the London of The Secret Agent exposes the fragility of respectable society, within their own group these same anarchists are exposed as a poor lot. Conrad mocks the way in which their creed becomes a fiasco in practice partly because they are completely taken over by sentimentality and self-deception. For example, Michaelis, an innocent victim of a miscarriage of justice, depends upon an aristocratic patroness who endorses his sentimental Utopianism (a retreat into the forest), yet does not wish to see her existing upper-class status subverted; or again, as his nickname "the Doctor" suggests, Ossipon envisages a scientific millennium, yet exploits Winnie's love and money; while, as his nick name "the little man" suggests, for all his dogma the defiant Professor of terrorism achieves little, although he envisages a survival of the fittest:

And the incorruptible Professor walked, too, averting his eyes from the odious multitude of mankind. He had no future. He disdained it. He was a force. His thoughts caressed the images of ruin and destruction. He walked frail, insignificant, shabby, miserable - and terrible in the simplicity of his idea calling madness and despair to the regeneration of the world. Nobody looked at him. He passed on unsuspected and deadly, like a pest in the street full of men (269).

The irony here is devastating; to be incorruptible the Professor must see himself as the ultimate outsider, ignoring "the multitude of mankind" which should be his concern. Through a portrayal of such tragically contemptible characters, Conrad shows us the discrepancy between the claims and practice of the anarchists, mirroring...
as it does the discrepancy between the claims and practice of the society these anarchists aim to destroy.

In contrast with the anarchists, who have contracted the so-called “disease perversity,” the simple-minded Stevie is able to utter a sound moral judgement about the cruel, harsh world around him. He sympathises with the maimed horse driven by a cab-driver, stammering: "shame," "bad world for poor people," and "poor brute." Certainly it would be wrong to dismiss Stevie as an “idiot” because he is able to formulate his own vision of a future without exploitation and oppression. Indeed, he is not afraid to speak truth and stand up for justice, as suggested by his willingness to implement direct action. However, he is naive enough not to suspect Verloc’s motivation. When the selfish Verloc is pressurized by his paymaster to carry out direct action, he sees himself as having no choice but to persuade Stevie to carry a bomb which accidently blows him to pieces during a futile effort to blast Greenwich Observatory. So Conrad captures and clashes together Verloc’s hypocrisy, Winnie’s maternally aroused savagery, the anarchists’ failure to match theory and practice, and Stevie’s naivete and integrity - such are the symptoms of a sick society which cast doubt on the notion of progress.

The plot to blast the Observatory is seen as attempted subversion of an artificially-created order which controls daily existence. In the capitalist society, as George Woodcock argues, “the clock represents an element of mechanical tyranny in the lives of modern men.”\(^\text{10}\) Besides, the invention of standard time helps to assert the supremacy of the British Empire. So, unsurprisingly, the Observatory becomes the prime target for the anarchists who aim to disrupt the centralising power of clocktime. Meanwhile, on a personal level, Stevie’s tragic death has been prefigured in another symbolic incident: he lit firecrackers in a stairwell in the building as a protest against tales of injustice and oppression. Behind his capacity for extreme action rather than reasoning power, is Stevie’s legitimate anger at a world which fails to eradicate social injustice, a sense of helplessness where his own society provokes in Stevie a sense of

alienation, of being an outsider. His inability to articulate is eloquently symbolic of the unheard underprivileged, and the danger of their being lured into violent protest. And indeed anarchism, however crudely put into practice, can pose a serious threat to any society which clings to the status quo. But Conrad does not choose to make a clearly defined (and arguably simplistic) political point; instead he creates a clash between conservative and terrorist forces (which is likened to a game of cat-and-mouse) to show the deficiencies of both creeds: the anarchists' commitment is corrupt just as the police are. Conrad casts a satirical eye over the Metropolitan police of his day, the protectors of law and order within the democratic state, for their self-interest, misconduct, and corruption. Chief Inspector Heat has secured his promotion by depending upon his informer, Verloc. In his inquiry into Stevie's death, Heat questions Michaelis, an innocent ex-convict, to shield the guilty Verloc. Moreover, Heat takes a Marxist view that "thieving is not sheer absurdity. It is a form of social industry." In the light of this view, as Malcolm Bradbury observes, he is "a man on a moral tightrope."

The Assistant Commissioner, Heat's superior, intervenes to protect Michaelis not because he is innocent but because his wife has a friendship with Michaelis's patroness. At the top of this bureaucratic organisation, there is the Home secretary (whose epithet is ironically "The Great Personage") who is an embodiment of bourgeois laziness. Here, we need to distinguish laziness from the tolerance which is a key strength in a democratic society. Meanwhile, behind the police's lax attitude to the anarchists, there is even greater dereliction since there is a knowing compromise of security, not a tolerant respect for individual liberty. So, the potential for miscarriages of justice suggests that there is a moral black hole within this democratic society.

Some of the characters are able to discern not their own deficiencies but those of both anarchists and police. For example, the Professor offers a relentless critique of both groups: "the terrorist and the policeman both come from the same basket. Revolution, legality - counter moves in the same game; forms of idleness at bottom..."

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identical” (94). This cynical character’s perception is convincing, but his extreme method of self-destructive terrorism poses a serious danger, too, because it rules out all humanity. Another example of clear-sightedness is Winnie, who observes "they [the police] are there so that them as have nothing shouldn’t take anything away from them who have" (170). Clearly, she voices an age-old anger at a world where wealth is not distributed, but protected. By contrast, the simple-minded Stevie takes a more conventional but, as it turns out, naive view that the police are "a sort of benevolent institution for the suppression of evil" (169). Yet even the Assistant Commissioner is plagued by self-doubt over his police job. Indeed, he is seen interestingly as an outsider within society because he worked as an administrator in the colonies where he enjoyed relative freedom as unquestionably in control of his patch. This of course has its own irony in the setting of the novel’s probing of democracy, but it is lightly touched on, as back in London, he finds himself locked in a hierarchical social structure which oppresses him and he is overwhelmed by bleak pessimism:

His descent into the street was like the descent into a slimy aquarium from which the water had been run off. A murky, gloomy dampness enveloped him. The walls of the houses were wet, the mud of the roadway glistened with an effect of phosphorescence, and when he emerged into the Strand out of a narrow street by the side of Charing Cross Station the genius of the locality assimilated him. He might have been but one more of the queer foreign fish that can be seen of an evening about there flitting round the dark corners (150-1).

Since Conrad explores the fundamental falsity of both the law-abiding camp and that of the law-breakers, he neither condones nor supports any one side. I have been arguing throughout that one of Conrad’s great strengths is not only his evenhandedness but his ability to detect the “outsider” quality in those who appear at first sight integrated.

3

In The Secret Agent Conrad explores marital relationships which are reduced to a contract, or a commercial transaction, in the capitalist state. Winnie appears to sell her femininity to her husband who is her chief client in return for his material protection; the context of the shop dealing with pornography is eloquent. Her
romance with a butcher boy is never realised because she has to choose a better commodity represented by Verloc. Verloc is also hired by his boss and so subsidises the income with which he buys domestic services from Winnie. The human relationship is reduced to running a business where self-interest supercedes humanity or any meeting of minds. Indeed, communication is conducted in a business-like manner, between husband and wife, just as between the secret agent and his boss. Similarly, the Assistant Commissioner has a loveless marriage which is publicly known as the "perfect match." His promotion depends upon his wife's connection with the circle of the powerful and the wealthy. The resulting break-downs in communication engender a sense of crisis in human relationships as ostensible partners act and react in isolation.

In addition, Conrad sets his scene in an economy which not only exploits the labourers but aggravates social inequality. Verloc sees the dichotomy within the "monstrous town" between the atmosphere of "opulence and luxury" in the residential area where the foreign Embassy is located and the "gloom and squalor" in his rundown Soho shop which is situated in "a shady street behind a shop where the sun never shone" (174):

And a peculiarly London sun - against which nothing could be said except that it looked bloodshot - glorified all this by its stare. It hung at a moderate elevation above Hyde Park Corner with an air of punctual and benign vigilance. The very pavement under Mr Verloc's feet had an old-gold tinge in that diffused light, in which neither wall, nor tree, nor beast, nor man cast a shadow. Mr Verloc was going westward through a town without shadows in an atmosphere of powdered old gold (51).

[Mr Verloc] pulled up violently the venetian blind, and leaned his forehead against the cold window-pane - a fragile film of glass stretched between him and the enormity of cold, black, wet, muddy, inhospitable accumulation of bricks, slates, and stones, things in themselves unlovely and unfriendly to man (84).

Similarly, in Under Western Eyes Conrad portrays St. Petersburg as an abode of poverty and misery at odds with any romantic idea of Tzarist splendour. So in these two novels, he looks at the dark side of the imperial powers, both British and Russian, where, far from integrated communities, we are shown both causes for alienation and its effects with an air of seeing both sides which would certainly exasperate those
readers who expected (or expect) clear partisanship, preferably to their own cause. But then, I would argue, observation rather than the taking of sides is how an outsider copes with an alien society.

4

In *The Secret Agent* the omniscient narrator (not given an identity as Marlow is in *Heart of Darkness* or *Lord Jim*) constantly sustains an ironic mode of presentation for all characters - anarchists, police, and Verloc's family. The reader is invited to see London, the heart of British Empire, from the angle of the labyrinthine underworld where the anarchists operate, and within it Verloc's household which becomes centre stage. Here Conrad's own experience, as in previous novels, may well be detected in his approach to his subject, this time through the wry commentary of an anonymous observer:

Writers of uncomfortable loyalties must find their salvation in a style which remains uncommitted by saying two things at once: a discourse which simultaneously castigates and approves, retains and rejects; which holds before the reader's mind mutually contradictory points of view.\(^\text{12}\)

Indeed, as John Batchelor argues, "the ironic technique of *The Secret Agent* holds the reader at a distance from the material,"\(^\text{13}\) as if the reader too is being manipulated into adopting outsider status, not fully in command of all the facts; and this, given that this is a novel about England, must have been a shock for the first readers of Conrad's text.

Conrad's words are crowded with ironies. One of the results is to defamiliarize and regenerate language devalued by its use in the everyday running of society. In my view, Conrad's constant worrying at language has an affinity with Bakhtin's assertion that language is an ideological tool:

We are taking language not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a world view, even as a concrete opinion, insuring a maximum of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life. Thus a unitary language gives


expression to forces working toward concrete verbal and ideological unification and centralization, which develop in vital connection with the processes of sociopolitical and cultural centralization.  

Indeed, behind Conrad's suspicion about language, as I have already argued, we can detect an impulse to subvert the centralized power of language. Conrad explores the function of language itself, its capacity to falsify, and refuses to accept it at face value. Since both Verloc and Razumov invent lies and fabricate identities, the reader, unlike the many characters within the work who are locked in a web of self-deception, is compelled to distance himself from the characters. As we have already seen, Conrad's works are full of those who tell lies and of those who believe in lies. Indeed, when "there is the radical disjunction between signifier and signified," communication becomes problematic and certain dimensions of thought are left unexpressed. Silence, as was admitted in Heart of Darkness, is not a viable alternative because it completely denies communication, leading inevitably to isolation, yet as Marlow saw it is a corrective to be set against either empty rhetoric or forced dialogue.

Thus, the reader is both estranged from many of The Secret Agent's characters and encouraged to probe their communication or lack of it for meanings which are not immediately obvious. Paul Armstrong argues that reading The Secret Agent is "a bewildering and provocative experience." In my view, confusions over the meaning of the text are intensified when the reader accepts the characters' utterances and claims at face value. Edward Said rightly argues that "Every text that Conrad wrote, whether formally, aesthetically, or thematically, presents itself as unfinished and still in the making." Indeed, since there is no last word in Conrad's works, the reader must remains vigilant. Both Conrad's suspicious treatment of language and ironic mode of presentation of his characters mirror his deliberate

subversion of so-called normative use of rhetorics and language, revealing ways in which outsider status can be generated through failures within communities to develop a mutually effective level of communication.

5

In Under Western Eyes the English narrator, a Professor of languages residing in Geneva, introduces the story of an ordinary Russian student, Kirylo Sidorovitch Razumov, whose tragic personal life represents the central dilemma of Russian contemporary society. Razumov is an intriguing outsider whose mind is torn between his self-centred careerism within a despotic regime and his political alliance with the revolutionaries. His abortive action in helping Haldin, a revolutionary fugitive, to escape highlights his inner contradictions: whilst he denounces Haldin for his treason against the state, he sympathises with him over his noble cause, revolution. Indeed, Razumov faces an agonizing impasse between his desire to report Haldin to the state officials and his desire to rescue the man. At Haldin’s request, Razumov calls the cab-driver, Ziemiatrich, who is supposed to transport Haldin out of Russia, only to find the driver in a helplessly drunken state. As a result, Razumov decides to inform on Haldin and tries to wash his hands of all responsibility. When he realises that Haldin's intrusion has ruined his career, Razumov is driven by a feeling of revenge and agrees to go to Geneva as a state spy to observe the exiled revolutionaries. But in the end he has to face retribution when his disloyalty to the state emerges. In my view, the importance of this novel lies in Razumov's increasingly isolated role as he experiences two characteristic features of Russian life, the cruelty of autocracy and the single-mindedness of revolution.

Razumov is portrayed first as a man who aligns himself to the paternal authority of the state. Indeed, he identifies the Holy authority of the Czarist state with a father figure: he is "the young man of no parentage" (61) (although he is also described as the "illegitimate son of Prince K-"), and at the same time he states...
"Russia can't disown me," (215).18 His determination to get the prize for a patriotic essay competition mirrors his readiness to accept the official propagandist language of the state and also to pursue his career within the state. So there is a certain tragic inevitability in the fact that, while attracted to the revolutionary cause, he remains critical of Haldin's dream-intoxication, and in the event betrays his friend out of self interest.

Clearly, Conrad links Razumov's selfishness with the political reality which is developing in Russia in the early years of the twentieth century. It is interesting to note that Razumov (his name refers to understanding, reasoning powers) is described as an anglicised Russian, a confusion of cultures which, as in other of Conrad's novels, predicts future mental conflicts, as suggested by his growing disillusionment with revolution, let alone autocracy (we can recall Nina's divided loyalties in *Almayer's Folly*, the disenfranchised Africans in *Heart of Darkness*, and Dain's European leanings in *Lord Jim*). When Razumov is unable to bear the burden of mounting pressure coming from his double role (an "authentic revolutionary" and a deceitful spy), he is driven to confess what he has done. On the state's side, his confession is equivalent to treason and predictably it invites retribution from the thug Nikita who bursts Razumov's ear-drum; on the revolutionaries' side, his confession is clearly not acceptable either. His moral isolation leads to a kind of self-destruction which is in sharp contrast with his initial ambition of climbing the ladder of success within the autocratic state. Because of his deafness, he is run over by the tramcar and crippled:

He fell forward, and at once rolled over and over helplessly, going down the short slope together with the rush of running rain water. He came to rest in the roadway of the street at the bottom, lying on his back, with a great flash of lightning over his face - a vivid, silent flash of lighting which blinded him utterly. He picked himself up, and put his arm over his eyes to recover his sight. Not a sound reached him from anywhere, and he began to walk, staggering, down a long, empty street. The lightning waved and darted round him its silent flames, the water of the deluge fell, ran, leaped, drove - noiseless like the drift of mist. In this unearthly stillness his footsteps fell silent on the pavement, while a dumb wind drove him on and on, like a lost mortal in a phantom world ravaged by a soundless thunderstorm. God only knows where his noiseless feet took him to that night, here and there, and back again without pause or rest. Of one place, at least, where they did lead him, we heard afterwards; and, in the morning, the driver of the first southshore tramcar, clanging his bell desperately, saw a bedraggled,

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soaked man without a hat, and walking in the roadway unsteadily with his head down, step right in front of his car, and go under (340).

Razumov does recover from the tragic accident, but only as a hopeless cripple, and he returns to Russia, though far from the centre of power. But by proclaiming his guilt, by personally confirming his outsider status and not pursuing deception so as to win Haldin's sister, Razumov does gain the respect of the revolutionaries he betrayed, rather as Kurtz wins Marlow's respect by asserting the "horror" at his end. The final irony revealed in *Under Western Eyes* is that Razumov's punishment was dealt out by a man who was himself a traitor. Razumov, on the other hand, by accepting outsider status paradoxically redeems himself; confession in this novel, as in *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim*, wins a measure of grace, presumably because it finally renounces hypocrisy and deceit, two qualities which Conrad's works treat particularly severely.

Like Razumov, the English narrator is a contradictory figure who, like Marlow, assumes the double role of observer and character simultaneously. His principle of detachment is often marred by participation, fuelled by his jealousy of Razumov's love for Nathalie Haldin, Victor Haldin's sister. As an English expatriate, residing in Geneva, a "democratic institution," and encountering Russian subjects who are alien to him, the English narrator is suited to see the deficiencies of the two polarized social systems: Switzerland "protects idle individuals from the cradle to the grave," while Russia "takes away liberty from passionate individuals." Indeed, as a perceptive outsider, he sees the dark side of Geneva which gives an impression that it is a "town of prosaic existence" charged with "an air of hypocritical respectability and of inexpressible dreariness." However, it must be stressed that he, like Marlow before him, is not given an ultimately authoritative voice. In fact, he is unable to comprehend an aura of mysticism surrounding the Russian characters, for example, Haldin's sacrifice, Razumov's mental conflicts, Ziemiatrich's drunkenness, Mrs Haldin's tenacious adherence to self-deception as to her son's martyrdom, and Nathalie's philosophical position with regard to love and harmony. The narrator's
interpretations of these unfamiliar Russian subjects become problematic because they are based upon an assumed superiority of Western logic and rationalism. Whilst his satirical stance over revolutionism appears at times to have some foundation, his incomprehension of Russian political reality undermines his other perceptions. He is in complete contrast to Nathalie: whilst he is "a traveller in a strange country" (185), Nathalie remains "a faithful soul to Russia." Nathalie's creed concerning the redemption of Russia through her dedication to the idea of reconciliation appears ridiculous to an English expatriate who stands aloof from any commitment to realpolitik. She declares her determination to the English narrator who lives in bourgeois comfort: "I would take liberty from any hand as a hungry man would snatch a piece of bread" (158). So it is important to treat the English narrator as a fundamentally unreliable witness of peculiarly Russian events.

In contrast to the passionate actions taken by Russian revolutionaries, the Professor of languages (the English narrator) is guided at least in theory by his conviction concerning the supremacy of language, since it is governed by its own internal law and order. But, in practice he, like Marlow before him, takes an ambivalent view of language: whilst he believes that language is the only vehicle to express human thought, he is aware that words are "the great foes of reality." On the one hand, he translates, edits, and interprets Razumov's diaries for a Western audience, but his empirical consciousness never comprehends the aura of Russian mysticism imbued with irrationality, cynicism, revolutionary zeal, and crude violence. Like his predecessor in fact, the narrator at once demystifies and obscures the vision for a reader who wishes to totalise the text. So I would argue that this novel deals with a clash between the West and the East [Russia], between English empiricism and Russian mysticism. Conrad takes a relative view of them.

Terry Eagleton rightly speaks about the "treble detachment" which enables us to take a distanced view of Victor Haldin (through the eyes of Razumov), Razumov
(through the eyes of the English narrator) and the English narrator (through the eyes of the framing narrator). So, as in the works discussed previously, the reader must be alerted not only to detect multiple voices but to question the validity of the views taken by three different narrators. In my view, this novel is a destabilised text because the characters are unable to tell lies from truth and the narrators often remain puzzled: the implications of the political scene so often reach beyond the confines of the text, as with *Heart of Darkness* and *The Secret Agent*. Goonetilleka argues that the implied reader needs "a perspective which encompasses the picture and the frame." Tony Tanner also looks at the fluid state between the frame and the picture, arguing that "the frame delimits and spans the picture, but the picture can challenge and even ridicule the frame." In my view, these multiple points of view are designed not simply to puzzle the reader, but to release the reader from the tyranny of a single authorial voice and the dogmatic views taken by self-deluded characters; by acknowledging the outsider status of the English narrator at least, Conrad's text allows no single view to hold authority, a ploy he has already used when he has British Marlow struggle with what he experiences in the Belgian Congo and in Malaya.

As Eagleton argues, it is important to pay close attention to the fact that the implied author "satirises the limits of English empiricism" because the narrator cannot comprehend Russian mysticism. Eagleton further argues that the failure of comprehension results from "the provincial pragmatism of English culture." In *The Secret Agent* Vladimir, presumably a representative from the Czarist regime, speaks about English insularity: "they will not look outside their backyard here." From his Russian standpoint, he also ridicules English conservatism which is suggested by the proverb that "prevention is better than cure." But emphasis is put not on an ideological war, but on "a precariously fine tension between 'English' and 'foreign'

experience."24 Conrad rejects monocentrism in favour of plurality. Said argues that "monocentrism is practised when we mistake one idea as the only idea, instead of recognizing that an idea in history is always one among many."25 On the political front, Conrad explores the points of view of the oppressed (easier for him to do in a European context, arguably, than in an Africa he had merely visited) as well as of those representing the dehumanising apparatus of the state, either capitalist or autocratic. To some extent then, he presents both anarchism and revolutionism as having their attractions, because they radically challenge the centralising power of the state. In contrast to servitude to the state, such radical politics are seen as a form of extreme individualism which displays consistent resistance to the authorities. Nonetheless, it is equally important to see the human aspect of radical politics because "Conrad's interest is not simply in revolutionary anarchism for itself, but in the underlying dreams and contradictions of emotion which create it." 26

As Verloc fails to reconcile domestic concerns with politics, so Razumov fails to reconcile selfishness with political engagement. Both characters are cut off from the human community and suffer from moral isolation. Razumov's credentials as a "true rebel" are never directly challenged by others, but his own sense of guilt over the betrayal begins to wreck his life:

He made a gesture of despair. It was not his courage that failed him. The choking fumes of falsehood had taken him by the throat - the thought of being condemned to struggle on and on in that tainted atmosphere without the hope of ever renewing his strength by a breath of fresh air (263).

And so he struggles to extricate himself from the "prison of lies" through confession to Nathalie Haldin who ironically views Razumov in the light of her brother's complimentary remarks about him - "a man of unstained, lofty and solitary existence" (159). What is at issue here is that Razumov disengages himself from the patriarchal

25 Edward W. Said, "The Text, the World, the Critic," 188.
authority in St. Petersburg and attaches himself to the feminine and maternal atmosphere in Geneva. But while his love for Nathalie drives him to confess his transgression, his revelation is disastrous to their developing relationship.

There are several gestures relevant to moral isolation. Razumov is described as "a man swimming in the deep sea" (61); his inner turbulence is well conveyed when he looks at "the water under the bridge [which] ran violent and deep" (207). Razumov "keeps the head between the hands" and faces an agonizing question uttered by councillor Bakutin: "where to?" Similarly, Verloc is shown as "holding his head in both hands" (183) and "there's nowhere for him to go" (180). When they are unable to maintain their double role, these characters are engulfed by such negative experiences as madness, despair, frenzy, and loneliness. Indeed, they are left alone, being cut off on all fronts. As a last resort, Razumov tries to keep his diaries to register his private feelings that he could not communicate with others. His choice of writing itself is "another flight from solitude;" but like the English narrator's interpretations, the validity of his written confessions is questionable, since he is seeking to reconcile himself to himself.

Conrad's deconstructive approach to the centralising power is also discernible in his handling of female characters who challenge patriarchal authority. I have already mentioned how, in The Secret Agent, Winnie has to depend upon Verloc's charity to secure material protection, and can eventually assert her power only by killing her husband. In this case an outburst of frenzied violence is required to overturn the power relationship between male and female. In Under Western Eyes the rising tide of feminism is most visible in the Geneva section. Nathalie envisages Russian redemption through her dedication to the idea of reconciliation between the oppressed and the oppressor; Tekla, who is known as a Samaritan, volunteers to nurse Razumov who is "ill, getting weaker everyday." By contrast, male characters are the

27 John Batchelor, The Edwardian Novelists, 80.
oppressed: Razumov is crippled and Ziemiatchich, Victor Haldin, and Councillor Mikulin are executed. It is arguable that, whereas the atmosphere of St Petersburg is masculine, suggested by execution and drunkenness, that of Geneva is feminine, suggested by conversation and love. So, the split between masculine and feminine can be seen as mirroring a sense of crisis in human relationships.

However, this subversion of the power relationship between male and female does not solve anything; all that is asserted is that women may interpret things not better than men but very differently. We have already seen this idea being explored in earlier works in ways that have often been seen as mysogenistic but which do not, in my view, necessarily privilege the male point of view: in *Almayer’s Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands*, the male protagonist is seen as weaker than the women he may have wronged but who certainly emerge as stronger; in *Heart of Darkness* the “protection” of the Intended reflects more on Marlow’s need to protect Kurtz’s reputation at the heart of Empire than on the Intended’s vulnerability; in *Lord Jim* the call of honour above love is referred to ambivalently - it is, in each case, the male who is portrayed as trapped within his own isolation, and there is no attempt to omnisciently analyse why the women respond as they do. The same is true in *Under Western Eyes*: Mrs Haldin is convinced of her son’s martyrdom; Sophia Antonovna, who is known as the most dedicated female revolutionary, regards Peter Ivanovitch as an “inspired man” (349); and Tekla regards Razumov as a “visionary soul.” Despite the questions raised by such differences in male (the narrator’s) and female perceptions in this novel, the Russian women’s enthusiasm outweighs the tone of resignation of their male counterparts and effectively challenges the conventional view of male dominance and female submission. We can also trace this passive image of male characters in *The Secret Agent*: Michaelis is wrongly imprisoned and depends upon his patroness; Verloc becomes “a convinced fatalist” and is murdered by his wife.

Here, it is worth mentioning Conrad’s comparative view of English and Russian women. The Englishwoman, Winnie, is tied to household drudgery, while
most of the Russian women mentioned above are absorbed first and foremost with revolutionary ideas. Winnie's final desperate act has no other motive than revenge and only leads to a moral isolation which she seems to share with the whole of London; she is as inseparable from her environment as the African woman in *Heart of Darkness*, their tragedies seeming to articulate something larger than themselves:

[Mrs Verloc] was alone in London; and the whole town of marvels and mud, with its maze of streets and its mass of lights, was sunk in a hopeless night, rested at the bottom of a black abyss from which no unaided woman could hope to scramble out (240).

In *Under Western Eyes*, however, while still in Geneva, Nathalie envisages her spirit of concord:

Listen, Kirylo Sidorovitch. I believe that the future will be merciful to us all. Revolutionist and reactionary, victim and executioner, betrayer and betrayed, they shall all be pitied together when the light breaks on our black sky at last. Pitied and forgotten; for without that there can be no union and no love (327).

She asserts the healing power of Russian compassion which is contrasted with the overriding power of rationality in the West, but in the light of the severity of Tsarist political tyranny, the reader surely must wonder how Nathalie's ultimately isolated dedication to caring for the oppressed could bring any real change in a foreseeable future. However, I suspect that Conrad may have reached a point where he chooses to offer the solution of Nathalie's vision of reconciliation rather than to privilege unchallenged his earlier resolutions of unending alienation for his outsider figures.

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In *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes*, Conrad the outsider uses similar techniques to those he has used in earlier works to explore different cultural settings so as to capture the dark side of a wide range of social systems: democratic, capitalist, and autocratic. Indeed, his determination to "strike and sustain the note of scrupulous impartiality" stands out and I endorse the view that "Conrad's irony is

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28 Joseph Conrad, "Author's Note to *Under Western Eyes*," quoted from the Penguin Classics (1990), 49.
directed against Western as well as Russian interests." Among the revolutionaries, he finds fanatical, quixotic elements; among the conservatives, he finds self-seeking, corrupting elements. Conrad's worlds in these two novels suggest that there is only a thin line between the savage and the civilised. As Tony Tanner claims, "progression slips into regression in an indiscernible way". He also appears to address the idea that "splendour and misery [either in the capitalist state or the autocratic state] are but two aspects of a single reality." So, as Tony Tanner contends, "for Conrad there simply aren't any fixed and unalterable lines of demarcation". The secret agent straddles both sides, and even the narrator(s) experiences more than one culture. The outsider looms large, both as observer and as creature of alienation within the action of the novel.

My primary task throughout the first part of this thesis has been to track down the role of the outsider points of view within Conrad's distancing method. To recapitulate: language as a unified or unifying force is shown as having lost its authority in the six novels under discussion; a single voice cannot dictate the narrative; an ironic mode of presentation of narrators as well as characters has been displayed; any ideological underpinning is problematised; and paternal authority is undermined.

So it is up to the reader to explore the meaning of these texts which offer no overall authority but rather question the values asserted by the Europe of Conrad's day, since Conrad never offers a synthesis which would arguably be equivalent to an act of tyranny: if his works can be said to stand for anything, it is the right to question received notions within imperial cultures, rather than the right of any person or persons to provide easy answers. As Cedric Watts contends, Conrad's typical method

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is "to interlink and confuse stereotypical dichotomies of contrasting kinds." So the English mind is measured against the Russian soul; silence is measured against eloquence; laziness is measured against frantic action; conservative forces are measured against radical forces; the capitalist state is measured against the autocratic state. And amidst these dichotomies, the outsider, confused, often alienated, often robbed of the communicating skills of articulacy, offers a powerful comment on what the Europe of his day invests its servants with as they grapple with the problems facing them in a world which all too often does not share the certainties by which the imperial powers operate as if they were universal. I would argue that Conrad's sustained position throughout these works is remarkably non-partisan, and selfconsciously so, as suggested by his insistent use of distancing techniques, whether these are narratorial or demonstrated by his choice of language. Given all this, it appears to be quite wrong to label Conrad as "imperialist," "racist," or "sexist." Such labels insist that Conrad must take sides, must stand up and be counted, imply that there is no value in the sort of approach which records what causes uncertainty and questions, simply by putting European certainties in contexts where they can demonstrably be seen as failing to provide all the answers. It seems to me ironic, finally, that it is a Russian woman, in Under Western Eyes, who offers a tentative, isolated hope for the future, and who, in my opinion, offers an insight into where Conrad's works featuring outsiders are heading. Nathalie speaks of a future that "will be merciful to us all. Revolutionary and reactionary, victim and executioner, betrayer and betrayed, they shall all be pitied together when the light breaks on our black sky at last. Pitied and forgotten; for without that there can be no union and no love." It would, of course, be wrong to quote one character's comment as illustrating Conrad's overall position, if it were not that this character simply seems to articulate the overall movement which I have detected in the six novels under discussion. Conrad's outsider vision seems to me to offer something larger, in its sense of tragedy quite as

much as in any hope for the future, than any blinkered commitment to any one side
could do.
Though born in England Lowry lived most of his creative life abroad; in Mexico, in Canada, and on forays to continental Europe from his New World base. . . . From the very early 1940s Lowry was virtually an exile from the English literary world. Actually isolated from nearly all outside influences, the most palpable were always American rather than British. Do we then place him as 'Canadian', 'Commonwealth', 'American', or what?¹

While Joseph Conrad and Malcolm Lowry (1909-1957) both merit outsider status, they merit it in very different ways which problematise any all-embracing definition of the outsider writing in English. For while Conrad moves from a different culture, eventually settling in England and creating a literary space for himself within his adoptive culture, Lowry moves from his parent, middle-class culture in England to live in other countries, but still endeavours to create a literary space for himself within territory traditionally claimed by the culture he has rejected. So although Conrad and Lowry, in their respective generations, tend to interrogate many of the same aspects of the mores of Western civilisation, Conrad writes as the outsider within society, and so can be read as the observer who does not ultimately belong, while Lowry's strictures against the society he rejects have tended to provoke different kinds of indignation; his attacks smack of treachery. Moreover, while Conrad in a number of the novels I have been examining is careful to distance himself from the narrative voice, Lowry only does so in Under the Volcano (1947), while in his other works he increasingly narrows the gap between life and work. So Lowry's personal history has tended to mean that the bulk of his work, apart from Under the Volcano, have been largely neglected for a number of years.

In this, he might at first sight seem comparable to D.H. Lawrence, since both men rejected the dominant culture of their roots and were indeed rejected by influential numbers of critics in their home country. But in fact their careers developed very

differently: Lawrence, working-class by origin, had to struggle to find his voice in a medium implicitly appropriated by the middle class, reaching the fringes of the Bloomsbury group before finally abandoning a culture which cold-shouldered him. Lowry, however, was middle-class by origin but voluntarily rejected the 'privilege' of belonging to that culture long before it rejected him. Nor was that the only difference between the two writers; for instance, while Lawrence was essentially optimistic about humankind, provided that it rediscovered its roots in the natural world, Lowry's pessimism increased with the years. Furthermore, while Lawrence's protagonists more often than not reflect his views, the narratives within which they operate do not invariably insist that they are autobiographical; Lowry's, however, do so with greater and greater insistence as time goes by.

So the bulk of Lowry's work has failed to appeal to most readers in his home country. Yet his experiences of uprooting, border crossing, and displacement make him a quintessential outsider, offering fruitful material for my discussion. He is a writer whose multicultural identity and restless mobility go to the very heart of his work, and so I shall inevitably be concentrating on the important issue of the transnational, transitional self which characterises Lowry as an outsider. By so doing, I shall develop my on-going exploration of the crucial re-visions of the self inherent in an outsider's experience of crossing ethno-national boundaries, focusing on the triad of exiles under consideration.

Lowry is a rebel who challenges dominant cultural assumptions. His works impel us to acknowledge certain aspects of the potential that an outsider may develop, such as a fluid consciousness found in his attempt to de-localise and de-territorise, subversive energies running through radical aesthetics and revolutionary politics, a dual perception of home and abroad, and a shifting sensibility experienced in displacement. Lowry's marginalisation by those critics who have remained wedded to the criteria of a nineteenth-century canon is not an isolated phenomenon because it springs in part from the continuing debate about nationalism versus multiculturalism. During his lifetime Lowry's potential was not fully recognised on either side of the Atlantic and suffered
from a double marginalisation: in America where New Criticism was at its height in the 1950s, his works were unpopular because of the New Critics’ distrust of their autobiographical bias; in England, Lowry’s experimentalism (associated as it all too frequently was in critical discussion with denigrating references to his alcoholism) was resisted by the forces of localism. Some scholars, indeed, have voiced concern about the neglect of Lowry’s literary talent and serious thought. In 1974, for example, Malcolm Bradbrook acclaimed him as ‘one of the greatest novelists of the twentieth century; without doubt the greatest novelist (except possibly E.M. Forster) whom Cambridge has produced’, after Malcolm Bradbury asserted that ‘Malcolm Lowry is today one of our best-known neglected novelists’, while Gordon Bowker draws the conclusion that ‘Lowry is a victim of his own mythology and a victim of the neglect of English scholars’.4

Bowker, Bradbrook and Bradbury can be counted alongside those few select critics who have directed attention to the merits of displaced white writers whose identity is as it were nomadic rather than normative. In Exiles and Emigrés (1970) Terry Eagleton has noted considerable contributions to modern English literature made by the foreign writers who have come to Britain - of those displaced, cosmopolitan outsiders such as Henry James, Joseph Conrad, T.S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound. He appreciates their defamiliarising perceptions which enable them to transcend the limits and pressures of the dominant English culture.5 Two years later, in Extraterritorial (1972), which contains a discussion of Vladimir Nabokov, the Russian writer who was culturally and linguistically exiled in America, George Steiner has noted the importance to modern art of both the literature of the unfamiliar and the artist of ‘extraterritorial’, and made a bold claim that much of our best modern writing has come from writers who are

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'unhoused'. Both critics have attempted to dispel the widespread notion that exile is a disability rather than a stimulant.

Nonetheless, the plain fact is that neither Eagleton nor Steiner mention Malcolm Lowry's name, although their general claims are quite relevant to Lowry's outsider status, as Ronald Binns argues, showing how Lowry 'stands in oblique yet significant relation to contemporary English writing.' He goes on to make the useful point that:

They [Beckett and Lowry] made their lives and found many of their artistic sources and influences elsewhere: indeed they chose a conscious displacement. Both sustained an internationalist view of the arts, established complex canons of reference and influence, and became indeed exemplary modern expatriates, writers 'unhoused.'

However, even though Binns sees the merits of unhoused writers, he fails to perceive differences between Beckett (an Irish writer who confined himself mainly to Europe's cultural capitals) and Lowry (an English writer who moved from Europe's cultural capitals to the margins).

It is, thus, high time to consider Lowry as an outsider who makes his own unique use of the tradition of cross-fertilisation between cultures. I shall also compare his work with Conrad's, focusing on how an outsider's protest against domination is carried out through hybridization. Given Conrad's influence on Lowry, this approach is clearly relevant.

In order to understand Lowry's fictional world, it is necessary to recognise the role autobiography plays in his work. The seeds of his discontent were implanted at an early stage of his life. His bitterness over parental neglect is apparent: neither his repressive father nor his remote mother provided him with either home comforts or sufficient love. Moreover, there are some suggestions that he was subjected to abuse at

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8 Ronald Binns, Ibid., 89.
the hands of nursemaids. Such traumatic experiences of tyranny affected his entire outlook and imbue his fictions with a poignant yearning for human fellowship. However, the task of tracing Lowry's personal history is not without its own problems since his movements are often hard to track down, and furthermore his own fictions, while often employing facts from his own experience, inevitably merge fact with products of a very vivid imagination. In the most recently published critical biography, Gordon Bowker touches upon Lowry's capacity to blend reality with fantasy: 'the real Lowry and the mythical Lowry are often difficult to separate, and he himself worked hard to blur the difference'. Indeed, his fusion of the factual with the fictional has perplexed and exasperated critics and readers alike. Critics are pulled between two extremes in their interpretations of Lowry: one group has admired him as 'a drunken visionary'; another has denounced him as 'a plagiarist' or a 'mimic writer'. His cultists tend to celebrate his eccentricities more than his achievements; his detractors tend to exaggerate Lowry's alleged 'mimicry' of other writers. Both factions commonly fail to comprehend Lowry's real talent. In the end, the best way to free him from legends and myths and misrepresentations is to explore the ways in which he makes use, as a writer, of his profound experience of outsider status. Gordon Bowker appears to grasp some essential aspects of Lowry's enigmatic personality, defining him as 'a man obsessed - obsessed by the pen, obsessed by the bottle, obsessed by private terrors'. But there is more to Lowry than this. To begin with, I would again stress that he creates a tradition of his own which is separate from that of his contemporaries. He emerges as a writer of metafiction who breaks with the mimetic tradition of rational thought in favour of the unreal and the irrational. Then again, his writing is rooted in the fact that he is a rebel who perfects his own dissenting voice against English cultural constraints, following the dictates of his own imagination rather than any specific literary trends without ever entirely forsaking his links with European literary tradition. Furthermore, being a déclassé and multiculturalist, Lowry celebrates a plurality of voice and a multiplicity of

vision. Hélène Cixous speaks of the peculiar sensibility of those who cross ethno-national frontiers, arguing that 'the border makes up the homeland, it prohibits and gives passage in the same stroke'.

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I shall now turn, without more ado, to an examination of Lowry's fiction and shall begin by analysing and appraising Lowry's apprentice novel *Ultramarine* (1933) which has elicited little critical attention. In this work, the status of declassé/outsider/exile is absolutely central. The outsider's compulsion to know another world prompts his transgression of class, nationality, culture and faith. Then, there is the issue of the psychodynamics involved. An outsider wrestles with a typical dilemma which can be seen as a corollary of his uprooting: 'Loneliness (artistic solitude) is the great reality, love (human fellowship) the great necessity: how can the two be brought together?' Ivan Klima also comments on the freedom-versus-home dilemma which, while unacknowledged, may well explain some of the tensions plaguing Lowry's early outsider figures: 'At home, freedom seemed unattainable, whereas abroad freedom had to be bought at the cost of losing one's home.'

*Ultramarine* charts an outsider's voyage of self-discovery on a freighter ship from Liverpool to the Far East. As an account of rites de passage, this novel charts the spiritual transformation of a young nomad standing on the threshold of manhood. It also serves as a stepping stone to a wider understanding of Lowry's exploration of outsider status. Conradian echoes both reverberate and are subverted in *Ultramarine* which introduces Lowry as a celebrant of the sea, like his predecessor. Like young Jim, Eugene Dana Hilliot, the protagonist of the novel, is driven by a compulsion to know other worlds by going to sea. For both dissenters, travel is a form of escape from cultural constraints. But an exclusive emphasis on romantic and escapist qualities would

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bypass the issue of their resistance to dominant values. I wish to argue that their wanderlust is firmly grounded in their growing disenchantment with the dominant values of their culture. Despite affinities, there are fundamental differences as to the directions they take: whereas Jim is a doomed idealist who pursues power and glory, Hilliot is a déclassé who refuses to be seduced by the privileges of his upper-middle class background and deliberately 'downgrades' his status by striving to identify with the sailors. But then again, like Jim who agonises over his impulsive jump, Hilliot suffers from a discord between intention and action when he faces the immediate task of saving a stranded pigeon. He hesitates to dive into the shark-infested sea and rescue the crippled bird which is on the brink of drowning. Norman, one of the crew, ridicules Hilliot for his apparent lack of courage: 'Time! Of course there would have been time. Time wouldn't have mattered if you'd been a man' (154). Jim is also branded as a coward by his crew, so both figures are openly humiliated, and have to wrestle with their consciences. But while Jim tries to rid himself of the stigma by pursuing his idealistic aspirations and turning his back on his tormentors, Hilliot tries for harmony with his detractors by sticking to pragmatism.

There is a striking incongruity when Hilliot, a public schoolboy, arrives at the Liverpool port by chauffeur-driven limousine to join the tramp steamer as a deckhand. Through Hilliot's class conversion, Lowry allows two different social spheres to collide and interact. A bourgeois boy is brought into contact with the sailors and initially is the natural target for their hostility. Both the cook, Andy, and the quartermaster dampen Hilliot's romantic notion of a sea voyage, mocking him with an old sailor's expression: 'a man who went to sea for fun would go to hell for a pastime' (22). And indeed the boy soon becomes disillusioned about sea life: 'For this is what sea life is like now - a domestic servant on a treadmill in hell!' (47). His disenchantment increases steadily:

Now all the ports were the same to him; they were not towns, but congested, weedy rivers in which lifeless men flowed together and apart and together again like battling torrents (145).
Lowry highlights Hilliot’s twin impulse towards artistic solitude and human fellowship. The young man’s sympathetic view of the working class is different from Jim’s scepticism which is apparent in his questioning the value of rubbing shoulders with sailors. Unlike the dreamer Jim (whose officer status reflects his class attitudes), Hilliot learns to adapt himself to an alien environment by doing chores such as scrubbing the mess room, polishing the floor, and chipping off rust. Although his voluntary intrusion into the world of the sailors proves to be a painful ordeal, it leads him to recognise the virtues of the working class. Indeed, the distinctive thing about Hilliot is his successful mediation between classes.

The idea that a Byronesque romantic traveller is vulnerable is also explored in V.S. Naipaul’s “The Tramp of Piraeus,” in In A Free State (1971). The plight of an old English tramp who has to hide in his small cabin can be compared with that of Hilliot who is bullied by the sailors. Both travellers are self-professed citizens of the world who are free, yet alienated and unprotected. But there is a fundamental difference, too: whereas Naipaul’s story ends without any sign of reconciliation between the attackers (foreign immigrants on board) and the attacked (an English tramp), this early novel of Lowry’s ends on a note of reconciliation between groups (bourgeois boy and sailors). McGoff, one of the sailors, instructs Hilliot on the merits of the proletariat:

You see us [we] working men ain’t [aren’t] the sort of bastards that the moneyed class think us, lying in all morning smoking cigarettes and then telling the tale to the Labour Exchange in the afternoon. No, we work all according to secedule [schedule]-time - (164).

Here, Lowry calls into question bourgeois prejudices about the working class, and makes Hilliot responsive to what McGoff says. It is interesting to compare how outsiders respond to class differences within their parent societies, for they are by no means uniform: so Lawrence takes an ambivalent view of the working class (where he has his roots) who are, in his view, rough, often brutal, but full of vitality, while Lowry (bourgeois by origin) takes a sympathetic view of them which arguably romanticises difference. Lowry’s unwavering attitude is also different from George Orwell’s ambivalence. Orwell, another public school product, once disguised himself as a tramp.
and mixed with down-and-outs, yet he was by and large disheartened by the masses as being apparently devoid of revolutionary potential (and, by implication, needing middle-class leadership).  

Hilliot certainly rebels against his middle-class upbringing. The son of a wealthy businessman, he regards his father as a guardian (not as a father) and pours scorn on his remote mother. Similarly, Conrad’s Jim, the son of a local parson, rebels against Christianity. He not only refuses to reply to his father’s letter but never returns to his ‘homeland’. Yet neither dissenter loses faith in the possibility of close relationships: Jim attaches himself to Captain Marlow, and later to his Malays; Hilliot to the sailors. Being nauseated by his father’s tyranny and his mother’s gentile aspirations, Hilliot, a thinly-veiled young Lowry, is attracted by the idea of human solidarity with the working class and emerges as a quasi-Marxist intellectual. The letter addressed to Hilliot by his mother reveals her contempt for the working class:

My Dearest Son - Just a little note to say may God bless you and keep you in the right path. I hope you are comfortable and keeping clean, because I don’t want my son coarsened by a lot of hooligans. I’ve no time for more because as you know, my eyes are so bad these days. Very much love from your own Mother (90-1).

Through his subversive silence, Hilliot appears to challenge his mother’s deep-seated prejudices that the working class are ‘unhygienic’, ‘lazy’ and ‘degraded’, just as in Heart of Darkness, Marlow counters the white supremacist of his aunt, who advises him to wear white flannels (an emblem of civilisation) in the sweltering African jungle. Both Hilliot’s mother and Marlow’s aunt are entrenched in their class-bound consciousness. As a result, Hilliot’s mother fails to see the virtues of the sailors - responsibility, masculinity, and toughness - which her class failed to deliver to her son. Her poor eyesight symbolises the fact that her perception is deeply flawed. Hilliot however has the capacity to see in class divisions a crisis of culture within class-bound English society.

An outsider’s capacity for transgression/boundary-crossing is also discernible in nationality and gender. Hilliot’s nationality falls somewhere between English and Norwegian and by implication Lowry discounts a single nationality. Hilliot in a sense personifies the tramp steamer drifting across all seas and closely identifies himself with it:

When you come to think of it - an ideal match. Both of us born of Viking blood, both robbed of our countries and left to make out as best we can; both, finally, with the same wandering, harbourless, dispossessed characteristics (31).

The sailing freighter is never constrained by geographical boundaries. On his voyage out, Hilliot encounters people of diverse nationalities, undergoes a transformation and adaptation of the self and finally acquires a fragmented, hybridised and rootless identity. He also emerges as a multilingual, speaking several languages - German, Norwegian, Japanese, Greek, and English - overcoming the confines of a single language. Lowry as author uses different linguistic modes to depict class differences: he presents the colloquialism of the sailors’ conversations and uses the technique of stream-of-consciousness to register Hilliot’s meandering monologues.

Lowry also explores a potential problem for the outsider: vulnerability concerning sexuality. Hilliot’s mind revolves around a twin desire: his attachment to Janet from whom he is physically separated and his compulsion to form emotional ties with one of his fellow shipmates, the womaniser called Andy. Similarly in Heart of Darkness Conrad shows Marlow unwillingly glimpsing how Kurtz is torn between the worlds of the African woman and the Intended. So Hilliot is uncomfortably lodged between Janet and Andy and suffers from a continual emotional oscillation, yet he does achieve breakthrough. He counters Andy’s sexual taunts of ‘Miss Hilliot’ and ‘Your Ladyship’, by conjuring up memories of Janet as a means of transcending the misery of Andy’s bullying. Asher Milbauer comments on the redeeming power of a constant dialogue between past and present, arguing that ‘an equilibrium [between past and
present is a milestone on a path to survival'. Indeed, Hilliot avoids both being a defeatist and relying on dreams, by striking a balance. Compromise offers itself beguilingly as an imperative: whilst he can barely resist the impulse to kill his tormentor, he is tempted to adopt the attitude of 'the bad sailor' as a precondition for his manhood, for Andy represents an ideal of strength and masculinity that Hilliot's upper-middle class background fails to deliver.

5

In Ultramarine, Lowry depends upon two different narrative modes: he develops Hilliot's conversations with the sailors by using a dramatic method which effaces the self; simultaneously, he unfolds Hilliot's private consciousness by using an interior monologue which expresses the self without mediation. Moreover, he abandons chronological narration in favour of a dislocation of time. As the ship is nearing the Manchurian port Tsjang Tsjang, Hilliot evokes his memories of the past nineteen years which are compressed within forty-eight hour. His flashbacks alternate with conversations taking place on the ship. Noting that Conrad and Lowry share a common ground in dealing with exiles and seamen, Malcolm Bradbrook hints at a similar configuration of their narratives which are largely constructed by reworking personal memories of the past. Marlow reconstructs his African and Eastern memories and tells them to an audience; Hilliot interweaves public dialogue with private monologue and strives to achieve balance. His sporadic fixation on Janet gives him a breathing space away from the reality of Andy's abuse. By making use of a constant interaction between past and present, Hilliot avoids the danger of being predominantly retrospective. It is this quality that enables him to succeed where the dreamer Jim fails: Hilliot survives and returns home.

Lowry's skill in interweaving is also evident in his spinning a web of rich intertextuality in Ultramarine. Ironically, because of this same quality, he stands

accused of being a ‘plagiarist’ or a ‘mimic writer’. As I shall argue, he does not simply recycle ideas and methods used by great writers, but rather he uses them to meet his artistic purposes. For example, he uses a literary allusion to Sophocles’s *Oedipus the King* (the tramp ship is named *Oedipus Tyrannus*) to provide a subtle link between the tragic outsider of ancient time and Hilliot, a modern version. Lowry also adopts the familiar motif of a Dantesque descent into Hell so as to define the nature of Hilliot’s spiritual journey. A wandering motif used in Joyce’s *Ulysses* is also arguably relevant to Hilliot’s nomadism. Lowry depends upon modernist techniques such as the Joycean interior monologue and a Proustian time scheme to capture and convey Hilliot’s memories in a constant flux, while at the same time Lowry’s artistic decisions both announce subversions and retain claims on the literary models he echoes, and so create a tradition of Lowry’s own. For instance, in terms of emotional torment, we could draw a parallel between Hilliot and Goethe’s young Werther. But whereas Werther takes the path of self-destruction out of despair, Hilliot celebrates a principle of harmony. Furthermore, while Hilliot could appear to follow a similar path to that taken by Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus, he is different from Joyce’s young artist. Whereas Joyce’s hero declares his dedication to an artistic vocation, Hilliot rather looks for human fellowship to overwhelm his artistic ego. Lowry attempts to fuse (or confuse, according to his detractors) warm humanity with aesthetic pleasure. I would argue that Lowry’s capacity to blend is not a perverse act but the legitimate quest of the outsider to both problematise the traditions he inherits and to achieve some kind of synthesis on his own terms.

From his first novel onwards, Lowry emerges as a writer of metafiction who reconceptualises reality rather than represents it. Like Conrad’s impressionistic writing, Lowry’s metafiction defies Western rational thought. Some may argue that Lowry loses his grip on reality, but I would argue that in fact he reconceptualises it because he experiences shifting ground. So Lowry creates an interesting duet by blending the real with the unreal. Lowry’s resulting ‘schizophrenic’ writing has often been dismissed as
a ‘degenerate’ art, but it highlights the outsider’s psychic dynamics in defiance of so-called mimetic representation.

Hilliot is constantly haunted by a fear of death whilst he is driven by a desire for love. As we have seen, he struggles to maintain his fragile self by looking for strong emotional ties. An intersection of self-surrender and self-preservation runs counter to Cartesian dualism which tends to underline coherence and unity whilst overlooking the details. Ultramarine is deeply imbued with images of death. For instance, Hilliot dwells upon the imagined death of an unborn son:

Death. Outside time drips its rain for our son, who lifts to be kissed, a twisted, witless mask, grinning sightlessly at us, two holes in the bridgeless nose, the sightless eyes like leaden bullets sunk into the face.... Myself, also, the man without a soul. It died, suddenly, at the age of eight. I felt it die a little every day.... A little, little grave, an obscure grave - (66).

He also contemplates his own future death:

When the door of Dana Hilliot, old age pensioner, was forced, the police found him lying on the mattress in an emaciated and verminous condition. Death from exhaustion and self-neglect - (70).

Lowry highlights the issue of inhumanity through the nature of Hilliot’s reflections on death. His paranoid fear of it leads him to distort reality and invent an image. He creates a surreal mood within the ordinary and so, paradoxically, makes reality more alive. Notably, his creativity seems to thrive and expand when he is standing on the border-line between fact and fancy. For example, he perceives ‘the dock [as] a coffin of molten iron, with long white candles burning’ (81) and ‘the lamprimmer’s bunk [as] a baby’s coffin’ (136). One drunken night, he goes to the cinema and records his surreal impressions of its interior: ‘The cinema glowed with pink light inside. The walls were fairly plain and the concealed red lamps gave it to me the appearance of a tomb or a catacomb burning with fire’ (97). Our abiding impression is that Hilliot makes use of an interaction between objectivity and subjectivity. R.D. Laing legitimises attempts like
Hilliot's to blur a rigid boundary, arguing that 'under the sign of alienation every single aspect of the human reality is subject to falsification'.

Lowry's concern for metafiction courts controversy as to its capacity for achieving any radical goal. His experimental style falls short of offering an alternative world but its strength lies in the transformative power of its vision on the everyday world. Lowry has a gift for translating his thought into imagery. However, an emphasis on the metaphorical and rhetorical function of language is not always without its own problems, the most serious of which is an obvious dilution of radical political gestures. Lowry cannot evade this charge, but he sacrifices single-minded political stances so as to emphasise creative tensions. The same is true of Conrad, who avoids position-taking in favour of the relativity and the all but inevitable irony of the outsider's art. In comparison with Conrad who keeps his hidden self intact by adopting an ironic mask (a common defence of the outsider, powerless in the presence of the dominant culture), Lowry appears to define his outlook more clearly, largely because, I suspect, his protagonists, like Lawrence's, share so much with himself. Lowry's metafiction (and Conrad's metanarrative) may well obscure radical politics, yet they have their own subversive function. Both writers sympathise with the cause of revolutionary politics, yet their 'radical' politics is inevitably checked given their artistic priorities which hold at the very least a dialogue with contemporary modernist concerns. Conrad arguably adopts the ironic mask to conceal his 'radical' side within the country which has accepted him, and Lowry's political will to change the world is arguably held in check by an artistic ego which so closely shadows his own.

I shall now explore how Hilliot's outsider subjectivity responds to the world around it. Here, once again, it is important to see an interaction between self and world because Lowry expands Hilliot's personal suffering into the wider landscape containing the suffering of mankind. Hilliot watches Norman capture the stranded pigeon and cripple it by clipping off its primary feather. The bird manages to escape from its cage, yet is left helpless in the sea and is drowned without attracting any attention from the

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motor boat nearby. Hilliot is very responsive to this scene of human cruelty yet is incapable of taking decisive action to rescue the bird. (Similarly, in *The Secret Agent* Conrad's Stevie sympathises with the cab-horse burdened by a heavy load, yet his only outward response is not intervention but a decision to walk.) When we consider the fact that the pigeon is the 'very messenger of love itself', its ultimate abandonment suggests that a principle of Christian love is at stake. The predicament of the bird is replaced by that of a dying Indian bank courier in *Under the Volcano* which contains a more overt political dimension, yet even in *Ultramarine*, Lowry expresses outrage at human cruelty. Thus, we cannot rule out a political purpose in Lowry which, according to George Orwell, is a 'desire to push the world in a certain direction, to alter other people's idea of the kind of society that they should strive after'.

At another point, Hilliot sees a cargo of caged animals that is being transported to a metropolitan zoo where they will be displaced and confined. The nature of his distaste for oppression is clear in his response to this instance of human cruelty, yet he has been seen simply as a quasi-surrealist who mingles the metaphorical with the literal. But surely the predicament of the animals serves as a broad metaphor for any forced transplantation of human beings caused by human oppression and brutality. Lowry catches a convincingly apocalyptic mood through Matt's hallucination of being eaten by the animals that smash the cages when a typhoon hits the ship. This panic-stricken situation which mischievously echoes the *Patna* crisis in *Lord Jim* is highly emblematic, as Lowry meticulously highlights all the noises so that they coincide at a single moment - the screams of the animals, the sharp alarm siren, and the fury of the sea.

Lowry opposes the notion that derangement is something beyond reason that cannot be understood. Not only do the hallucinations of the deranged Matt, serve to illuminate the anarchy which suffering can lead to, but Matt continuously talks about the human atrocities committed in the Belgian Congo by King Leopold who is said to maltreat 'niggers' and cut off their ears and wrists; Lowry shows how the schizophrenic can envisage an impoverishment of civilisation and remain a man of conscience. Here,

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Conrad’s powerful indictment of Belgian imperialism is dramatically echoed by Lowry, since both writers oppose the politics of brutalization. Furthermore, Lowry’s sympathetic view of the schizophrenic turns the conventional view of its threat to what is reasonable upside down, highlighting a shortcoming in Cartesian logic which insists on clear-cut distinctions between madness and sanity.

Lowry also repeats sailors’ yarns which illustrate the issue of the victimisation of human beings by war and enforced hospitalisation. Conrad’s Marlow also spins yarns to his audience. What is of interest to me is the fact that both writers use yarns to disturb through strategies of defamiliarisation rather than entertain an audience. Marlow’s tales about Jim’s and Kurtz’s tragic deaths are deeply disturbing to those who cling to white supremacism. I draw attention to two episodes mentioned by Matt: one is about a man crippled in war who appears in Matt’s nightmare:

I was discharged from the Army a cripple, yes, my right foot turned in, this here left arm useless, paralytic - you’ve seen ’em mate, men like I was hanging round every street corner, and you say poor devil to them - (181).

Another is about the schizophrenic called Deaffy who is subjected to the ordeal of enforced hospitalisation for his ‘derangement’ which is caused by traumatic war experiences:

But in the end Deaffy went mad with the loneliness; and it took nine or ten strong men to hold him; and he used to lie down on the ground with his eyes wide open and let the flies crawl over his eyeballs. . . (129).

By taking a sympathetic view of victims, Hilliot challenges the established order which, in the spirit that Foucault so devastatingly analyses, justifies an ideology of war and an official policy of enforced hospitalisation. Lowry incorporates the individual’s fate into social and political contexts; he politicises human misery and suffering. As his resolutions reveal, Hilliot is deeply committed to an elimination of the misery surrounding slaves and starving children and he emerges as a man of conscience eager to assume responsibility for the oppressed.
Unlike Matt who becomes a passive victim of fear, Hilliot charts a way out of derangement and remains defiant. He confronts his chief tormentor Andy by taunting him as the ‘chinless cook’ or the ‘tattooed cook’. He is no longer trapped by his adversary. His acceptance of a new job as coaltrimmer partly suggests that he, like Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus, could ‘be forged out of the furnace of his mind’. An epiphanic moment reveals his transformed attitude: ‘I have the universal experience of sublimated all-embracing love for mankind’ (170). At this point, he abandons his egocentrism and tries for harmony and mediation between different sets of beliefs and values. His reconciliation with Andy is like a microcosmic resolution of a class struggle. Indeed, despite differences in temperament and class, they can understand each other. Andy acknowledges the values held by Hilliot such as his love for Janet and ‘home’, Hilliot also comes to sympathise with Andy who, being a nomadic sailor deprived of home comforts, has to seek his version of love through sex in a brothel.

To explain Hilliot’s spiritual maturity, it is useful to borrow the Blakean notion of a dialectical development of contrary states of human consciousness - from innocence through experience into a higher innocence. Indeed, Hilliot asserts his independent identity by declaring: ‘But I have outgrown Andy’ (170). At this point, he achieves moral courage. Unlike the Consul in Under the Volcano who plunges down the path of self-destruction, Hilliot tips the balance towards an affirmation of life by embracing diversity rather than unity:

Why was it his brain could not accept the dissonance as simply as a harmony, could not make order emerge from this chaos? Surely God had made man free from the first, tossing confusion of slime, the spewings of that chaos, from the region beast. Chaos and disunion, then, he told himself, not law and order, were the principles of life which sustained all things, in the mind of man as well as on the ship (157).

Hilliot learns to be flexible and so to celebrate his life. His newly-born consciousness runs counter to a rational approach which tends to play down such elements as chaos and disunion. He realises that something is left out by Cartesian dualism and as an alternative looks at an interactive relationship rather than a hierarchical one. His transformed attitude is far from being a suddenly contrived and perverse view; gradually,
by learning to maintain a deep sense of reciprocity between classes, he transcends polarization.

Hilliot's personal transformation is not complete unless it receives social recognition in the guise of acceptance by the community of sailors. Initially, Hilliot's name was mis-spelled Heliot, which not only means that his true identity is not fully expressed by his shipmates but he enters a sort of hell as a servant. Appropriately, his name is associated with the word "helot" (a serf class in ancient Sparta), which is a fitting way to represent his initial intention to downgrade his class. Hilliot begins by being an object of hostility, since he is a bourgeois, but, to his delight, is finally accepted as a member of the community. Through Hilliot's successful mediation, Lowry appears to envisage a truly classless society - a subversive notion which undermines the authority of the existing class system.

7

Viewed within the larger context of Lowry's oeuvre entitled The Voyage That Never Ends (a subtle title which epitomises Lowry's nomadic quest), Ultramarine is, as I have said, a stepping stone leading to an investigative exploration of Lowry's outsider voice and outlook. I shall continue to trace the development of his embryonic ideas, some of which develop while some die. The distinctive thing about his first novel is a reconciliatory tone which dwindles away in his later work. The Consul is a cool cynic and in 'Lunar Caustic' Bill Plantagenet is consumed by fury. Hilliot restrains himself from alcoholism, debauchery, and solipsism. On the other hand, Lowry's first novel clearly delineates some features of what will become his habitual approach. He defies binary division and instead explores the grace of fusion. The distinctive thing about Lowry is his capacity to connect between opposites such as self and world, text and politics, self-expression and self-effacement, past and present, the real and the unreal, artistic solitude and human fellowship. By choosing to be an outsider, Lowry celebrates both fictional and ideological freedom abroad. Moreover, he aspires to a universal citizenship which imposes a major threat to political nationalism and cultural
essentialism. I believe that new practice in reading developed in recent years (not least by postcolonial analysts) should take his dissenting voice into account.

In *Exiles and Emigrés* Terry Eagleton has argued that the flourishing of modernism in England was largely the product of the foreign exiles/expatriates who flocked to England in search of its civilised, traditionalist milieu. But Lowry left England in search of radical aesthetics and revolutionary politics which were unavailable at home. I would argue that the world of outsiders/exiles is more than one-way traffic. It is in this sense that we should explore a common space between centripetal forces created by Anglicised foreign writers like Conrad and centrifugal ones displayed by English rebels like Lowry.

Ultimately, as I have said, being an outsider, Lowry resists easy categorisation as to national and cultural identity. He aspires to be a declassé, a multiculturalist, and a cosmopolitan. He also cannot be assigned to any one literary tradition. As Malcolm Bradbury says, Lowry was fed by a double principle - the spirit of the romantic and the spirit of the modern - which generated deep artistic contradiction. In my view, his main achievements as an outsider are in the areas of multiplicity of identity, plurality of vision, reciprocal relationships, interweaving literary modes, and shifting sensibility. In the light of such achievements, he can no longer be considered as marginal to the cultural changes re-viewing the English canon. It is high time that we saw his life and work in a more positive light. The textual analysis of *Under the Volcano* which follows will only serve to consolidate my findings about the value of his outsider status.

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I begin with some reflections upon exile as a product of, and reaction to, the age in which one lives. In *Under the Volcano* (1947) Lowry presents an outsider figure, Geoffrey Firmin, whose personal misery is closely linked with political despair over the rise of Fascism. This novel reflects the clash of twin ideologies in the 1930s - the rise of Fascism and the defeat of Socialism. Through the outsider's resistance to the totalitarian state, Lowry appears to support the liberal-democratic state which allows and encourages diversity.

An intersection of literary text and political reality is also discernible in Conrad's work which is written within the context of the Age of Empires. At the very heart of his attitude to imperialist practices in the Congo must lie his traumatic experience of Poland's succumbing to imperial Russian domination. V.S. Naipaul's diasporic writing also considers the impact of the colonial encounter which produced deracination and displacement of migratory peoples in the post-colonial era. Not surprisingly, given their experiences, this triad of outsiders are commonly concerned with an impoverishment of civilisation. In his article 'Becoming Exiles', Richard Ellmann rightly claims that 'exile could include a much larger idea than mere physical separation, voluntary or involuntary, from one's native land; it could include disaffection of a political and social kind'.

Salman Rushdie suggests a further role for an outsider whose identity is at once plural and partial: 'If literature is in part the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality, then once again our distance, our long geographical perspective, may provide us

with such angles'. And indeed, Lowry provides a new angle for a way of perceiving reality. The main thrust of the arguments I shall develop is that an exile/outsider exists not in isolation, but in negotiation with the outside world. Lowry sticks to a principle of reciprocity in shaping his aesthetics and politics.

Simultaneously, an examination of the condition of exile will lead us to see the depressing side of exile. In ‘Reflections on Exile’, Edward Said gives a balanced view of dispossession, arguing that ‘the achievements of exile (a plurality of vision, for instance) are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind for ever, for being cut off from one’s roots, one’s land, one’s past’. So, it is essential to resist a one-sided portrait of exile.

Lowry’s artistic imagination appears to thrive on an exile which simultaneously compounds his personal misery, and this duality is well embodied in Under the Volcano. The success of this single novel should refute the popular belief that exile leads to an impoverishment of art, but ironically, although the success of this novel saved him from total obscurity, it perpetuated the notion that he is the writer of just one good novel. As Malcolm Bradbury has pointed out, the success of the novel abroad was also soured for Lowry by a ‘general lack of recognition in his native Britain’. Even the grounds for its success have remained various and obscure and demand clarification. For example, some may be interested in the exotic Mexican subject matter, others in the lives of white expatriates in Mexico. Both views fall short of explaining what Lowry is about, so I shall explore the outsider’s concern both for the European situation and Mexican local politics. In addition, given the fact that critics have been hostile to Lowry’s ‘erosion’ of Englishness and his deviations from right behaviour and thinking, I hope to shed light on the potential which his outsider figures develop.

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Under the Volcano is one of the most important post-war political novels which registers the outsider's distaste for a totalising ideology such as Fascism. Kafka's anxieties about the human condition under a totalitarian state are comparable. Ironically, both writers may benefit artistically from political repression. Furthermore, as Roger Bromley argues, Lowry is a 'writer who probably offers the most searching interrogation of the violence exercised by the symbolic forms of power in Western society since Lawrence'. Indeed, both Lowry and Lawrence refuse to accept a collective identity which curbs individual freedom. It is significant that Lawrence was a conscientious objector and Lowry was a draft dodger. Conrad's distaste for tyrannical power is apparent, too. According to Martin Seymour-Smith, Conrad 'wished to get away from the Poland to avoid being conscripted for service in the Russian army'. It is indeed illuminating to see how social and political realities leave these writers with no perceived option other than to don outsider status.

Under the Volcano is a subtle and multi-layered text containing several strands which interact and overlap, shaping a gigantic modern tragedy. The novel can be read as the story of an alcoholic who chooses voluntary exile in a provincial town of Mexico where he is killed by a fascist gang who use murder as a political weapon. But then, Lowry incorporates the Consul's personal tragedy into contemporary political events such as the First World War, the Spanish Civil War, and the rise of Fascism in Mexico. Furthermore, he attempts to universalise his political discourse by examining the entire history of mankind which has been a violent clash between oppressors and oppressed.

When the book first came out, literary critics failed to appreciate Lowry's interweaving skill by taking a narrow Eurocentric perspective, or even a provincial English one. Their unfavourable reviews enraged Lowry and he wrote a preface to

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communicate his authorial intention and strategy. In it he urges us to read a broader significance into Geoffrey's tragedy as it is at once personal and universal:

On one level, the drunkenness of the Consul may be regarded as symbolising the universal drunkenness of war, of the period that precedes war, no matter when. Throughout the twelve chapters, the destiny of my hero can be considered in its relationship to the destiny of humanity. 9

A decade later, in his article 'Europe's Day of the Dead', Anthony Burgess warns against a narrow reading of Under the Volcano:

It is a book about heaven and hell and the necessity of choice between them. On another level, it is a study of the choice that Europe, in the thirties, had already made. The most superficial level presents the self-enclosed world of the dipsomaniac, and this is the level that too many of the book's earliest readers saw to the exclusion of everything else. 10

This view overcomes English parochialism, yet remains Eurocentric in the sense that it fails to consider the Mexican element of people, culture and politics. For Mexico is more than a decorative backdrop against which foreign expatriates enact their own personal drama. Similarly, Conrad's Africa and Far East are more than a playground into which European colonialists flock to mend their fortune. There is a real danger of reductiveness when foreign settings are mediated through a predominantly Western understanding.

Lowry, as an observer, has a privileged position in preserving certain sketches of the Mexican landscape. Gordon Bowker comments on his dualistic image of Mexico as an infernal paradise:

If the magic mountain of Popocatepetl represented the possibility of eternal life and beauty, the sewer-like barranca which ran through the town could only stand for the gaping jaws of hell. 11

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This marriage of heaven and hell defies a binary polarisation of Mexico. In ‘Preface to a Novel’, Lowry comments on his symbolic use of Mexico as a site for collision of opposite ideas:

Mexico, the meeting place of many races, the ancient battleground of social and political conflicts where, as Waldo Frank, I believe, has shown, a colourful and talented people maintained a religion which was virtually a cult of death. It is the ideal setting for the struggle of a human being against the powers of darkness and light. 12

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_Under the Volcano_ is overwritten with many literary echoes and allusions and demands close reading. Through constant revision and rewriting of its manuscript for more than a decade (1936-47), Lowry fashions it into a very complex, sophisticated work of art. It is for this reason that he stands accused of being an advocate of high art for its own sake. D.B. Jewison compares the novel to a 'library with a confusing catalogue' 13 and Brian W. Shaffer to a 'compendium of world literature' with 'its allusive density and narrative complexity'. 14

Another charge centres on Lowry's practice of metafiction which invites critical assaults from political _engagés_ as well as realists. Like Conrad's hazy impressionism, Lowry's metafiction resists representation and creates a threat to rational thought. Both writers discredit subject-object binarism and instead use a vague and figurative language which goes beyond the scope of logic. Lowry's alcoholism is seen as a major threat to reason, but it is also arguably a stimulant which facilitates fluidity between self and world and a sedative which alleviates the misery of exile. Besides, an outsider's physical displacement and spiritual estrangement make places and situations strange and unfamiliar. Thus, an unreal/irrational dimension challenges the rationalist/realist gaze. R.D. Laing draws our attention to the way in which 'true sanity entails in one way or

another the dissolution of the normal ego'.\textsuperscript{15} Lowry consciously blurs a rigid boundary between subjectivity and objectivity in favour of psychodynamics.

For a successful textual analysis of \textit{Under the Volcano}, it is imperative to dismantle Lowry's writing strategy which is chiefly designed to challenge and decentralise the power of a unified authorial voice by accommodating the eclectic voices of dispossessed characters. Lowry chooses characters of diverse nationalities, counterpoints their points of view, and achieves Bakhtin's "polyphony of voices", designed to undermine a unitary voice. I shall consider four \textit{angst}-ridden expatriates - the British ex-Consul Geoffrey Firmin, the British journalist Hugh Firmin (Geoffrey and Hugh being half-brothers of Anglo-Indian origin), the French film-maker Jacques Laruelle, and the American actress Yvonne Constable (Geoffrey's estranged wife). Despite their diversity, there is uniformity in Lowry's notion of the fragmentariness of their existence. He interweaves their fates to shape a large common consciousness through a web of friendship and betrayal: Geoffrey loves and hates his estranged wife; Yvonne loves and cuckolds him; Hugh cares about his half-brother whilst he has an adulterous affair with Yvonne; Jacques is Geoffrey's old friend who has already been involved in an affair with Yvonne in Hollywood. The distinctive thing is Lowry's capacity to connect, to relate, and to link.

In addition, Lowry charts various responses to the outside world and reveals the collective failure of bourgeois intellectuals facing the rise of Fascism: Geoffrey is a cynic who seeks consolation in alcohol; Hugh is an opportunist obsessed with erratic adventurism; Yvonne finds a refuge in her fragile fantasies; Jacques escapes into aesthetics. I want to stress that Lowry maintains a critical distance from his characters without forsaking his sympathy for them. Like Conrad, Lowry celebrates a principle of diversity with regard to characters, locales, and points of view; such an approach mirrors his distaste for a totalising power, both narratorial and political. It is in this sense that his aesthetics are highly politicised.

The central character is, of course, Geoffrey Firmin who is anxious about his roots and origins. As an outsider, he is able to assert neither a national culture nor a nationalistic rhetoric. His outsider status is further reinforced by his position as a foreigner in Mexico. Through his portrayal of the Consul who suffers from crippling dislocation, Lowry examines the condition of exile which Conrad explored before him. It is, thus, necessary to dismantle Geoffrey's enigmatic personality which has puzzled and exasperated critics and readers alike. Like Kurtz who is within and outside an imperial identity, Geoffrey consciously crosses firm boundaries between inside and out. Indeed, Lowry shows an intersection of the public domain of a civil servant and the private space of an alcoholic exile.

But first I want to explore the outsider status of the main narrator, Jacques Laruelle. Exactly one year after Geoffrey's death, he retraces and distils his memories of his old friend, yet he is denied a single narratorial voice. There are some reasons to be considered for his limited role: firstly, he is portrayed as aiming to present Geoffrey's life objectively; secondly, he has limited access to Geoffrey's inner consciousness. So, he adopts an impersonal voice which is allied to his personal voice. He gathers different views of Geoffrey taken by the locals, evokes his own personal memories, and directly reveals the content of Geoffrey's unposted letter to Yvonne without any editorial mediation. Thomas York hints at Jacques' faith in the ethos of Flaubertian objectivity, arguing that 'Laruelle's voice does not frame Under the Volcano for the reader, nor interprets the Consul to the reader'. As I have already argued, Conrad's "decentring" aesthetics is firmly rooted in his distaste for a monolithic power, both narratorial and political.

Jacques's impersonal posture is allied to a personal touch. He pays tribute to Geoffrey's heroic struggle against the madness of the world, albeit through self-destructive alcoholism and cynicism. Upon hearing Senor Bustamente's mistaken view

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that the Consul could be an American spy, Jacques retorts that the Consul is ‘not vicious but an hombre noble’ (37). Whereas Conrad’s Marlow, in a confused and confusing testimony, idealises Kurtz as a ‘remarkable man’, Jacques pays the Consul homage he deserves.

Lowry also touches upon the predicaments of Jacques which are associated with his life-style of expatriatism. On his last day in Mexico, he faces a stark choice between returning to a France on the brink of the Second World War, and remaining in a Mexico made volatile by the rise of Fascism. His personal dilemma takes on a universal nature when it is read within the context of the social and political reality surrounding him. He is afflicted by regrets about his underachievement: ‘He had intended to make a film which is a modern film version of the Faustus story modelled on Trotsky’ (14), and he suffers from the disparity between his ambition and execution. Jacques dwells upon his own failure with a tinge of regret: by taking refuge in art, he can be seen as representing the shameful silence of bourgeois intellectuals facing political oppression. Lowry establishes an elegiac tone through Jacques’s melancholic mood.

In addition, Lowry locates the novel in Mexico where the cult of suffering is upheld; he also chooses the Day of the Dead which is the Mexican national mourning day. Then, Jacques uses an expressionistic style in observing thunderclaps, drifting dark clouds, and sweeping darkness. Such ominous elemental forces are artistically chosen to underline the madness of the modern world caught in the vortex of war. While passing through the ruins of Maximilian’s Palace and the abandoned Cortez Garden, with hindsight Jacques draws a striking parallel between the tragic fate of the Emperor Maximilian and his wife Carlota and that of Geoffrey and Yvonne - both couples are foreign exiles victimised by political violence in Mexico. The issue of the physical vulnerability of exiles is further linked with the theme of betrayal which is one of the thematic thrusts in Conrad’s work. Lowry uses a historical allusion to universalise the condition of exile. The ill-fated Maximilian I was sent out by Napoleon III as Emperor of Mexico, yet he was betrayed by the French troops on which his power rested and
subsequently, despite his compassion for the Mexicans, he was executed by the rebel forces in 1867. His wife, Carlota, returned to Austria where she became insane as a result of her psychic traumas. Geoffrey and Yvonne follow a similar fate in displacement. Jacques survives to tell this tragic story of exiles, his own existential despair linked with his dispossession. He, thus, is not immune to the sense of doom which affected both couples.

Jacques is one of those European expatriates who fled from the European battlefield. Edward Said draws a distinction between expatriates like Jacques and exiles like Geoffrey: ‘Expatriates may share in the solitude and estrangement of exile, but they do not suffer under its rigid proscriptions’. Such a comment rings true when we compare Jacques’s survival with Geoffrey’s death. Jacques is implicated in a web of tragedy from which he escapes unscathed, at least physically. The volume of Elizabethan plays (that he failed to return to Geoffrey and did not open until after Geoffrey’s death) helps to establish a common tragic awareness. But whereas Geoffrey actually lived like a Faustian hero, Jacques is inspired only in imagination:

He [Jacques] wanted it because for some time he had been carrying at the back of his mind the notion of making in France a modern film version of the Faustus story with some such character as Trotsky for its protagonist: as a matter of fact he had not opened the volume till this minute (33).

Jacques’s neglect of making the proposed film highlights his failure to assume responsibility as a social being. In a free state, he suffers from a crippling dislocation and only sees hardship for the future:

A sense of fear had possessed him again, a sense of being, after all these years, and on his last day here, still a stranger. Four years, almost five, and he still felt like a wanderer on another planet. Not that that made it any the less hard to be leaving, even though he would soon, God willing, see Paris again. Ah Well! He had few emotions about the war, save that it was bad. One side or the other would win. And in either case life would be hard. Though if the Allies lost it would be harder. And in either case one’s own battle would go on (15).

We might compare Conrad’s Professor of Languages in *Under Western Eyes*, an English expatriate residing in Geneva. Both narrators experience more than one culture and have what Salman Rushdie calls a ‘stereoscopic vision’ of home and abroad. Edward Said also argues for the privileged point of view of those who are displaced, arguing that ‘exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that - to borrow a phrase from music - is *contrapuntal*’. Jacques maintains a reciprocity between two countries.

Lowry also hints at the disadvantages of falling between two stools without a sense of belonging, since Jacques remains indifferent to all politics partly because he has no community to anchor him. Furthermore, like Conrad’s Kurtz, Jacques has a moral capacity to examine his failure with a sense of horror:

> Yet in the Earthly Paradise, what had he done? He had made few friends. He had acquired a Mexican mistress with whom he quarrelled, and numerous beautiful Mayan idols he would be unable to take out of the country, and he had - (16).

Jacques suffers from a pang of conscience for being non-political and ahistorical. Indeed, he neglects to practise the principle of love for mankind and instead fetishizes exotic artefacts and seeks esoteric pleasure. Nonetheless, his critical reflection upon the collective failure of bourgeois individuals in the 1930s is notable.

Hugh Firmin is a political journalist who makes astute observations on the contemporary political landscape. He is also an outsider figure whose credibility is undermined by his opportunistic adventurism. His reportage is conducted by mimicry of radical ideologies rather than with journalistic impartiality. In a sense, he is something like one of V.S. Naipaul’s mimic men. As many of Naipaul’s bogus liberals do, Hugh promises all and delivers little. Like Jacques, he suffers from a discord between serious

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intention and quixotic pursuit. In imagination he is eager to fight against the Fascists in Spain, yet in reality he only contemplates shipping a cargo of arms to the Loyalists. Later, at the scene of the dying Indian, he once again fails to deliver any practical help.

Given the fact that Hugh is Geoffrey's half-brother, it is tempting to see him as Geoffrey's alter-ego; as John Orr points out, Lowry uses the method of 'the simultaneous presencing of the doubled self'.20 Orr goes on to argue that 'Hugh is the Consul potent and sober', yet he fails to fathom his half-brother's inner consciousness. However, Hugh has his moments: on a morning ride with Yvonne, he is well aware that their movements are under surveillance from the watchtower. His personal belief that 'the world was always within the binoculars of the police' (110) reflects an oppressive political reality engendered by mistrust and suspicion between democratic and totalitarian states. He is clear-eyed about his profession too: his profound scepticism about the role of journalist is apparent when he quotes Spengler's words: 'journalism equals intellectual male prostitution of speech and writing' (104). Both Jacques's filmmaking and Hugh's journalistic vocation offer little to shape and change the destiny of mankind, although their insights are still of some value.

As an outsider figure, Hugh crosses territorial borders and breaks barriers of thought and experience. As his disenchantment with a national culture grows, Hugh goes to Spain and then to Mexico and finally vanishes to an unknown destination. His restless mobility enables him to maintain a dual vision of home and abroad. Arguably, Hugh can be seen as a further development of Hilliot in Ultramarine; indeed, Under the Volcano in a sense charts what followed after Hilliot's homecoming from his sea voyage.

Hugh rebels against the inert traditionalism of English society whilst he pursues radical ideologies abroad. He is seen as a flawed character in the sense that he fails to translate his radical ideals into fruitful action. Like Conrad's Lord Jim, Hugh can best

be described by a collated image of rebel and clown. Jacques sums up his abiding impression of Hugh with both sympathy and contempt:

In half an hour he'd dismissed him [Hugh] as an irresponsible bore, a professional indoor Marxman, vain and self-conscious really, but affecting a romantic extroverted air. ... In the hours which followed his response to Hugh's telephone call from Parian M. Laruelle learned much about Hugh: his hopes, his fears, his self-deceptions, his despair. When Hugh left, it was as if he had lost a son (14).

Both Jacques and Hugh share a sense of guilt about their failure to take political action. Arguably their expatriate and nomadic life styles has made it difficult for them to make a real commitment to changing the world. Lowry keeps a critical distance from both characters:

For Hugh, at twenty-nine, still dreamed, even then, of changing the world (there was no other way of saying that) through his actions - just as Laruelle, at forty-two, had still then not quite given up hope of changing it through the great films he proposed to make. After all he had made great films as great films went in the past. As far as he knew they had not changed the world in the slightest (15).

Nonetheless, Hugh has a capacity to criticise the fabric of English society and he emerges as an anti-Establishment figure. While in Ultramarine, Hilliot as outsider offers a compelling criticism of conventional and repressive class-bound English society, Hugh regards the Phelocetes on which he once sailed as a microcosm of class-bound English society with himself as outsider:

But if he had expected to leave British snobbery astern with his public school he was sadly mistaken. In fact, the degree of snobbery prevailing on the Phelocetes was fantastic, of a kind Hugh had never imagined possible. ... The whole ship rolled and weltered in bourgeois prejudices and taboos the like of which Hugh had not known even existed (166).

On the ship, Hugh observes the mood and attitude of British life, in particular, traditional British philistinism. His distaste for bourgeois prejudices leads him to defend proletarian virtues. However, while he is attracted by leftist political ideologies, he shows no real commitment to them. For example, he was initially a staunch supporter of Zionism' out of sympathy for the Jews, an epitome of the dispossessed. But later he turns into a supporter of Anti-Semitism because of his personal bitterness over his
Jewish publisher who, motivated by commercial interest, destroys Hugh's credibility as a
song-writer by hinting at plagiarism. Here, the theme of betrayal resurfaces. Such
inconsistencies in his political line continue as the novel develops. Whilst he is
convinced that 'Marxism is a new spirit which can replace any existing ideologies', he
fails to be a true revolutionary. He holds himself aloof from the dying Indian Bank
courier; he instead merely imitates the identity of Juan Cerillo, an authentic revolutionary
figure who fought for an elimination of exploitation, injustice and poverty in Mexico.
Hugh, therefore, is not a political engagé but a mimic man. Nonetheless, what saves him
from contempt is his moral capacity for self-criticism which is exemplified when he
sums up his past as 'negative, selfish, absurd, and dishonest' (156).

Yvonne Constable, an American actress and Geoffrey's estranged wife, is the
only female figure of substance in the novel. She is pictured as a victim under the
patriarchal regime. Since childhood, she has been orphaned, betrayed, uprooted, and
alienated. Through her, Lowry reinforces familiar themes such as absence of love, fear
of tyranny, and a sense of betrayal. She had to nurse her alcoholic father; she was
brought up 'under Uncle Macintyre's strict regime; she is betrayed by her first
husband's infidelity; at the present time she is divorced and childless. Her predicament
elicits sympathy. She struggles hard to stand outside hierarchical and patriarchal
structures through both her sexuality and her fantasies. So once again Lowry treats her
with an ironic even-handedness.

Lowry amply demonstrates his complex management of human consciousness
which is achieved by his skill in overlapping and interacting. The fact that Yvonne is a
'bereaved and dispossessed orphan' (267) is reminiscent of Geoffrey's and Hugh's
unhappy childhood. Besides, the fact that she becomes famous as a film star in
Hollywood reminds us of Hugh's short-lived success as a song-writer and Jacques'
skill in making films. Here, the thinking behind the construction of her public persona is
Lowry’s profound scepticism about the glamour of her public image. As an actress, she lives in a world of fantasies created on the screen, yet in reality she suffers from ultimate alienation: she is an outsider. Lowry rehearses a familiar idea of the incongruity between public domain and private space.

Yvonne’s obsession with self-created fantasies is, like alcoholism, a kind of defence mechanism. It is tempting to dismiss fantasies as irrational, but we cannot underestimate their subversive function - a projection of an active desire for what is lacking in society. There is a realistic edge behind her decision to release a small eagle imprisoned in a wooden cage outside the little cantina El Pelate. By performing this symbolic act, she projects her wish to liberate herself from domestic patriarchy and reveals her affection for the lot of those oppressed like herself. The caged eagle reminds us of the stranded pigeon in Ultramarine. Understandably, when she watches the bird soaring high above volcanoes, she feels an ‘inexplicable secret triumphal relief’ (321). This is the moment when she releases her repressed fear. Indeed, she has suffered from a constant fear of tyranny: ‘the real terror she’d felt when she actually had been caught in a ravine with two hundred stampeding horses’ (262). This nightmare becomes reality when she is crushed to death under the hooves of the runaway horse in the forest. Lowry highlights the dual operation of her consciousness which revolves around resistance and surrender.

Yvonne’s resistance to tyranny is in stark contrast with the false consciousness which characterises Conrad’s white women such as Marlow’s aunt and Kurtz’s Intended - they uncritically endorse an imperialist ideology which perpetuates suffering and exploitation. But Yvonne has only a half-fermented idea of oppositional engagement. Her loathing of domestic tyranny does not develop into political will, although Lowry appears to locate the germ of Fascism in the patriarchal family. Furthermore, while her fantasies not only resist mimetic representation but undermine the concept of rationality, they have both positive and negative effects. Yvonne’s fantasies at once sustain and destroy her life.
Geoffrey's outsider status needs scrutiny. Like Conrad's Kurtz, he is both a public servant and an alcoholic exile. Lowry also highlights the Consul's fragmented and hybridised identity - he is a British Consul of Anglo-Indian origin who aspires to be a Mexican subject. So, it is certainly not illuminating to judge his multicultural identity according to a single national and cultural strain. He has served the British Government, first as a naval lieutenant-commander during the First World War and later as a Consul in a provincial Mexican town, but he shuns publicity when his disenchantment with a national culture grows. As an outsider, he questions the validity of patriotism which fuels antagonism between peoples. He is traumatised by the atrocity committed by his crew on the ironically named S.S. Samaritan who burnt alive the German captives on a U-boat. Later, when Britain severs diplomatic ties with Mexico in protest against the Mexican Socialist Government's decision to expel foreign oil companies, Geoffrey's Consular service ceases to function; he is left doubly stranded. These two events explain his bitterness over antagonism between countries, while his political despair not only prompts his exile but intensifies his alcoholism.

Lowry maintains an ironic even-handedness in dealing with the Consul whose cynicism is combined with warm humanity. Geoffrey raises a dissenting voice against political violence committed by the allies as well as those responsible for the Holocaust. Despite his own drift into alcoholism, he continues to show concern for human decency as in the instance of the dying Indian Bank courier, an exemplary Samaritan who becomes a victim of universal Fascism. What is at issue here is the barbarism which threatens the very foundation of civilisation. This is reminiscent of the distaste for imperial barbarism found in Conrad.

Geoffrey inevitably suffers from a rupture between his public and private selves: whilst he is publicly praised for his gallantry, he is privately stigmatised for the atrocity to the U-boat crew. Here, a comparison between Lowry's and Conrad's outsider figures such as Kurtz and Lord Jim sheds light on some features of dissenters whose
egocentrism defies cultural constraints and reason. The abuse of power is discernible in both Kurtz’s self-gratification and the Consul’s alcoholism. Predictably, neither of them survive because they fail to control their destructive passion. Another area of comparison is the opposite direction taken by outsider figures such as the Consul and Lord Jim. Whereas Lord Jim clings to his fragile idealism and tries to redeem his lost honour, the Consul chooses to remain in obscurity and embraces cynicism. Such a contrast is made by the narrator of Under the Volcano: ‘Unlike “Jim” he had grown rather careless of his honour and the German officers were merely an excuse to buy another bottle of mescal’ (39). But despite such differences, both Geoffrey’s alcoholism and Jim’s dream-intoxication both point to the outsider’s break with Western rationality. I would also stress that both writers do not forsake their critical detachment from their outsider figures who are strikingly dramatised.

A brief look at Geoffrey’s life reveals his prevailing notion of lovelessness which is at once personal and political. In childhood, he was orphaned when his father disappeared into the Himalayas and his mother subsequently died; later he was adopted by an English family. In maturity, he experiences the break-up of his marriage; he sees the severance of diplomatic ties between Britain and Mexico. It is here that we should look at how his personal view of life affects his political outlook and vice versa. In his letter to Yvonne, he vents his anger at her cruel act of desertion: ‘Oh Yvonne, we cannot allow what we created to sink down to oblivion in this dingy fashion’ (45). This comment is echoed at the very moment of his dying: ‘Christ, he remarked, puzzled, this is a dingy way to die’ (374). The fact that he repeats the word ‘dingy’ can be read as a desperate plea for the human decency which is missing. It is a supreme irony that Geoffrey’s affection ultimately finds expression in his addiction to alcohol. His peculiar mentality is apparent when he justifies ‘the necessary, the therapeutic drink’ (54):

Alas, what has happened to the love and understanding we once had! What is going to happen to it - what is going to happen to our hearts? Love is the only thing which gives meaning to our poor ways on earth: not precisely a discovery, I am afraid. You will think I am mad, but this is how I drink too, as if I were taking an eternal sacrament (45).
Geoffrey masks a desperate insecurity with alcoholism which is a kind of defence mechanism against the harsh reality facing him. The unposted letter addressed to his estranged wife reveals his conflicting drives - a desire to reclaim love and a desire to abandon it. Senor Bustamente, the owner of the local bar and cinema, captures Geoffrey’s pathetic image by describing him as the ‘poor lonely dispossessed trembling soul that had sat drinking here night after night’. Dr Vigil, Geoffrey’s Mexican friend, also identifies the root cause for Geoffrey’s alcoholism in ‘sickness not only in the body, but in the soul’.

Geoffrey’s alcoholism inevitably courts controversy, since there has to be a real danger when alcohol becomes a ‘personal totem’. It is helpful to remember Almayer who in displacement fetishises European goods as the emblem of his European identity. Outsider figures’ mental fixations entail a danger of bypassing the real issue. Indeed, in Geoffrey’s case, the influences of alcohol and displacement cause places and situations become unreal. Yet there is an irony here: the deepening phantasmagoria of mescal precipitates the disintegration of self which actually helps to shape the decentred narrative.

It is legitimate to argue that Under the Volcano is a text which explores the condition of exile. Tzvetan Todorov defines an exile like the Consul as ‘someone who interprets his life in a foreign country as an experience of non-belonging to his milieu, and who cherishes it for that very reason’. The dispossessed Geoffrey suffers from a fear of eviction, which, according to Tony Bareham, is ‘a kind of displacement of the spirit’. He has the notion that he is an outcast from society and perhaps from the paradise of Eden when he encounters the warning notice put on the fence in Mexican Spanish, which he translates as, ‘You like this garden? Why is it yours? We evict those who destroy!’ (132). But his fear of eviction has led him to mistranslate it. By contrast,

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Hugh correctly reads it: "Do you like this garden which is yours? Take care not to let your children destroy it". What interests me here is that Geoffrey's subjective perceptions convey a certain psychological truth - that is, his presence in his neglected garden reinforces his notion of an expulsion from the paradisal garden. Moreover, in the garden he reflects upon his physical vulnerability when he spots 'the insect [which is] still flying furiously in the cat's mouth' (144). Here, he clearly identifies with the doomed insect. Later, such fear is actualised when he looks down the yawning barranca (a similar kind of fear to that which Conrad's Jim undergoes before his impulsive jump into an 'everlasting deep hole'). The image of 'the jaws of death' which connects both of Lowry's scenes reveals Geoffrey's existential despair which is related to being an outsider.

Geoffrey's cynicism about all political causes has its merit. At least, it rules out any room for sentimentality, complacency, and self-deception. It also breeds a peculiar personal philosophy of non-interference which is the opposite of Sartre's engagement. Nonetheless, whereas both Conrad and Naipaul often stand accused of an alleged 'imperialist gaze' (Conrad is often called a writer of imperialist text, according to Edward Said; Naipaul is often called a traitor who privileges English culture, turning a deaf ear to native voices, according to Selwyn Cudjoe.), Lowry appears to establish his credentials as an anti-imperialist. In imagination Geoffrey makes fruitful connections between self and world, for example, drawing a parallel between powerless individuals and defenceless countries and forming an anti-conquest rhetoric which is appealing:

Not long ago it was poor little defenceless Ethiopia. Before that, poor little defenceless Flanders. To say nothing of course of the poor little Belgian Congo. And tomorrow it will be poor little defenceless Latvia. Or Finland. Or Piddledeedee. Or even Russia. Read history. Go back a thousand years. What is the use of interfering with its worthless stupid course? Like a barranca, a ravine, choked up with refuse, that winds through the ages, and peters out in a - What in God's name has all the heroic resistance put up by poor little defenceless peoples all rendered defenceless in the first place for some well-calculated and criminal reason - (311-2).
Geoffrey vehemently opposes the older imperial rhetorics of European territorial expansionism. In the light of this political stance, he endorses anti-Fascism, anti-Imperialism, anti-Totalitarianism, and De-colonisation.

Geoffrey’s cynicism thus proves to be an effective tool with which he can protest against an abuse of power by the oppressors over the oppressed. But it is not without its problems, one of the most serious being an exclusion of resources of self-renewal and commitment. Here, what is relevant to his leftist thought is Walter Benjamin’s tragic awareness of imperial expansionism, ‘There is no document of civilisation which is not at the same time a document of barbarism’. 24 Geoffrey opposes both Imperialism and Fascism - unitary ideoloies which justify and impose a totalising power over the weak and the oppressed. His reflection upon the situation of the ‘poor little Belgian Congo’ gives a strong hint that Lowry is referring to Conrad. So it is legitimate to find implicit a reading of Conrad as an ‘anti-imperialist’ (it is enough to remember that he had an absolute distaste for Russian imperial domination) within Lowry’s depiction of Geoffrey as an anti-fascist.

Which is not to say that Lowry does not view Conrad critically. In his letter to Downie Kirk dated ‘April or May [sic], 1951,’ Lowry reveals his disappointment about Conrad’s characteristic aloofness:

*Heart of Darkness* indeed! Joseph Conrad should have been to Haiti. What he failed to understand was that the savages of the Congo had to some extent subdued the dark forces that are in nature by creating their religion in the first place, in order to subdue them; that that, in its way, was a civilizing, almost a pragmatic process. A white man comes along and is made a God and uses the same magic to keep and to gain power with these "unspeakable" rites, etc. But in my estimation it was the white man who had corrupted them with his own brand of unspeakableness. Anyhow that story - great though it is - is at least half based on a complete miscomprehension. . . . It is clear that Comrade Joseph did not allow himself to be corrupted by any savages though: he stayed in Polish aloofness on board in company with some *a priori* ideas. 25

This passage highlights the clash between Lowry’s alignment with the Mexicans and Conrad’s ultimate detachment. But, as many political *engagés* often do, Lowry fails to

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read Conrad’s ironic distancing from Marlow (an irony, as I have stated before, often found in the writing of the powerless outsider confronting the dominant culture). V.S. Naipaul, a formidable cultural critic of our time, expresses his view of Conrad:

[He] is a writer who is missing a society, and is beginning to understand that fantasy or imagination can move more freely within a closed and ordered world. Conrad’s experience was too scattered; he knew many societies by their externals, but he knew none in depth.26

Naipaul appears to be in a better position to examine the ‘Other’ than Conrad who has only superficial glimpses of ‘Otherness’, but his detractors also dismiss Naipaul as a disqualified spokesperson for the Third World because of his apparent ‘pro-Western’ stance. It is all too often risky to categorise the political stance of a writer whose perspective and identity is shifting and interacting.

Lowry himself maintains an ironic distance from Geoffrey who is at once a dissenter and a defeatist. A major critical blind-spot is to disregard the distance between author and character. Confusion arises as to the extent of this distance. Arguably Conrad maintains an ironic distance from Marlow who both refutes and reinforces imperialist ideology. Naipaul has been at once criticised and praised as an eloquent apologist for the British Empire, yet he too can be read as avoiding one-sided position-taking by maintaining his critical detachment. The ironic consciousness which characterises these writers opposes uncritical allegiance to a dominant ideology.

Lowry charts a dual operation within Geoffrey’s consciousness which hinges on defiance and self-surrender. In an age of extremes when individual liberty is being denied, Geoffrey dissents and remains defiant. Like the damned Faustian hero, Geoffrey abuses his egocentric power; in his half-drunken state, ‘no thought of escape now touched [his] mind’. Such arrogance provokes his interrogators and invites retribution. Yet at the same time, his surrender to political despair is apparent when outside the cantina he catches glimpses of the military barracks, of the watchtower, of the ragged

platoon of marching soldiers - all are signs of a Fascist organisation in operation. Subsequently, he seems to gauge his existential despair when he, like Jim who has to jump into that ‘everlasting deep hole’, is looking down at ‘a sheer drop to the bottom of the ravine, a dark, melancholy place’ (339).

There is be another dimension of this despair associated with Geoffrey’s status as a foreigner. He tries to embrace multiple identity through fabrication and mannerism, but such aspirations are not acceptable to the Mexican fascist gang who represent uncritical allegiance to a unitary ideology. Moreover, in an age of mistrust and suspicion, his aspiration is tragically misplaced. Under Mexican eyes his elusive identity verges on confusion; his every movement is treated with suspicion. Geoffrey unconsciously draws the map of Spain on the table, which arouses his interrogator’s suspicions about his identity. He also unwittingly carries Hugh’s card of the Military Union of Anarchists in the jacket that Hugh borrowed and this too is misunderstood. Furthermore, he is not carrying his passport (It remains unclear whether he actually lost it at the fairground or left it at home by chance or deliberately refuses to carry it so as to proclaim that he is a citizen of the world.). He gives the false name of William Blackstone, a revolutionary figure whom Geoffrey personally imitates. When he confesses that he is a writer, his interrogator mocks him, saying “not a wrider [writer] but a spider”. So, as a result of a collapse in communication, Geoffrey, like Kafka’s K. is interrogated and executed. A combination of Geoffrey’s own wilful fabrication of his identity and his interrogator’s miscalculation helps to constitute the ultimate tragedy.

In Under the Volcano it is important to see the link between the aesthetics of decentring from a single narratorial voice and the politics of struggle against Fascism. Lowry’s aesthetics are highly politicised. He sets multiplicity against monologicality in, for instance, his diverse points of view, experimental style, disruptive narrative voice, interest in the construction of plural identities, and illusory view of reality. Similarly,
Conrad's impressionistic narrative and multiple points of view can be read as designed to undermine the authority of Western rationality/logicality. But complaints about Conrad's approach are still lingering because his provoking concealment neutralises the power to disturb normative assumptions. Martin Seymour-Smith argues that "Conrad's politics were neither reactionary nor left-wing". But in Lowry's case, his political line is more explicitly expressed without sacrificing his artistic integrity.

Lowry counterpoints the different attitudes of those who are involved in the scene of the dying Indian, stressing a common failure of both the locals and the foreigners: Geoffrey will not interfere out of a sense of futility; Hugh fails to prove his much-sought heroism; Yvonne escapes by a flight of fantasy; a foreign diplomat's car dashes away without paying the slightest attention to the predicament of the dying man. The locals are indifferent as much as the foreigners are: the pelado steals the blood-stained money from the dying Indian; the police and the taxi drivers are on strike and no action follows; the fascist gangs warn everyone not to touch the man who is working for the Socialist government; the ordinary Mexicans are immobilised by fear. Lowry highlights and illuminates the issue of inhumanity both here and in the S.S Samaritan incident, focusing on a common failure of both foreigners and locals, allies and enemies.

Lowry continues to underline the issue of human cruelty in the scene of the wretched bull in the Tomalin arena, a metaphor for a theatre of cruel killing. He once again charts the different reactions of those who are involved: Geoffrey is despairing; Hugh jumps into the arena to prove himself; Yvonne envisages an alien place to evade the scene in front of her; and Mexican spectators are excited over the butchery which hints at holocaust and ethnic cleansing in our time.

Nowhere is Lowry's resistance to monolithic, rational thought more evident than in his fascination with alcoholism which blurs any rigid boundary between the real and the unreal. Geoffrey's decentred self destabilises syntax, sometimes making it rambling

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and self-indulgent, and produces a kind of schizophrenic writing which resists mimetic representation. Like a writer in perpetual motion, the schizophrenic experiences a shifting ground between sanity and madness, between reality and fantasy.

Lowry also constructs narrative by espousing a principle of contingency which is opposed to logic. This new approach appears to do full justice to the outsider’s sensibility which is constantly shifting and interacting. As Malcolm Bradbury argues, ‘Geoffrey Firmin is a man following signs, the seemingly contingent notices - street signs, advertisements for films, the random Spanish phrases, which in their very ambiguity of false translatability become coded messages pointing the pathway to damnation’. Upon arrival at the rail station with a mission to rescue Geoffrey from a hellish place, Yvonne overhears an announcement: ‘A corpse will be transported by express’. Such sinister remarks not only dampen her renewed hope but presage her tragic death. While walking together, Geoffrey and Yvonne encounter the picture entitled La Despedida (the Parting) displayed on the show-windows of a printing shop: ‘a photographic enlargement, purporting to show the disintegration of a glacial deposit in the Sierra Madre, of a great rock split by forest fires’ (59). This ‘random’ data represents an aesthetic choice. The split rock serves as an objective correlative for a broken marriage. It also represents a looming disaster facing mankind. Interestingly, this same object evokes quite different responses: whereas Yvonne contemplates the possibility of a ‘single integrated rock’ with the hope of reconciliation, Geoffrey dwells upon a terrible disaster in the future. By exploring both readings, Lowry maintains precarious tensions rather than prescribing solutions.

Similarly, Conrad’s insistence on a principle of contingency/provisionality undercuts the totalising potential of logicality/rationality. The Patna crisis is triggered by irrational elemental forces; Jim’s impulsive jump all but dominates the entire development of the narrative. By such devices, Conrad suggests a distrust of a unified discourse based upon certainty and uniformity. Furthermore, his obsfucating rhetoric

can be read as a refusal to contain all experience within rational exposition. It is not accidental that he presents Kurtz as undergoing a dissolution of the rational self. Kurtz’s deviations can be seen as at once a sign of moral dilletantism and a revolt against Western values. Both Lowry and Conrad turn ‘normality’ upside down with a suggestion that it closely resembles monstrous aberration.

Lowry associates Geoffrey with certain places to underline the condition of exile, highlighting displacement, dispossession, and vulnerability. In the neglected garden, as I have shown, he suffers from a fear of eviction; in the sinister cantina, he faces a physical danger. By contrast, Lowry associates Yvonne with certain places such as the paradisal forest and the constellations to underline her transcendental desire. Here, her fantasies about alien places are a sign of her spiritual displacement. By looking at her compact-mirror, Yvonne tries to capture the eternal world of the twin snow-capped volcanoes of Ixtaccihuatl and Popocatepetl which are seen as an ‘image of the perfect marriage’ (97). This is an attempt to escape from unbearable reality. Meanwhile, Geoffrey is driven by a destructive urge which negates everything. Upon noticing the movement of the vultures hovering over the volcanoes, he compares them to ‘burnt papers floating from a fire which suddenly are seen to be blowing swiftly upward, rocking’ (97). His negative attitude prefigures the failure of salvage operation. By graphically charting Yvonne’s upward movement and Geoffrey’s downward one, Lowry interweaves redemption and damnation at once.

9

The strength of Under the Volcano lies in a balancing act between political concerns and the striving for an integrity of artistic expression. Lowry avoids writing a didactic and politically clamorous novel in favour of orchestrating eclectic voices. Indeed, he excludes authorial control and coherence. Jacques does not reappear in the concluding part of the novel. This deliberate omission can be read as Lowry’s distaste
for any form of totalising narratorial voice. His democratic impulse is apparent behind his attempt to release the reader from the tyranny of authorial control.

Regrettably, Lowry’s attempt to reconcile his political purpose with his artistic considerations has been undervalued. For he does indeed support interaction between aesthetics and politics. To illustrate this point, I shall consider the film *Las Manos de Orlac*, mentioned in the novel, which represents political violence with a powerful visual image of blood-stained hands. Peter Lorre’s film is based upon the story of a pianist whose lost hands are replaced with the transplanted hands of a murderer by a German scientist belonging to the Nazi party. Thus the street poster advertising this film economically epitomises the universal predicament of the tormented artist under the Nazi regime. Lowry encourages us to see the danger of the extinction of individuality under a collective ideology. Viewed from this perspective, Lowry has strong objection to an artistic autonomy which is divorced from political reality. Equally, he upholds the view that too graphic a statement of political commitment distorts artistic vision. By looking at the intersection between aesthetics and politics, he appears to overcome a one-sided exposition and explores creative tensions, making fruitful connections amongst fragments, episodes, characters, and places and achieving his own brand of an artistic unity. The poster of the blood-stained hands prefigures the scene of the dying Indian and that of Geoffrey’s murder. The fact that all three characters involved are victims of Fascism clearly reflects Lowry’s interest in political reality.

10

Few will now dispute the fact that *Under the Volcano* is one of the most important post-war novels. But to argue that the novel is a political parable is a reductive reading. Tony Bareham comments on Lowry’s balancing act, arguing that the novel is ‘one of the most powerful political novels of our time’ with the ‘unpolemical and undidactic nature of its presentation of events’.29 Indeed, as I have argued, Lowry’s

political concerns are checked by artistic integrity. He creates this novel as a reflexive text - a novel of situation, not a novel of action.

Lowry thus remains first and foremost an artist with an acute political consciousness. Geoffrey knows that he cannot alter the world at will, yet even in his alcoholic despair, he clings to his defiance. Although his action is limited to confronting his interrogator with a machete, he emerges as a man of conscience. The fate of Kafka's K under a totalitarian state closely parallels Geoffrey's situation. But Geoffrey has a streak of defiance that K lacks and moreover he has a much clearer comprehension of the world surrounding him than K who remains puzzled about political reality. Both Kafka (a German-speaking Jew displaced in Prague) and Lowry bear witness to an extinction of individuality under totalitarianism in general and Fascism in particular.

Thus, Under the Volcano registers a lament for the disappearance of human decency. Its ending suggests no redemption, neither personal nor universal, with a chilling sentence: 'Somebody threw a dead dog after him down the ravine' (376). Ironically Geoffrey's true comrade is either the bottle or a dead dog. His desire for human fellowship remains tantalisingly elusive: 'Someone had called him companero too, which was better, much better. It made him happy' (374). However, neither a decent burial nor a public enquiry into the murder incident is likely to follow in Mexico where law and order is virtually paralysed. Lowry presents Geoffrey as at once a victim of his outsider status and a victim of Fascism.

Throughout my discussion, my main tasks have been (1) to unearth Lowry's dissenting voice; (2) to demonstrate his capacity to connect, to link, and to relate; (3) to illuminate and highlight the condition of exile which has elicited little critical attention from those who insist on an allegiance to roots and origins. I stand by my contention that Lowry is neither a mimic writer nor an apolitical writer, but a compelling outsider. I have also explored the seriousness and importance of Lowry's aesthetics and politics; by making a conscious attempt to de-localise and de-territorise, Lowry goes beyond a parochial and nationalistic view of art and formulates a global vision. The value of an
outsider's dual vision of home and abroad certainly merits consideration within the wider debate involving the clash between nationalism and multiculturalism today. Moreover, in a time when the outsider's experiences of crossing national and ethnic boundaries become the rule rather than the exception, Lowry's case is ripe for review. I shall continue to explore these issues as I turn to his other works.
THE OUTSIDER'S SHIFTING PERCEPTION AND TRANSFORMING POWER

1

The negative perception of the outsider's uprooting is typified by Nadine Gordimer, who expresses her view about the desirable relation between the writer and society as 'the feeling that to go into exile is to lose your place in the world, your responsibility, your source. To be a good writer you have to be a citizen'.

This claim has some truth, but there is a lurking danger of regionalism where point of view is tied to one culture. The positive advantages of not being so tied have been demonstrated by many literary exiles. Henry James, for instance, crusaded against provincialism and for internationalism; James Joyce eschewed Irish provincialism for the vantage point of exile in Europe; and, as I have already argued in the previous section, Salman Rushdie champions the outsider's capacity to maintain a dual vision of home and abroad. And despite clear evidence of Lowry's personal struggle against ultimate metaphysical despair, his experiences of border-crossing do appear to nourish his art, even when they compound his misery. Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid (1968) highlights both the hazards and rewards of Lowry's particular experience of being an outsider.

Another contentious issue raised by Dark as the Grave is the validity of the genre of autobiographical fiction. Roland Barthes underlines the artist's need to make essential gestures, that is, transformations of concrete experience into artistic form. By implication, he would be dismissive of Dark as the Grave where the ethics of impersonality (or the removal of authorial presence) are by no means strictly observed. And indeed, many critics who adhere to Barthes' ideal have regarded Dark as the Grave a 'bad literature', largely because of its autobiographical bent. Their critique of the novel's confessional quality has its points, but fails to consider seriously Lowry's aim

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to abolish the conventional demarcation lines of genre. For Lowry refuses to see valid opposition between the factual and the fictive, preferring the elegance of fusion; in this, he was arguably closer to so-called postmodernist ethics than to modernism, since his persona in *Dark as the Grave* breaks with the modernist dictum that writing is a form of cool impersonality.

This novel highlights the outsider's licence to blend, collate, and transform, as I shall demonstrate. The notion of transformation is central to the outsider. Indeed, the outsider experiences life differently from those centred within a specific culture, and needs to shape his/her own vehicles to encompass the creative tensions between the desire for self-expression and the wish for self-erasure. The main points which I am going to develop in relation to *Dark is the Grave* are: (1) the outsider's experience of shifting ground caused by his uprooting, border crossing, and displacement; (2) the outsider's tendency to produce a fragmentary work which reflects his unsettled psyche; (3) the outsider's transformation of life into art.

It has sometimes been thought that art requires a long tradition and a stable society if it is to flourish. Yet very often, the outsider's anxieties about roots and origins remain a constant source of creativity.³ J.P. Stern comments on the outsider's transforming power, arguing that 'the artistic imagination does not wipe out suffering but transfixes it.'⁴ This claim is certainly true of Kafka and Lowry: both of them produce great art from their experiences of political repression, and both of them show how the outsider's experience is piecemeal, as he attempts to construct a meaningful pattern in a world which is alien to him. As Sigbjorn Wilderness says in *Dark as the Grave*, 'exile is rather a patchwork than a quilt' (79); therefore, inevitably the exile's writing cannot be a logical construction like a neat tapestry if it is to reflect the world as he experiences it. A kind of fragmentary writing may then well appear to be a natural and honest approach to reality.

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Unlike Conrad, both Lowry and Naipaul clearly consider autobiographical fiction a serious genre, yet equally clearly both writers renounce a photographic replication of reality. In his interview with Aamer Hussein, Naipaul argues for the need to blur and blend fact with imagination to make an important point, and indeed in The Enigma of Arrival, a West Indian writer displaced in the English countryside achieves just that alchemy between the actual and the fictive. Like Lowry then, Naipaul rejects the idea of sterile objectivity which not only endangers the reader-author relationship but precludes a humanistic quality.

In Dark as the Grave Lowry collates and transforms the factual and the fictive. In a letter he clearly signals a new direction: 'I think unquestionably what one is after is a new form, a new approach to reality itself'. However, such a serious intention has not been acknowledged by those critics who insist on a clear distinction between fiction and autobiography. George Woodcock argues that Dark as the Grave is 'a failure in fiction and in autobiography' because it is 'not a full revelation of his life and it takes on an air of unreal fantasy'. Certainly his dismissive view fails to see the outsider's conscious elaboration and transformation of reality. Ronald Walker also complains about Lowry's failure to achieve 'artful absence', arguing that Dark as the Grave is 'not a showpiece of the victory of art over life', being 'not a novel, rather a novel-in-progress'. Richard Cross expresses his dissatisfaction with Lowry's attempt to blend, arguing that Dark as the Grave would be 'a better, more honest book had the author explicitly abandoned fiction'. Tony Bareham too has a low opinion of Dark as the Grave:

There is an immediate critical question to be asked about the reworking of facts into valid fiction. Events which make sense within the world of the private individual may not be capable of taking on a

5 Aamer Hussein, an interview with V.S. Naipaul, "Delivering the Truth," TLS (September 2, 1994), 3-4.
large enough significance to warrant their appearance within the framework of fiction. More importantly, the fictive account requires a process of selection and a conclusion which validates the experience and gives it final shape. But real life tends not to produce such moments; distancing, revalidating, shaping. 10

Such comments, while interesting, read somewhat ironically when one considers that they were being produced at the time when magic realism, both the South American variety and its North Atlantic variants, was already in full spate, and receiving critical acclaim from other critics; and history's authenticity as anything other than story was very much part of current intellectual debate. However, more importantly for Lowry in his own time, autobiographical fiction was being dismissed by New Critics who disregarded authorial intention in favour of the autonomy of the text:

New Criticism was at its height, emphasizing the irrelevance of the writer, his biography or his intentions to the finished text. For a writer like Lowry, such knowledge proved lethal to his self-confidence and crucially undermined his efforts to write autobiographical fiction. 11

Because, by contrast, Sigbjorn Wilderness believes that an autobiographical fiction can best achieve an amalgam of life and art:

He had suddenly a glimpse of a flowing like an eternal river; he seemed to see how life flowed into art; how art gives life a form and meaning and flows on into life, yet life has not stood still; that was what was always forgotten: how life transformed by art sought further meaning through art transformed by life; and now it was as if this flowing, this river, changed, without appearing to change, became a flowing of consciousness, of mind, ... It was as if he stood on the brink of an illumination, on the near side of something tremendous, which was to be explained beyond. ... (60)

In a letter to Albert Erskine written in Spring, 1953, Lowry underlines an interactive relationship between the author and the text: "There is an artist, a poet in every man, hence he is a creature easy for anyone to identify themselves with: and his struggles are likely to be universal, even on the lowest plane". 12 Clearly, his emphasis on effective communication between audience and author reflects a democratic impulse which high art fails to deliver.

Dark as the Grave is based upon Lowry's return visit to Mexico during 1945-6. His sojourn produced travel diaries which were later transformed into fictional form - a fragmentary work in an incomplete and disjointed state. Sigbjorn Wilderness's journey starts from Vancouver Airport through Los Angeles to Mexico City Airport from which he travels to Cuernavaca and Oaxaca. Here, Lowry uses travel as a kind of inquiry about new truths, and travel provides a structural backbone to the novel. Indeed, Lowry not only distils the past but politicises his personal grievance over the murder of his old Mexican friend, Juan Fernando Martinez, a kind of Samaritan figure who volunteered to dispatch cash to remote villages so as to improve the living condition of the poor peons.

Dark as the Grave invites comparison with Heart of Darkness since both novels use the familiar journey motif of a descent into Hell and register a sense of horror. As Marlow's final encounter with Kurtz on his death-bed marks the culmination of his African quest, so Sigbjorn's visit to Fernando's tomb marks the culmination of his Mexican journey. But some differences also emerge when we compare the narrator's function: whereas Marlow's mission is to retrieve Kurtz, Sigbjorn's is to resume with the Mexican Indian courier who is his friend. In other words, whereas Marlow is involved in constructing an image of the man he seeks but has never before encountered, Sigbjorn is making a pilgrimage in search of someone he already knows to be a kindred spirit. Yet, in their different ways, both Kurtz's degradation and Fernando's murder inspire horror at human savagery. Given the fact that Fernando's murder is politically motivated so as to thwart the Socialist Government's radical land reform, Sigbjorn's personal grief mirrors public grief, too. This outsider's quest leads to a moral illumination of the age in which he lives.

Dark as the Grave is also a kind of metafiction where a writer-in-exile explores uncertainties about his life and work. Sigbjorn Wilderness wrestles with the uncertain future of The Valley of the Shadow of Death (the fictionalised title of Under the Volcano). Tony Bareham dismisses Dark as the Grave as a 'self-indulgent book about a self-indulgent man', but this view ignores the psychodynamics of a writer of in-
betweenness who reflects and observes the condition of exile, let alone uncertainty about his work. It is not accidental that a destabilised self produces a fragmentary work, a ‘novel-in-progress’, which avoids a formal and decorative function so as not to forfeit what the writer sees as truth.

Sigbjorn Wilderness is an itinerant writer who experiences shifting ground. His psychic insecurity naturally leads him to explore unsmoothed chaos rather than aspire to artificial conclusions. Beckett's well-known tenet legitimises the fragmentary construction of the outsider’s narrative: the reality of the individual is an incoherent reality and must be experienced incoherently. Indeed, Lowry shapes the narrative structure of *Dark as the Grave* in accordance with contingency in the belief that its fragmentary form successfully reflects the dislocating and disturbing impulses of a nomadic writer. George Woodcock is disappointed with ‘a flimsy plot of psychic experiences’, but he fails to recognise the psychodynamics of an exile which, by their very nature, can produce neither neat composition nor logical narrative.

*Dark as the Grave* has been sometimes read merely as a commentary on *Under the Volcano*. Richard Cross argues *Dark as the Grave* may be radically flawed by its dependence on *Under the Volcano*, ‘but it does provide us with intriguing data on the genesis of that novel’. However, compared with *Under the Volcano, Dark as the Grave* marks a radical shift in tone. In his letter to Albert Erskine dated 29 October, 1947, Lowry says: ‘I am writing what fairly can be described as a good novel’ in the conviction that ‘we progress towards equilibrium this time instead of in the opposite direction, and the result is considerably more exciting, if not even more horrible’. Indeed, whereas the Consul is deserted and killed, Sigbjorn is remarried and rehabilitated.

A writer of in-betweenness creates a space which is a place for mediation between conflicting drives of hope and despair. Sigbjorn Wilderness considers his trip to Mexico as a nightmarish journey which, by contrast, his wife Primrose sees as a honeymoon trip belatedly marking their wedding anniversary. As Terence Bareham rightly observes, 'two processes go on simultaneously in Lowry's fiction', and Lowry engenders creative tensions between them. The contrasting aspects of Sigbjorn and Primrose are evident in the following:

She [Primrose] delighted in treading these walks Sigbjorn had brought alive for her or that she herself had made alive: all these things made her heart dance, to sing, as she put it, like the calandria, in the tulipan. This was her life. This was her rebirth, her becoming phoenix. And yet, while Primrose was being renewed again, Sigbjorn seemed to see nothing, to love nothing, to sway away from her into some anguish of the past, into some agony of self, chained by fear, wrapped in the tentacles of the past, like some gloomy Laocoon.... (177).

Primrose represents a principle of life which counters and eventually overcomes the danger of Sigbjorn’s compulsion to suicide. Her name recalls the resilience of spring flowers. It is interesting to compare Primrose with Yvonne in Under the Volcano: whereas Yvonne takes refuge in fantasy, Primrose is earth-bound, whereas Yvonne deserts and cuckolds the Consul, Primrose consoles Sigbjorn. She rekindles the flame of life, suggested by her efforts to light the charcoal stove in their primitive lodging. She is also a devout Catholic who induces her husband to realise the symbolic meaning of a burning candle as 'a statement of the faith', 'the hope of resurrection'.

Lowry also explores the psychic complexity of individuals who experience different resonances at one and the same time. So it is hardly surprising that he allows Sigbjorn's wedding day to coincide with the great raids over Berlin, and this is not an isolated instance that triggers opposing emotions. As Irving Howe argues, 'the self is fluid, not definable but committed to a twin desire of faith and scepticism, possibility and danger', and Lowry constantly creates moments inspiring contradictory reactions so

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as to explore psychodynamics. And indeed, Sigbjorn is constantly torn between fear and expectation.

*Dark as the Grave* has been regarded as an artistic decline because of its alleged lack of the solid objectivity achieved in *Under the Volcano*. But Sigbjorn is in the process of metamorphosing from the Consul’s position; this next novel traces the successes and failures of a man out to break from a painful past without rejecting it completely. Sigbjorn’s efforts can be contrasted with Marcel Proust’s which aim to repossess and redeem the past. Sigbjorn, on the other hand, tries to exorcise those aspects of the past which have constantly haunted him like predators, yet both writers, in their very different ways, distill fresh insights from a re-viewed past.

Sigbjorn is not predominantly retrospective because he is also paving the way for a spiritual transformation which may lead to an affirmation of life. David Falk argues that the ‘creative interaction between past and present is one of the hall-marks of Lowry’s aesthetics of salvation’. Indeed, Sigbjorn eventually strikes a balance between the past and the present with this spirit of renewal, overcoming overwhelming despair, personal and political, despite making two unsuccessful suicide attempts.

At one point he breaks away from despair when struck by Epstein’s film version of Poe’s *The Fall of The House of Usher* which, contrary to the original story with its tragic ending, the director adapts so that it has ‘a happy, or a hopeful ending’ (260). Being inspired by the director’s power of transformation, Sigbjorn is determined to make himself a master of life:

What was the theme of *The House of Usher*? It was, or so it seemed to him at the moment, of the degradation of the idea of resurrection. But in the film, when the entombed was Usher’s wife and not his sister, she came back in time, as it were with the doctor’s help, to save him: they went out into the thunderstorm, but into new life. Were we not empowered as the director of that film at least to turn the apparent disaster of our lives into triumph? Suddenly it occurred to him that this was what he was doing in Mexico: was it not for him too a sort of withdrawal into the tomb? Was he the director of this film of his life? Was God? Was the devil? He was an actor in it, but if God were the director that was no reason why he should not constantly appeal to Him to change the ending. Perhaps only if he lived up to his higher self constantly, that was at all times, the best kind of actor that he could possibly be - given his limitations - perhaps only then would God think him worthy to listen to, worthy of being saved, whatever he meant by saved, and of saving Primrose (260-1).

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18 David Falk, "Lowry and the Aesthetics of Salvation," 58.
Yet despite his resolutions, Sighjorn’s renewed hope is constantly undermined by unexpected events. One of them is his encounter with John Standford, Sighjorn’s old German friend who sought a hiding place in Mexico during the war. John Standford is now completely ruined through debauchery and alcoholism, although he has made a fortune from his mines. His self-degradation is strongly reminiscent of the Consul’s, and indeed it is more than tempting to see John Standford as Sighjorn’s mirror image, which he is trying to shed. For John and Sighjorn have much in common as dissenters, and their emotional ties are in stark contrast to the straightforward antagonism between allies and enemies. Sighjorn’s dramatic encounter with his mirror image allows him to see the alternative paths which have been open to him: rehabilitation or degradation.

Another event which threatens his new-found hope is the confirmation of the news of Fernando’s murder which almost shatters his tentative optimism, yet he struggles to overcome his grief and emerges as an existential figure fighting back from the edge. Sighjorn’s transformed attitude is one of the features which distinguishes him from other modern protagonists who tragically fail to reconcile the self with the world, for example, D.H. Lawrence’s Gerald Crich in Women in Love and William Faulkner’s Quentin in The Sound and the Fury. Arguably, their despair over their culture and civilisation prompts a compulsion to self-destruction from which Sighjorn eventually disengages himself.

Sighjorn’s retrospective moments often disrupt chronological accounts of his travels. The past is always threatening to invade the present: having been emotionally scarred by the ominous behaviour of border officials, he is paranoid about being arrested as a Russian spy; glimpses of a small light coming from a prison trigger memories of his unjust imprisonment in Mexico. The political climate of mistrust and suspicion in the cold war era is mirrored here, and the intrusion of the past on the present tells much about a political reality which curbs civic freedom.

Sighjorn’s survival is partly achieved through his reconciliation with the past. While he is standing in front of the Hotel Conrada, he recalls haunting memories of being deserted by his first wife, Ruth, but he does not give in to the image conjured up:
'it was as if the ghost of a man who had hanged himself had returned to the scene of his suicide' (94). As he progresses, he recalls how he used to be supported by Fernando who often teased him, 'Ah, old maker of tragedies, are you making more tragedies?' (142); now he is supported by his wife, Primrose. This spirit of solidarity is hardly felt in *Under the Volcano* where the theme of betrayal is predominant.

As an observer, Sigbjorn has the capacity to reconceptualise reality. Such an approach overcomes the polarization of subject and object, blurring and blending the boundary between them so as to grasp a fleeting reality. From Laruelle's tower house, Sigbjorn watches a 'lunar eclipse in progress' which creates a hallucinatory mood. The gradual re-appearance of the moon merges with Sigbjorn's renewed capacity to rejoice:

What sinister omen did it hold for them, going groping into the grounds of this house on this day, and afterward what glorious silver portent? They heard the pure voice of a Mexican singing somewhere on a balcony, as if rejoicing that the world had relinquished its shadow and the moon was with them again. And after the eclipse, standing on the roof balcony, the sense of space and light, of being almost up in the sky. Long vines were waving and making shadows on sun blinds. Stars were winking like jewels out of white fleecy clouds, silver clouds; and the wide near sapphire-and-white sky, a white ocean of fleece, and the brilliant full moon sliding down the sapphire sky (127).

Again, like Jacques in *Under the Volcano*, Sigbjorn revisits the ruined Borda Garden of the Maximilian Palace and creates a surreal mood which blends with the realm of semi-consciousness:

[Sigbjorn and Primrose wandered around] the blackened dead branches and empty dead fountains of the gardens where the doomed Maximilian and Carlotta, pale royal ghosts of the Consul and Yvonne, had wandered, began to weave a pattern of mournful music through his consciousness: all the more mournful since, during a hangover this was the memory of a hangover, for he had, indeed they had, much increased their drinking since moving into the tower, even if half against their will. Indeed the Borda Gardens appeared to him much as the House of Usher had appeared to Poe: gloomy, no flowers, grassless, even the trees were dark, the flowers died in the very bud here, even the geraniums in the pots wouldn't bloom, the pillars supported nothing, and the roots of the old trees pushed up the pavement in broken waves; a few ducks swam in the shallow long pool, a few lonely old women sat here and there, some American tourists tittered and talked loudly and stupidly, an artist showed horrible bright prints, and Primrose and he wandered past the dry fountains, reading on the low leprous walls (132-133).

By drawing a striking parallel between the ruined Borda Gardens and Poe's House of Usher, Sigbjorn evokes a powerful sense of physical desolation which serves as the
metaphor for the modern wasteland caused by war. The collapse of these physical buildings is closely associated with the notion of a crumbling world. In imagination, he allows his personal spiritual climax to coincide with the climax of an important phase of European history.

George Woodcock narrowly defines the nature of Sigbjorn's journey as a 'melodramatic Lowrian search for an impossible grail' 19 without looking at the elegant interaction between private consciousness and political reality. In her Preface to *The Golden Notebook*, Doris Lessing powerfully defends the potentially universal nature of subjectivity:

Writing about oneself, one is writing about others, since your problems, pains, pleasures, emotions - and your extraordinary and remarkable ideas - can't be yours alone. The way to deal with the problem of 'subjectivity', that shocking business of being preoccupied with the tiny individual who is at the same time caught up in such an explosion of terrible and marvellous possibilities, is to see him as a microcosm and in this way to break through the personal, the subjective, making the personal general, as indeed life always does, transforming a private experience - or so you think of it when still a child, 'I am falling in love', 'I am feeling this or that emotion, or thinking that or the other thought' - into something much larger: growing up is after all only the understanding that one's unique and incredible experience is what everyone shares. 20

And the distinctive thing about Sigbjorn is his warm humanity. On his way to Quauhnahuac, he visits the Basillica church at Guadalupe where he prays not just for his personal salvation but for mankind in general. Sentimental as it may sound, Sigbjorn's sincere prayer embraces all mankind, the living and the dead:

But this time in his prayer, childlike, Sigbjorn included not only Fernando, himself, and Primrose, but the man in supplication whose hands were still held high, the woman with the child and the bottle of habanero, and the drunk, but the manager of the bank and even the world. Then almost as an afterthought, he included John Standford (254).

Clearly, Sigbjorn's private consciousness is open to the outside world. It is not accidental that he cherishes a spirit of solidarity, recalling that 'he (Fernando) had that haunting habit of putting prepositions (I like to work them with) at the end of a phrase' (221). Fernando is the man who encouraged Sigbjorn to see the bright side of life: 'I have my tragedies too. Well, we all do. Death itself is a weakness and cowardice that has

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you in its grip' (199). Sigbjorn sustains his fragile self by association with the strength of others.

Lowry of course is virtually indistinguishable from Sigbjorn: both are writers-in-exile driven into despair, personal and political. Lowry, through Sigbjorn, incorporates his personal misery - unsuccessful writer and foreigner - into the political circumstances surrounding him. Because of the peculiar political circumstances, journeying becomes the 'extension of every anxiety' (64) rather than guaranteeing the exhilaration of travel. Lowry has Sigbjorn recall how, because of the deteriorating political climate, he became a draft dodger who sought a hiding place in a provincial Mexican town where he was once again chased by neo-Franco spies and subsequently had to seek sanctuary in church. His harrowing experiences are inseparable from the political reality of war.

A study of dispossession must also be, in part, a study of the possessors, those who caused exile, massive displacement and dislocation. Sigbjorn reflects upon the issue of displacement caused by war. He himself was a sailor before he was twenty, a draft-dodger during the war period, and he is a traveller at the present time. Understandably, he is preoccupied with the issue of displacement. He recalls that 'his uncle's lawyer had sought refuge with his family in Canada during the German blitzkrieg of London'. He also instinctively understands the plight of Dr Hippolyte, the Haitian doctor displaced in Cuernavaca. He sympathises with 'a gigantic Negro clad all in white' (160) who feels uncomfortable about his problematic identity; on the one hand, Dr Hippolyte admits that as a negro he has every reason to hate the whites; on the other hand, he is flattered when he is regarded as a white man working as Charge d'affaires. Then again, while waiting for the next plane in L.A. airport, Sigbjorn notices the presence of soldiers in the queue and meditates upon their displacement caused by war: 'whole populations had been thrown into confusion and dispossessed' (57):

Both the sailors and soldiers had this in common: they looked deathly tired. So many people moving about, going back to their homes, to broken homes, leaving their homes, sailors half homesick for another sea, soldiers half seasick for another war (52).
Sigbjorn’s distaste for all that dehumanises is apparent when he overhears announcements coming from a loudspeaker which controls great masses of people at the airport: ‘most of the dialogue is taken care of by a loudspeaker that barks at regular intervals’(36). Here, in imagination he makes convincing links between the commanding voice of an anonymous loudspeaker and a unitary ideology such as Fascism which disregards individual integrity.

6

I shall now consider the dual operation of the outsider’s consciousness. For instance, Sigbjorn has an ambivalent feeling towards the Mexicans whose psyche, as he perceives it, veers between two extremes of animosity and humanity. As a foreigner, he is an easy target for Mexican animosity. He is indeed treated as ‘an imperialist American’ and is overcharged for his restaurant bill. In the past, he has been arrested by the police who were prepared to let foreigners buy bail. At the same time, he is drawn to the ordinary Mexicans who display warm humanity. The story about a little boy called Eddie highlights this humanity: he spontaneously acts to help the woman whose legs are amputated when a streetcar ran over her.

Sigbjorn consciously tries to expand the boundaries of self by engaging in a discourse about Mexican history which reveals at once fatalism and stoicism. As a tourist, he is struck by the deformed sculptures of human beings excavated from Monte Alban and regards Mexico as an epitome of human cruelty:

The guide explained the mysteries of Monte Alban. . . . ‘One of the strangest finds at Monte Alban was relief sculptures of human beings, all of whom have some bodily deformity. Some show the heads too flat, while others show them extraordinarily elongated. In some the extremities, usually the feet, are twisted, others were bent, and so forth’ (238-9).

He has himself witnessed the cruel beating of ‘a blind woman [who] tottered past carrying a dead dog’ (115). Yet equally, Sigbjorn is touched by Mexican stoicism which is well expressed in ‘Mexican babies, aware of man’s tragic end, do not cry’ (115). Through his observations, he learns to survive amid misery. He is also moved by the
ordinary Mexicans who desperately pray to ‘the Virgin for those who have nobody
them with’; Mexican stoicism paves the way for his own spiritual transformation.

Lowry takes an ambivalent view of writing. On the one hand, like Dostoevsky’s
Underground Man, Sigbjorn has a compulsion to write; on the other hand, he regards
the act of writing as ‘a form of prolonged concentrated debauch’ (58). Sigbjorn
confesses to Dr. Hippolyte his despair about the act of writing:

The author, while working, is like a man continually pushing his way through blinding smoke in an
effort to rescue some precious objects from a burning building. How hopeless, how inexplicable the
effort! (168).

Yet also, for Sigbjorn, the act of writing is another mode of participation linking him
with the outside world. And paradoxically, an exile finds in writing a home.

7

Sigbjorn emerges as an outsider who virtually abandons his ties with roots and
origins. He is displaced in Eridanus, near Vancouver, from which he travels to Mexico
where he remains a foreigner. His personal name hints at his possible links with
Scandinavian, possibly roaming Viking ancestry; his surname claims a link with territory
beyond civilisation’s limits. An outsider whose nationality is obscure, Sigbjorn tries to
embrace a universal citizenship; his mobility is essential to constructing his multicultural
identity, and his subsequent alienation is the precondition for an exile’s art.

Thus, it is hardly fair of critics to cite Dark as the Grave as proof of the poverty
of Lowry’s creativity. John Orr has argued for some sort of merit for the work: ‘In
contrast to the riches of Under the Volcano, the later novel [Dark as the Grave], with its
pastoral idylls, seem peculiarly vacuous. But to put this down to literary deterioration is
to miss the point’.21 Sherrill Grace also appreciates the merit of the novel, arguing that
in Dark as the Grave Lowry ‘experiences the ontological and aesthetic problems faced

by an artist'. And indeed, the outsider's transforming power is discernible both in Sigbjorn's self-renewal and in Lowry's creation of autobiographical fiction which collates the factual with the fictive. Despite his low opinion of this novel, George Woodcock rightly praises it for 'an extraordinary welding of the external world and the inner drama, of artist and artifact'. Dark as the Grave amply demonstrates that an exile/outsider can achieve a subtle fusion which has been missed by those who cling to a monolithic vision. The fate of a writer-in-transformation runs in close parallel with that of a novel-in-progress. The outsider's destabilised self is seen as a spur to both his/her shifting perceptions and transforming power. The outsider's psychodynamics deserve a fresh look because they are pivotal to a fair appreciation of the literature of exile. The study of the two novellas which follows will further address the outsider's dissenting voice in a much stronger tone and with greater clarity.

THE OUTSIDER'S FURY AND HARMONY

1

In Lowry's two novellas, 'The Forest Path to the Spring (1961) and 'Lunar Caustic' (1968), once again, Lowry's outsider figures make a deliberate attempt to abolish conventional demarcation lines and express dissent. Lowry adopts different genres: in 'Lunar Caustic' he comes close to dramatic form and in 'Forest' he develops the musical links of lyric prose. In 'Lunar Caustic' Bill Plantagenet, Lowry's outsider figure, problematises the long-held Western tradition of rational thought which draws a definite line between sanity and madness; in 'Forest' the unnamed narrator 'I', a jazz composer, is drawn to Chinese Taoism which embraces opposite impulses, yang and yin, and achieves an elegance of interaction.

An internal logic which links both novellas can be articulated as follows: the outsiders' fundamental dissatisfaction with Western values leads to their exploration of an alien philosophical tradition. 'Lunar Caustic' registers the outsider's existential fury at social institutions which uncritically practise compulsory hospitalisation of mental patients; by contrast, 'Forest registers the outsider's desire for healing through communion with Nature. Taken together, both stories highlight the outsider's dual aspects of rage and harmony, of advance and retreat.

As I have argued in the previous sections, Lowry's outsider figures deliberately choose to avoid polarization in favour of interaction in a wide range of areas such as class, race, culture, and gender. In 'Lunar Caustic' Lowry continues to blur firm boundaries between madness and sanity by writing from the point of view of patients hospitalised in a psychiatric ward in New York. Although the English version of 'Lunar Caustic' was published in 1968 (first published in French in 1956), its inception goes back as far as 1934 when Lowry volunteered to enter a mental hospital to explore

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2 Northrop Frye gives a succinct definition of lyric and drama: "The lyric is an internal mimesis of sound and imagery, and stands opposite the external mimesis, or outward representation of sound and imagery which is drama." Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), 250.
volatile tensions between the oppressed and the oppressors. This novella dramatises Lowry’s enduring contempt for the oppressor’s insensitivity to the schizophrenics. A consistent thematic thrust running through Lowry’s entire work is outsider figures’ anti-hegemonic energies. More importantly, Lowry sees a cause for the crisis in civilisation in the imposition of a conformist, arguably undemocratic order.

Bill Plantagenet defines his voluntary hospitalisation as ‘a deliberate pilgrimage’, an odyssey powered by a compulsion to know the world of the mental hospital from the inside. Earlier Hilliot was driven by a compulsion to enter and mediate the dichotomy between classes. In a letter to Albert Erskine, Lowry describes ‘Lunar Caustic’ as ‘a masterwork or a potential one’. Indeed, there is some justification for this, given the sustained intensity of the writing. Plantagenet, an outsider alienated from family and country, is a failed musician who subsequently becomes a confirmed alcoholic. By assuming the role of inquisitor, he examines the clash between the patients and those who supervise them. Inside the hospital, he realises despairingly that he has made ‘a voyage downward to the foul core of his world’, yet at the same time he finds a much-sought human fellowship among the inmates there, just as Hilliot did on his voyage. Outside the hospital, Plantagenet suffers from utter alienation and is likened to ‘the poor cat who had lost an eye in a battle’. Inside the hospital, he tries in vain to put the inmates’ case, but after being identified as a foreigner who cannot be legally treated, he is driven out of the hospital with no place to go except the bar. His journey leads to a profound understanding of the sense of horror permeating the mental hospital. He does manage to confront the doctor who represents an inimical social system: ‘Can’t you see the horror, the horror of man’s uncomplaining acceptance of his own degeneration?’ (328).

3 The final version reads like a fusion of two earlier pieces “The Last Address” (1940) and “Swinging the Maelstrom”.

As his adversarial stance suggests, Plantagenet takes a sympathetic view of at least three inmates: Mr Kalowsky, the schizophrenic, representing the universal predicament of the Wandering Jew, particularly under the Nazi regime; Garry, a mentally retarded teenager, who nevertheless articulates a valid vision of the disintegrating world; and Mr Battle, a deranged African American, repudiating language in favour of non-verbal modes of communication such as semaphoring, singing and dancing. In *Illness as Metaphor* Susan Sontag argues that 'illnesses have always been used as metaphors to enliven charges that a society was corrupt or unjust'. At the opposite pole to the oppressed, there are the oppressors such as Dr Claggart and Mrs Horncle, the head-nurse, who control and supervise the mentally-ill patients in the name of so-called 'normalisation'. Interestingly, the hospital itself is likened to a stage on which hostilities are exchanged. Appropriately, the sweltering weather condition serve as a metaphor for boiling tensions between two groups. So the hospital, hit by the heat haze, is seen as a sort of microcosm of society in ferment.

Michel Foucault speaks for such socially marginalised groups when he argues that 'madness begins where the relation of man to truth is disturbed and darkened'. Plantagenet's witness to Lowry's sense of injustice confirms Joseph Brodsky's view that 'literature is the only form of moral insurance a society has'. The rupture within human relationships is suggested by two contrasting groups: at the opposite pole to the patients' seething anger which represents their subversive energies, there is the anti-humanist and chilling image of the doctor's white, sterile robe, depersonalising, rational. The yawning gap between 'frenzy' and 'reason' is very indicative of their deadlock situation. By assuming the outsider's role, Plantagenet takes on the task of questioning the validity of a binary division between sanity or madness and even treats them as interchangeable.

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In the novellas, the outsider’s profound scepticism about Cartesian ideas draws him to a non-Western philosophy such as Taoism which underlines reconciliation rather than separation. In the light of Lowry’s distrust of Western rational thought, we can place him among the ranks of radical thinkers such as R.D. Laing and Michel Foucault. These left-wing intellectuals have strong objections to the ‘normalisation’ of the so-called ‘mad’ by putting more emphasis on psychodynamics than on uniform constructions of self which will tamely submit to established social institutions. In *Madness and Civilisation* (1967), Michel Foucault problematises a rational approach to socially marginalised groups such as criminals and schizophrenics, disapproving of a dominant assumption that ‘unchained animality could be mastered only by discipline and brutalization’.8 Like the fascist gang in *Under the Volcano*, the doctor in ‘Lunar Caustic’ uncritically serves the social system, abandoning on the way his integrity as an individual. The danger of the rational approach adopted by the doctor is that it ignores the psychic dynamics of the patients. Plantagenet engages in a fight against the social prejudices of the ruling group which falsify and distort the truth about those held in hospital. He appears to endorse fully the view taken by David Benham that ‘insanity is often an understandable response to an insane world’.9 Plantagenet’s confrontational style and subversive view reinforce his credibility as an outsider who challenges rather than supports those who serve a problematic social system. The outsider’s counter-hegemonic energies remain central, yet it is also this same quality that all too often makes him a victim of the politics of exclusiveness, marginalisation, and censorship.

A psychoanalytic approach is helpful for an analysis of the outsider’s psychic restiveness. Anthony Elliot appears to overcome a weakness of a Freudian approach (a tendency to exclude socio-political reality), arguing that ‘psychoanalytic discourse is [should be] designed to deconstruct the complex interplay between unconscious desire

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8 Michel Foucault, "Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason," 75.
and social life'. As I have argued, the psychic disturbances typical of outsiders are very much related to the socio-political reality surrounding them.

The common ground shared by Lowry with Laing and Foucault is a tendency to subvert traditional cosy assumptions which underlie the notion of rationality. In *The Politics of Experience* (1967), Laing takes a sympathetic look at ‘mentally-ill’ patients, and ‘Lunar Caustic’ is a literary text which endorses Laing’s conclusion that it is a supreme delusion on society’s part to claim it is right to impose ‘normalisation’ on those labelled as mentally ill. In *Madness and Civilisation* (1967) Foucault expresses a similar view. As David J. Tracy rightly says, ‘for Foucault, normality is itself insanity, and the so-called insane are actually engaged in a search for true sanity in a fundamentally mad world’.

Bill Plantagenet sees the subversive function of hallucinations which, contrary to normal expectation, are pivotal to the reconceptualisation of consciousness and the personality of the hospital inmates. In *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, Rosemary Jackson has pointed out the subversive function of fantasy, since fantasy suggests an alternative to actuality which is lacking or missing in society. Unlike the cynical Consul, Plantagenet intervenes to speak on the side of the oppressed. He argues that Kalowsky, the traumatised Jew, should be immediately transferred to a sanitorium for rehabilitation, but the doctor is unable to act, partly because he is locked in a bureaucratic system. He also argues that Garry, the ‘unformed Rimbaud’ with visionary power, should be encouraged to read books and to tell his stories so that he can formulate a valid vision of chaos, but once again the doctor fails to recognise the potential of this patient and dismisses his stories as ‘illiterate fables, or child’s stories’ (331). Again, Plantagenet takes a sympathetic view of Battle who repudiates language (or the concept of rationality) as it represses ‘the rhythm of his blood’. In this case, the doctor also fails to appreciate the vitality of the patient’s performance and bans singing

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and dancing as mere ‘noises’. Plantagenet raises a big question mark over a rational system which belittles the rich psychic space of the ‘mentally-ill’ patients who suffer from borderline conditions, and a ‘capacity to be mad without completely letting go of being sane’.13

As an outsider, Bill Plantagenet notices the sheer absurdity of the puppet show which, at least in theory as the doctor claims, is designed to ‘give the patients an opportunity to get together and control their usual tendencies for emotional outbursts’ (314), yet in practice, as Bill observes, puts them through an ordeal in a total black-out in sweltering weather. Ironically, the puppet show is counterproductive because the patients are frightened rather than entertained. What is more, the arguably genuine mad person is the puppeteer called Caspar who is ironically described as ‘a sane man from “outside”’ (314). Bill turns upside down our conventional view of madness and sanity by hinting at the madness of the inmates’ manipulators. Kalowsky and Garry are sane enough to know that what the puppet show portrays are by no means ‘humoristic stories’ but sinister dramas about terror-stricken people attacked by the Giant King Kong. The patients’ ability to maintain a critical distance from the situation in which they are placed is in sharp contrast to the total blindness of the doctor and the puppeteer as to what they are doing. Instead, Bill Plantagenet sees the relative merit of carnivalistic activity such as singing in unison. His endorsement of this activity also has the added value of defying the lifeless rigidity of law and order. What is distinctive about and peculiar to an outsider/dissenter like Plantagenet is his power and authority to interrogate an official version of truth.

It is possible to relate the mental illness of the inmates to the political and cultural condition of the age in which they live. Freud defines trauma as ‘what is past in mental life may be preserved and is not necessarily destroyed’.14 This definition helps us to understand the psychic make-up of Lowry’s three inmates, yet what is more important, is to see a continual interaction between private trauma and collective and

public memories. Kalowsky constantly suffers from his traumas related to the Holocaust, appropriately, the mental hospital serves as a metaphor for a filthy Jewish ghetto or Nazi concentration camp. Garry is also traumatised by war and he subsequently develops a fixation on the collapse of the roof of his house and further on the volcanic eruption in Pompeii; his hallucinations reveal his tragic awareness of the calamitous lack of any safe haven in the world of today. Battle keeps repeating the ballad of Titanic struck, which more or less demonstrates his outlook on global disasters. Apologists for a conformism may argue for the need to curtail the irrational side of human psyche to achieve the goal of an evolving human society. They may support ‘normalisation’ of the ‘mentally-ill’ patients through taming and repression. But an important question arises as to whether this rational approach is tenable, a question invariably raised by an outsider.

Despite the patients’ struggle, Lowry suggests no redemption by comparing the hospital to a ship which is listing. The wrecked coal barge seen through the window bars also symbolises their impasse; an avalanche of black coals fallen on the barge hints at the impossibility of escape. When the patients watch the ironically named Providence departing (like Conrad, Lowry names his ships with care), they come to realise that any chance of deliverance is remote. Even when we shift our gaze from the sea to the sky, the closure of all escape routes remains. The noises coming from the seaplane terrify rather than herald any promise for deliverance. This seaplane with the ‘blunt and luminous head of a whale’ (343) reminds us both of Herman Melville’s doomed whaling ship, the Pequod, on which Captain Ahab embraces his tragic fate and of the whale itself. Certainly, Plantagenet articulates a global vision when he thinks that ‘disaster seemed smeared over the whole universe’ (304).

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15 See also Doris Lessing’s Briefing for A Descent into Hell where she portrays the deluded patient, Professor Charles Wilkins, whose mental breakdown is firmly rooted in his fears of war. Lessing takes an outsider perspective, demonstrating that it is quite unjust to regard the patient’s hyper-sensitivity and perception as a disability. According to her, civilisation’s biggest blind spot lies in a Western medical practice which stigmatises the mentally-ill and justifies the use of powerful drug and electric shock treatment. She takes a sympathetic view of the patient’s fantasy which contains a grain of truth which is all too often easily obscured by a society which clings to rationality.
As he enters the hospital by choice and exits by force, Bill maintains a duality of vision from inside and out. Inside the hospital, his outsider perspective conflicts with the official view; indeed he undermines the doctor's single-voiced authority by his confrontational style. Outside the hospital, he reflects upon his alienation from home and country. According to Lowry's original scheme of a Dantesque trilogy, 'Lunar Caustic' was designed as purgatorio, marking a transition between Under the Volcano as inferno and 'Forest' as paradiso. Yet in the 'Lunar Caustic' we now have, another literary link is developed: Plantagenet hangs around New Bedford, Melville's home, pursuing his spiritual attachment to that voyeuristic writer of the sea. Thus, an exploration of the dichotomy between the doctor and the patients tells only half the story of the novel; the other half centres around Bill's alienation.

Lowry locates 'Lunar Caustic' in an urban wasteland of New York. Like Conrad who in The Secret Agent explores the dark side of a London which is the very heart of the British Empire, Lowry explores the grimmer aspects of the social and cultural condition of the metropolitan city. It is in this sense that this novella runs in close parallel with T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land. As Eliot's persona recalls the hyacinth garden which disappeared from the modern wasteland, so at the very heart of an urban wasteland Plantagenet tantalisingly catches glimpses of a pot of sprouting grass and the rainbow arched over a fountain. As I shall demonstrate later, Lowry's vision of the idyllic landscape is more fully explored in 'Forest'.

Plantagenet also does refuse sympathy to those who are the functionaries of a bureaucratic social system such as the doctor, the nurse, and the attendant, who are 'underpaid, overworked, and in fear of being fired'. Unlike the defiant patients who make their dissenting voices heard, those who supervise them are demoralised and obedient. Richard Cross argues that Lowry 'renders him [the doctor] a more pathetic figure than many of his patients'.

oppressed and the oppressors, underlining their common victimisation. His confrontational style deeply undermines the doctor's beliefs and confidence.

In addition, Plantagenet has an acute perception of global disasters. In his drunken state he is able to reflect upon the global calamities of his age. His perceptive eyes catch tabloid headlines: 'Thousands collapse in Heat Wave. Hundreds Dead. Roosevelt Raps Warmongers. Civil War in Spain' (296). He also takes a subversive view of the legal system, questioning the notion of justice. He spots headlines in a newspaper which indirectly express his contempt for the legal system: 'TWO SNAKES WRITHE IN COURT/ WOMEN QUAKE AS REPTILES SPIT VENOM AT TRIAL' (313). By implication, he problematises the legal system which only protects the privileged against the socially marginalised, a similar view to that taken by Winnie Verloc in Conrad's The Secret Agent, and a stance which reflects Conrad's Jim who remains defiant at the Court of Inquiry. These outsider figures challenge the very root of a problematic legal system which fails to address social justice and equality.

By drawing a parallel between the mental hospital which stigmatises so-called 'schizophrenics' and the court which discriminates against so-called 'criminals', Plantagenet vents his anger against social prejudices which ripen in social institutions which are cruel and inhumane. His perceptions lead to the following outburst:

Ennobled, he went to the washroom where he finished his bottle. Glancing round for somewhere to put it he noticed an obscene sketch of a girl chalked on the wall. For some reason, suddenly enraged, he hurled the bottle against this drawing, and in the instant he drew back to escape the fragments of glass, it seemed to him that he had flung that bottle against all this indecency, the cruelty, the hideousness, the filth and injustice in the world (346).

Together with Jim's deliberate choice of subversive silence, Bill's silent outburst is seen as another form of protest against a society which fails to address issues such as human decency and social justice. Here, silence is seen as a 'contradictory form of participation'. In 'The Aesthetics of Silence' Susan Sontag comments on the merit of the art that is silent, arguing 'Traditional art invites a look. Art that is silent engenders a
stare'.\(^{17}\) She draws a distinction between looking and staring: ‘A look is voluntary; it is also mobile, rising and falling in intensity as its foci of interest are taken up and then exhausted. A stare has, essentially, the character of a compulsion; it is steady, unmodulated, “fixed”.'\(^{18}\) Indeed, the outsider’s silence carries the weight of subversive energies. As Bill hurls the bottle in inarticulate protest, he makes an alarming connection between his own action and Garry’s capacity for violence; there is a disturbing implication here that there is only a thin screen between legitimate anger and a criminal act, between sanity and madness.

4

Plantagenet’s alienation is the precondition of the outsider’s art. He is a nomad, restlessly wandering from harbour to harbour, from saloon to saloon, with no place to go. His extreme alienation drives him to distort reality. He deceives himself into thinking that the letter an old woman is posting is addressed to him. Paradoxically, inside the hospital he finds his much-sought human fellowship amongst the inmates. For Plantagenet, Kalowsky is a father figure and Garry a son figure. So Lowry complicates Bill’s mental conflicts: whilst he resists returning to the hospital where life is unbearable, he feels guilty towards his fellow inmates, his friends, who are left behind bars.

Lowry creates a certain paradox when he shows how Bill’s release leads to utter alienation or how imprisonment leads to consolation. Indeed, nobody and no shelter await him when he is driven out of the hospital; he goes straight to the sailors’ saloon where he ‘move[s], drink in hand, to the very obscurest corner of the bar’ (346) to withdraw from being watched. Now that he is dispossessed, unaccommodated, and alienated, he desires a kind of maternal protection. Unsurprisingly, Lowry describes Bill as ‘curled up like an embryo’ (346) so as to convey Bill’s wish to return to the womb. What is relevant here is Freud’s view of man’s search for accommodation: ‘the dwelling-


\(^{18}\) Susan Sontag, Ibid., 183.
house was a substitute for the mother's womb, the first lodging, for which in all likelihood man still longs, and in which he was safe and felt at ease. Lowry highlights the predicaments of the dispossessed.

Plantagenet emerges as man of conscience through his adoption of subversive silence and anti-social behaviour. As the Consul confronts the fascist gang by wielding a machete, so Bill confronts the doctor and later throws the bottle against the wall to express his fury at the absence of human decency. Nonetheless, such confrontational gestures fall short of being oppositional engagement. As Anthony Burgess argues, 'rebels are produced by societies in ferment'. Plantagenet's stance needs a comparison with another type of rebel figure who takes a more radical course of action in the face of inhumanity. In Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (1962), McMurphy breaks the bars of confinement and liberates the cowed inmates from the mental hospital. This is another approach to the political agenda of liberation of the oppressed - yet in the end its ultimate engagement, as in Lowry's novella, is situated in the act of writing. Salman Rushdie defends the transforming power of an act of writing which is deeply committed to a political agenda: 'I must say first of all that description is itself a political act... So it is clear that redescribing a world is the necessary first step towards changing it'. This claim could be appropriated to defend Lowry's reflexivism which, to many engaged, is detrimental to achieving the goal of radical politics. Indeed, Lowry reconceptualises reality and redescribes the world in ways which arguably serve to raise the critical consciousness of an audience.

In 'Lunar Caustic' what remains distinctive is Lowry's blend of the ordinary with the unreal. His naturalistic descriptions of the sordid street and the unhygienic hospital conditions are allied to his use of subtle metaphors and symbols. Together with his warm humanity for the oppressed, the power of his outsider's fury and gaze, we can refute the widespread notion that an outsider/exile is an isolated artist working in a void.

In 'The Forest Path to the Spring' Lowry transforms the outsider’s fury into emotional equilibrium. In comparison with 'Lunar Caustic', this novella marks a radical shift in tone, setting, attitude, and form. Whereas he chooses an urban wasteland of New York in ‘Lunar Caustic’, in ‘Forest’ he opts for the idyllic landscape of Eridanus, a tranquil fishing village near Vancouver, where his outsider figure seeks rehabilitation. Yet a comparison will reveal the strength of Lowry’s reciprocity between the metropolis and the forest. Many characters in Lowry’s work envisage this paradise as their haven. In Under the Volcano Yvonne constantly dreams of a virgin forest whilst she is staying in Mexico. In Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid Sigbjorn Wilderness and his wife spend their first blissful days together in Eridanus and are sustained by the memory. Even in ‘Lunar Caustic’ Garry dreams of escape to such a haven, away from the trap of the institution. In ‘Forest’ Lowry’s protagonist, simply named ‘I’, is brought into contact with wildflowers, seabirds, and the constellations. Eridanus is thus seen as a resting place for exhausted outsider figures where they undergo a healing process through communion with Nature. They finally withdraw into Nature, away from social institutions such as the mental hospital and the fascist organisation. But I must stress that these outsiders continue to provide a shuttle service between the forest and Europe’s cultural capitals and, more importantly, maintains a joint outlook on the local and the contemporary global scene.

There are, I would argue, some misconceptions surrounding this novella. First of all, Lowry’s detractors maintain that an interlude of emotional equipoise was detrimental to Lowry’s creativity which often thrives upon his anxieties; 22 I shall address this point later. Secondly, critics have argued that this novella has a shapeless structure which, in their view, is an obvious sign of artistic failure. But I would argue that it has a musical structure with which Lowry conveys an emotional oscillation between fear and peace. Thirdly, critics have claimed that this novella lacks objectivity by singling out the

presence of the thinly-veiled narrator ‘I’. However, given the fact that the narrator is a jazz composer who tries to translate his spontaneous feelings into the orderly art form of opera, we can argue that artistic objectivity is rather enhanced by Lowry’s decision to interlink media which can then enhance each other. Indeed, by linking the protagonist’s art-form to the written word, Lowry adopts something akin to the genre of lyric which successfully conveys the cyclical rhythm of Nature to which the musician narrator responds. Fourthly, critics have voiced concern about Lowry’s retreat from the outside world into a hermitage. But, as I shall demonstrate, Lowry is closer to a visionary who holds the view that the individual’s survival is a prerequisite for rebuilding the future of mankind.

‘Forest’ amply demonstrates the outsider’s philosophical excursion into Chinese Taoism which is seen as an alternative to Western medical practice. The idea behind his conversion in faith is his respect for the grace of interaction. ‘I’ in ‘Forest’ is fascinated with Taoism which aims to achieve a delicate harmony between two conflicting impulses represented by yang and yin - the bright and the dark, the masculine and the feminine, hope and despair, etc.. According to Taoism, ‘the universe is not an absolute dualism of opposites but rather a unified process resulting from continual interaction’. I endorse the view taken by Perle Epstein: ‘For the reconciliation of his Western religious dualism, Lowry turned to the religions of the Orient’, stressing as they do reciprocity and circularity.

In ‘Lunar Caustic’ Lowry draws attention to casualties of the Western approach such as schizophrenics. In ‘Forest’ he appears to find an alternative vision in Taoism. The protagonist’s wife awakens in him the concept of the circularity of the universe by the example of raindrops:

‘You see, my true love, each is interlocked with other circles falling about it,’ she said. ‘Some are larger circles, expanding widely and engulfing others, some are weaker smaller circles that only seem to


last a short while. . . . The rain itself is water from the sea, raised to heaven by the sun, transformed into clouds and falling again into the sea' (241).

Here, 'I' is awakening to the notion of circularity which appears to overcome the shortcomings of the Western approach which underlines distinction. 'I' sees an interactive tidal movement of ebb and flow, a cyclical rhythm of four seasons, and a cycle of death and rebirth. He also puts his notion of transformation into practice and emerges as an artist of life. When he encounters the mountain lion (possibly a projection of his fear of the ghost of his past) on his way to the spring-well, he is able to transcend his fear with courage. Even when his shack is burnt down, he is determined to rebuild it with the help of his neighbours. When he picks up the cannister and the ladder abandoned on the shore, he recycles them into something useful. The outsider's capacity to transform both self and the world he experiences is essential for his survival.

The Outsider's experience of different philosophical traditions is also an important aspect of V. S. Naipaul who is often alleged to "venerate" Western rationalism as an alternative vision to the chaos and anarchy he perceives as sweeping through post-colonial societies. It is also true to say that many of Naipaul's outsider figures are steeped in Hinduism which underlines a stoic acceptance of life by regarding death as a part of life. Conrad also explores various religions; Marlow is a blend of English empiricism and transcendental Buddhism, while Kurtz is a blend of so-called Christian thinking and African ritual. These outsiders demonstrate the clash of different philosophical traditions and their changing allegiances throw light on their condition.

In 'Forest', 'I' explores the idea of redemption by referring to alien religions. The reclusive protagonist adopts multiple identities such as a hermit, a Zen monk, a Christian priest, and a Taoist. He compares squatters' shacks to 'monastic cells of saints'. He also regards fishermen's cabins as 'shrines of their own integrity and independence' (247). Interestingly, he conjures up the Japanese Shinto temple when he contemplates the seascape; he perceives the oil refinery at night as an illuminated 'Gothic cathedral'. Being driven by a compulsion for redemption, 'I' distorts and revisions reality in an interesting way.
Even in the paradisal forest, 'I' voices anger at social prejudices about squatters. At the very moment when he feels that he is finally settled down, he faces the threat of eviction by the municipal authorities who have a plan to redevelop the squatters' area into an 'autocamp for the better class'. So he vents his anger at a cruel and insensitive decision, arguing that 'to be deprived of one's house may, in a sense, be said to be like being deprived of one's rational faculty' (283). Here, in terms of their resistance to establishment insensitivity concerning socially marginalised groups such as the schizophrenics and the squatters, we can draw a parallel between his anger and that of Plantagenet. Also, like Hilliot who questions bourgeois prejudices about the working class, 'I' questions prejudices about squatters who are misunderstood and discriminated against as tax-dodgers or outlaws by those who serve capitalism. It is against this background that 'I' hates capitalism which perpetuates a dichotomy between rich and poor. Moreover, the rush of holiday-makers not only destroys the emotional equilibrium that he achieves in his self-declared 'haven' but defaces the sacred image of shacks as monastic cells into a 'nest of perversion' for the rich. This same quality of outsider fury is also discernible in Plantagenet's awareness of the symbolic significance for sharp social division of the coal barge on the one side and the luxurious motor boat on the other. It is part of the function of Lowry's outsider figures to try, in imagination or in practice, to mediate and resolve this dichotomy between have and have-not. They attach more significance to class than to nationality - a familiar Marxist idea. 'I' rebels against the capitalists' low opinion of the squatters and argues for the need to correct such prejudices.

Interestingly, even in retreat the outsider figure maintains a global vision. This is achieved by a constant dialogue between the past and the present. A glimpse of a blaze of light coming from the oil refinery triggers traumatic memories of the battleship anchored in a harbour during the war period. Moreover, at the present time even in this paradisal forest 'I' is in fear of ecological disasters such as the oil slick and an explosion at the oil refinery. Clearly he looks at the dark side of the oil boom in the
region. It is in this sense that I endorse Dominic Head’s view that ‘the negative is held in tension with the positive’. 25 Epstein also comments on an intriguing psychic complexity in Lowry’s outsider figure who ‘finds himself with his eyes on Heaven and one foot in Hell’. 26 So, on the one hand, ‘I’ is responsive to the neon sign advertising the shell oil company with the missing letter s (it glows as hell in darkness). On the other hand, being a jazz musician, the narrator perceives an oil refinery as a ‘musical instrument’. This example amply demonstrates a dual operation of the outsider’s consciousness which hinges on redemption and destruction.

7

One of the strengths of ‘Forest’ lies in the outsider’s ability to achieve ‘a precarious balance of antimonies’. 27 Anthony Burgess argues that ‘in the great geniuses the two \( [\text{yang and yin} \] \) meet, are reconciled, fertilize each other’. 28 Indeed, Lowry explores damnation and redemption at once by presenting Eridanus as the site of hope and disaster. This place’s name bears an ambivalent meaning of ‘the river of death and the river of life’. At the present time this paradisal place could be easily turned into a site of disaster with a possible explosion at the oil refinery and a possible oil slick - a modern version of the ancient city of Pompeii.

Amongst Lowry’s work, ‘Forest’ remains the most congenial one where ‘I’ enjoys relative happiness through his marriage which, as Richard Cross says, is ‘a prime mode of integration’. 29 Besides, he is accepted into the community of fishermen; he rebuilds his half-burnt house by sharing a spirit of solidarity with his neighbours - a familiar vision that Hilliot pursues. In addition, he resumes his old contact with the members of his former band and achieves relative success in his vocation. Furthermore,

he finds himself in accord with Nature, with the universe. The ending marks the mood of celebration:

But here, in springtime, on its last lap to the sea, it was as at its source a happy joyous little stream. High above the pine trees swayed against the sky, out of the west come the seagulls with their angelic wings, coming home to rest. And I remembered how every evening I used to go down this path through the forest to get water from the spring at dusk. . . . Looking over my wife’s shoulder I could see a deer swimming toward the lighthouse. Laughing we stooped down to the stream and drank (287).

This mood of celebration struck in the last passage of ‘Forest’ brings us back to Sigbjorn Wilderness’s celebration of the thriving countryside of Oaxaca. And this mood of celebration is in sharp contrast to the despair which characterises the ending of Under the Volcano.

Here, it is necessary to examine interrelationships among Lowry’s works that I have discussed. Tony Bareham sees ‘Lunar Caustic’ and ‘Forest’ as a ‘deliberate pairing’. 30 But viewed from the point of view of Lowry’s original scheme of constructing an outsider’s journey entitled Voyage that Never Ends, ‘Forest’ (designed as paradiso) is rather in ‘a contrapuntal relation to Under the Volcano’ (designed as inferno). 31 ‘Lunar Caustic’ and Under the Volcano share a similar despairing tone, yet, as I have argued, the former marks the outsider’s transitional stage of purgatorio. However, whereas the title ‘Lunar Caustic’ means a colourless corrosive poisonous liquid which is designed to treat patients according to Western medical practice, the title ‘Forest Path to the Spring’ means a direct contact with Nature which is the main source of healing; the works taken together offer a compound vision of Western dualism and Chinese Taosim. So we can benefit from an approach which considers both novellas together.

Lowry’s outsider figures bear witness to inhumanity and voice concerns about an impoverishment of civilisation. Their apocalyptic vision is expressed by dominant and consistent images of fire and violent destruction which serve as metaphors for an

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inferno epitomising the cultural condition of the contemporary world. In *Under the Volcano* the Consul in delirium plunges into the volcanic lava pool and in reality is also killed by gun shots fired by a fascist gang. In the short story ‘Present Estate of Pompeii’, Roderick, the American writer on a European tour, visits Pompeii which was engulfed by an eruption of Vesuvius. The outsider’s fear of global calamity is also discernible in ‘Forest’ where ‘I’ dreads a potential explosion the refinery. In ‘Lunar Caustic’ a heat wave hits Lowry’s New York, including the hospital where tensions run high. Even in his first novel, *Ultramarine*, Dana Hilliot is a fireman responsible for maintaining the furnace, and his association with fire reinforces the notion he expresses that he is in an inferno. I endorse Robert Kroetsch’s view that Lowry is ‘the poet of ruins’, preoccupied with ‘ruins of place, of culture, of visions of self, of visions of paradise’.\(^{32}\) It is in this sense that his outsiders emerges as his visionaries. And in his later works at least there is a hope that the ruins may lead to rebuildings, as Yeats celebrates in his poem ‘Lapis Lazuli’.

8

So, as was shown at the starting point of this chapter, Lowry abandons the United Kingdom while retaining his roots in his native literature, and aims to become a citizen of the world. As a result, he has to suffer a double marginalisation, as outcast and foreigner, yet it is precisely the same outsider status which enables him to overcome parochialism with an internationalist stance.

Lowry’s outsider figures have an authority and power to challenge social prejudices and to face issues of inhumanity. We cannot underestimate their anti-hegemonic energies discernible in their subversion, transgression, and conversion. They inevitably suffer alienation from home and country, yet they make use of alienation which is the precondition of the outsider’s art. They also try to transcend alienation by forging a sense of communal solidarity with socially marginalised groups. And

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ultimately, it is Lowry’s warm humanity which distinguishes him from the predecessor he so admired; he does not, in the end, share Conrad’s cool impersonality and detachment.

In this section I have analysed and appraised the outsider’s psychic space, his dissenting voice, and global vision. Lowry’s outsider figures reject a rational approach which involves schematisation and celebrate instead the principle of reciprocity. A fair assessment of the literature of the outsider/exile means neither repeating the folly of adopting a narrow nationalistic line nor imposing censorship on the outsider’s subversive energies. By adopting this approach, we can answer two central accusations raised by those critical of Lowry: Isn’t Lowry’s desertion of Englishness an unpardonable sin? Isn’t Lowry’s reflexivism a total abandonment of global politics? Given the potential that his outsiders develop, such a dismissal is completely unjustified, as I have demonstrated. The story of Lowry’s marginalisation, however, is not an isolated phenomenon but representative of prejudices about the literature of the outsider/exile in general, which is why the problems his work faces leads on appositely to a consideration of Naipaul’s position in the postcolonial era.
V. S. Naipaul, can be seen as an outsider who enters the mainstream of English literature from the margin, his background being an amalgam of three national traditions, as he is a Trinidadian of East Indian descent living in England. In his 1991 essay entitled ‘Our Universal Civilisation’, Naipaul frankly admits that ‘Identity for me was a more complicated matter... Many things had gone to make me’, referring to the cultural hybridity which has contributed to the construction of his multiple self. Indeed, his personal sense of rootlessness and restlessness go to the very heart of his life and works. Like Conrad and Lowry, he is a *deraciné*, neither having any definite abode nor feeling at home anywhere. Paul Theroux argues that ‘Naipaul is like an unsponsored explorer without a compass’. However, while Conrad never wrote about Poland and Lowry remained virtually an outcast from England, Naipaul makes use of creative tensions between an urge to depart from his roots and an urge to return to them. His relation with his roots is ambivalent, a mixture of concern and contempt. Timothy F. Weiss comments on the state of being in-between inherent in Naipaul: ‘By breaking ties with his community, he begins the long process of making new ties, though that does not extinguish the need to return and understand anew his Trinidad community. Exile is marked by a sharing of opposites’.

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1 Eugene Goodheart, "Naipaul and the Voices of Negation," *Salmagundi* 54 (Fall 1981), 57.
Rob Nixon claims that Naipaul is 'the most comprehensively uprooted of twentieth-century writers and the most bereft of national affiliations'. But the same is arguably true of Conrad and Lowry who are denationalised writers in the sense that they are essentially guided by an internationalist and cosmopolitan consciousness. Linda Anderson compares Conrad and Naipaul in terms of their displacement:

It is difficult to speak of V.S. Naipaul and Joseph Conrad in terms of cultural associations, the common features which link one national literature with another, since it is their deracination, their ambiguous relationship with the English tradition they chose to join rather than with the culture from which they spring, which suggests Naipaul's and Conrad's common interests. A sense of alienation is a by-product of migration.

And John Thieme argues that 'deracination is Naipaul's ubiquitous subject and the crux of the twentieth-century experience'. So it is illuminating to discuss Naipaul's rootlessness after exploring Conrad's deracination and Lowry's nomadism, so as to see the variety of ways in which a triad of outsiders can react to the dominant cultural values of their respective times. For as I continue to argue, the outsider is of necessity neither a romantic escapist nor a supercilious tourist, but a cultural critic. Naipaul once said that 'it took me a long time to see that I had no society to write about. I had to write differently. I had to look at the world afresh'. Edward Said's oft-repeated claim that Naipaul is writing an imperialist narrative 'via his acquired British identity' - he also makes a similar claim about Conrad - hardly does justice to the merit of Naipaul's even-handed perception.

Edward Said would seem to conflate outsider status and enforced exile, saying that 'composure and serenity are the last things associated with the works of exiles'. Robert Boyers takes a harsh view of Naipaul's reclusiveness, arguing that 'the impulse to withdraw, to turn away from a too-menacing reality, is by definition stupid and

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intolerable'. However, Michael Thorpe gives a balanced view of Naipaul's stance, arguing that 'a sense of non-belonging becomes the price he has to pay and the strength which inspires his works'. Both James Joyce and Albert Camus are also seen as voluntary exiles who drop the rhetorics of 'national literature' and 'anti-colonial resistance' and instead explore a universal human condition. So any attempt to label an outsider ethnocentrically may not only endanger the value of his cultural hybridity but mislocate the centre of gravity for studying him; as Eugene Goodheart argues, 'Traveling for Naipaul one feels is the natural condition of his life, for it is always a way of living in a place without being part of it'. I shall argue that an outsider's experience of crossing boundaries can be seen as at once a hazard and a reward, at once a disability and a stimulant.

Naipaul uses his exposure to colonial education to develop insights into English culture. For this very reason, he has been accused of 'slavish worship' of an alien tradition. But, as I shall demonstrate, he does not lose critical distance from English society, as suggested by his satirical presentation of it in The Enigma of Arrival. He also mocks and ridicules the colonial élite who speak with an impeccable English accent and have no contact with the masses. His distancing from English society is clearly discernible when he describes English literature as 'an alien mythology', while in London he says that 'after eight years here I find I have, without effort, achieved the Buddhist ideal of non-attachment' - a similar posture to that adopted by Marlow, an English Buddha, in Heart of Darkness. In addition, Naipaul reflects upon his precarious position as an outsider, saying that 'the Americans do not want me because I am too British. The people here do not want me because I am too foreign'.

It is imperative, I would argue, to approach Conrad and Naipaul by looking at their power of distancing. It is important to read between the lines of both writers' texts

17 V.S. Naipaul, "London", Ibid., 5.
where other interpretations may be hidden beneath the surface language. Salman Rushdie underlines the importance of reader response to a literary text:

What is more, the writer is there, in his work, in the reader’s hands, utterly exposed, utterly defenceless, entirely without the benefit of an alter ego to hide behind. What is forged, in the secret act of reading, is a different kind of identity, as the reader and writer merge, through the medium of the text, to become a collective being that both writes as it reads and reads as it writes, and creates, jointly, that unique work, ‘their’ novel. This ‘secret identity’ of writer and reader is the novel form’s greatest and most subversive gift.18

A failure to practise ‘the act of deciphering’ - ‘an internalization of the author’s ideas’,19 according to Wolfgang Iser, has, in my view, given rise to distorted readings of some of these writers’ novels. Their irony is designed to promote critical awareness on the reader’s part. A close parallel can, for instance, be drawn between Conrad’s use of irony and Russian dissident writers’ adoption of Aesopian language which invents ‘screen and marker’ to avoid political censorship. According to Lev Loseff, ‘The existence of ideological censorship is the obvious precondition for the rise of Aesopian language in literature’.20 By disguising their subversions in Aesopean language, whose sole purpose seems to be to entertaining, Russian dissident writers convey their dissenting voice past the censors. It is possible to argue that Conrad must have invented a spiral of ironies in his text as a kind of defence mechanism in an alien society against which he is raising a dissenting voice.

In a much lighter vein, Naipaul uses irony for condemnation rather than condonement of dominant cultural values. Peter Hughes characterizes Naipaul's style as 'underwriting' (to say less that he intends to say) which is designed not to raise, but to lower voices,21 while Richard Johnstone weighs up Naipaul's position with regard to politics, saying, ‘Yet writing about politics, while eschewing commitment, is exactly what Naipaul does do’.22

Naipaul goes beyond the bounds of regionalism and also avoids the trap of nationalism. But again, some Third World critics call for an unambiguous commitment to roots, native traditions, and anti-colonial resistance. While, like Conrad, Naipaul unsettles stereotypes and exposes lies, their methods are nevertheless a disappointment to those who want to see the social system changed. So, while Richard Johnstone takes a positive view of Naipaul's role as an outsider, assessing Naipaul as an 'observer rather than participant, the witness who describes but does not prescribe', others - Frantz Fanon, Chinua Achebe, and Edward Said - take a hostile view of outsiders like Conrad and Naipaul, blaming their lack of the radical resolve needed for social change. These politically committed critics have failed to see artistic subtlety - an ironic tone of voice - as an alternative to the crudity of overt politicisation. Said is dismissive of Naipaul who 'deliberately falsifies his material on the third world so as to pander to the biases of a Western audience'. Said subsequently coined the derogatory term 'Naipaul phenomenon' out of his belief that Naipaul's popularity will be a short-lived boom. Derek Walcott also mocks Naipaul in 'Nightfall', referring to Naipaul's despairing verdict on the future of Trinidadian society. In The Wretched of the Earth (1961) Frantz Fanon declared that 'Every onlooker is either a coward or a traitor'. Naipaul has proved particularly vulnerable to such a valuation.

Naipaul’s first novel *The Mystic Masseur* (1957) demonstrates his satirical vision of a gullible society, an East Indian Hindu Community in Trinidad, where a trickster is revered as a hero. The objects of satire are both the gullible masses and Ganesh himself. While exposing the absurdities of their mutual foolishness, Naipaul’s irony encourages active participation on the reader’s part. As is the case with Conrad, Naipaul respects what Wolfgang Iser calls the ‘tripartite, author-text-reader relationship’. According to Iser, ‘one’s deciphering capacity is essential to the production of the meaning of literary texts’.¹

In *Lord Jim*, Conrad exposes the absurdity of chanting the Koran in the face of Gentleman Brown’s incursion into the Patusan community. In *The Mystic Masseur* Naipaul also shows the absurdity of a Trinidadian society regarding a fake Hindu spiritual leader as the redeemer. Through satire, these writers aim to promote a critical awareness of the danger of mindless veneration for all religions which, according to Naipaul, offers false consolation. This power of demystification is arguably a quality which characterises the role of outsiders. I would argue that Naipaul’s much-criticised ‘detachment’ remains a valuable antidote to mindless acts of acceptance or veneration: He conducts a rational inquiry into the nature of the barriers to evolution and progress of mankind. Clearly Naipaul rejects the Fanonian line that ‘decolonization is always a violent phenomenon’² and instead adopts the Camusian line that gives priority to self-renewal over political struggle.

From the position of an outsider, Naipaul problematises Ganesh’s ‘greatness’. Through his manipulative skill, Ganesh deceives the gullible masses into thinking that he is a spiritual redeemer. Then turning his back on them, Ganesh joins the colonial establishment as a representative of Lake Success. Naipaul mocks the British colonial

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² Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), 27.
Government's decision to honour Ganesh with an M.B.E: the colonial office has unwittingly misjudged the trickster as an 'important political leader'. In the end, Ganesh is a great pretender who serves rather than subverts the existing system. His selfish exercise brings no benefits to the community as a whole. We see a yawning gap between his public image and what we, as readers, have constructed of his life.

Naipaul thus questions public 'images' - as did both Conrad and Lowry. In Lowry's Under the Volcano the Consul sees the absurdity of the situation when he is publicly honoured by the British Government for his gallantry as a naval commander (he is in fact deeply traumatised by his indirect involvement in an atrocity committed by his crew against the German captives on the U-boat). The danger of acts of veneration is also an important issue in Conrad's work. Conrad nudges the reader to see an absurdity in Almayer's fetishisation of Nina's cot as an altar and in the young Russian sailor's admiration for Kurtz as a guru. Even Conrad's narrator Marlow half condones, even while he questions, the idealisation of imperial heroes such as Kurtz and Lord Jim. So distancing on the reader's side becomes an antidote to the naiveté of characters within these outsider texts venerating false heroes.

2

The Mystic Masseur also highlights Naipaul's ambivalent relation to his roots. His contempt for the inefficiency and sloppiness of a Trinidadian society is tempered by tolerance and affection. His critique falls on both the peasants beset by superstition and ignorance and a colonial élite mimicking foreign ideas irrelevant to their own society. Naipaul's ambivalent relation to his society is comparable to James Joyce's to Dublin or Ireland in general - Joyce once referred to 'My dear, dirty Dublin' while describing Ireland as 'the old sow that eats her farrow'. Dubliners offers his diagnosis of an ailing society. In a letter to his publisher, Joyce declares that 'My intention was to write a chapter of the moral history of my country and I chose Dublin for the scene because the city seemed to me the center of paralysis'.

Similarly, Naipaul diagnoses

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Trinidadian society as a 'half-made society living on the borrowed culture'. A close parallel exists between Naipaul and Joyce in terms of their existential nausea and subsequent self-imposed exile.

The Mystic Masseur is narrated through the eyes of the narrator 'I' who is both a character and the narrator. As the character he is deluded by Ganesh and as the narrator he observes Ganesh from a discreet distance. In the Prologue, 'I' as a young school boy begins to question the authority of the mystic: 'I often thought with a good deal of puzzled interest about the little man locked away with all those fifteen hundred books in the hot and dull village of Feunte Grove' (17).4 'I' assumes the pose of a story-teller, saying 'I myself believe that the history of Ganesh is, in a way, the history of our times; and there may be people who will welcome this imperfect account of the man Ganesh Ramsumair, masseur, mystic, and, since 1953, M.B.E.' (18). In the Epilogue 'I', now a university student in Britain, is fooled by his vanity into being associated with Ganesh who is a public star:

The day of the visit came and I was at the railway station to meet the 12.57 from London. As the passengers got off I looked among them for someone with a nigrascent face. It was easy to spot him, impeccably dressed, coming out of a first-class carriage. I gave a shout of joy. 'Pundit Ganesh!' I cried, running towards him. 'Pundit Ganesh Ramsumair!' 'G. Ramsay Muir,' he said coldly.

While 'I' wishes to be associated with a great personage, Naipaul takes a sardonic view of Ganesh who anglicises his name and buries his Hindu past for the sake of expediency,

'I' is thus as unreliable a narrator as Conrad's Marlow. In the chapter entitled 'The Mystic Masseur', 'I' briefly intervenes to recall his first encounter with Ganesh and reveals his vanity at being associated with a great personage: 'Yet when Ganesh published his autobiography, The Years of Guilt, I read it half hoping to find some reference to myself. Of course, there was none' (118-9). As Landweg White observes, 'I' might be 'just another admirer'.5 His commentary, based as it reputedly is on

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memorial reconstruction, problematises its own assertions. It is thus vital for the reader to maintain a critical distance from the narration.

‘I’ has inside knowledge about the circumstances surrounding the rise of Ganesh from obscurity to success. But also, ‘I’ has an outsider’s perceptions about a Trinidadian society from which he came to Britain for study. Fawzia Musfafa reads the boy-narrator’s departure as a ‘device that allows the narrative to fluctuate between a mature voice recalling the impressions of childhood and a child’s limited vision’. The narratorial tone is affected by the narrator’s growing scepticism about and continuing fascination with Ganesh. Conrad’s Marlow is likewise characterised by both his critique of and complicity with imperialism.

3

The primary object of satire in The Mystic Masseur is Ganesh who, through his personal opportunism, squanders opportunities for transforming an ailing society. In terms of the fame and power that he attains, Ganesh can be compared to Conrad’s Kurtz whose success goes relatively unchecked. What Ganesh lacks is an adversarial stance which can develop into rebellion and anti-colonial resistance.

Naipaul also exposes the contradictions and problems of an Asian-Hindu community in Trinidad, highlighting the clash between materialism and spirituality. The materialistic-minded Ganesh, for instance, is closer to a spiritual accountant than a spiritual healer. Inside his holy temple, his wife Leela’s fridge is packed with coca-cola. Naipaul also ridicules the foreigners who, like the gullible locals, revere Ganesh as a hero. American servicemen at the station visit Ganesh’s temple in search of spiritual advice, while the British colonial office unwittingly inflates Ganesh’s image.

Yet Naipaul portrays Ganesh as a victim as well as a victor. Ganesh experiences a head-on clash between his inherited Hindu ways of life and his modern colonial education at Queen’s Royal College. Both worlds are alien to him. He feels uncomfortable about such Hindu rituals such as the Brahmin Initiation ceremony and

6 Fawzia Mustafa, V.S. Naipaul (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 34.

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the funeral ceremony for his father which supercedes his personal grief. When he returns to college with his head shaved after the Initiation ceremony, he becomes a laughing stock and is ordered to stay away from the college until his hair grows again. Being humiliated by his Indianness, Ganesh anglicises his name to 'Gareth' and later, when he becomes an eminent politician he anglicises his name into R.G. Ramsay Muir, M.B.E.

It is not the Hindu heritage alone against which Ganesh rebels because he cannot find colonial education congenial either. He is bullied into playing football at college and as a result injures his foot. Later when he takes up a teaching job in a primary school, he finds himself in an odd position when the headmaster exhorts: 'I want to let you know right away, before we even start, that the purpose of this school is to form, not to inform. Everything is planned' (24). He gives up the idea of being a teacher (a colonial agent serving the British Empire) and instead decides to become a Hindu pundit. Ganesh despairs over his double imprisonment - in the Hindu world, everything is pre-ordained; in the colonial world, everything is planned. So he comes to realise that there is little room for manoeuvre; to find a way out of this impasse he decides to be a trickster rather than a passive victim of circumstance.

An encounter with Mr Stewart, significantly an English Hindu, sets Ganesh on the road to Hindu mysticism, while the Great Belcher, so nicknamed, a representative of older Indian ways of life, provides many scriptures and encourages Ganesh to become a Hindu spiritual healer. Ganesh tries to combine his modern educational background with traditional Hindu ways in order to draw an audience. But what is distinctive to him is his love of expediency. For instance, he makes a small fortune by exploiting his father-in-law Ramlogan who values Ganesh's B.A.

Indeed, Ganesh sells his educational background as an attractive commodity to the low-caste shopkeeper who is uneducated. As Conrad questions the sanctity of marriage in *The Secret Agent*, where Verloc's marriage with Winnie is reduced to a commercial transaction, Naipaul does the same in the case of Ganesh and Ramlogan's daughter Leela. The money-minded Ramlogan insists on a modern way of sending
invitation cards with R.S.V.P. which will cost less than the traditional method of offering free food to everyone. Earlier Ganesh’s father bought the commodity of modern education for his son with money coming from land which generated oil royalties. With the influx of Western materialism, the traditional ways of Hindu life are disintegrating.

In *The Middle Passage* Naipaul comments on the false ground on which a reputation is built: “Trinidad has always admired the “sharp character” who, like the sixteenth-century picaroon of Spanish literature, survives and triumphs by his wits in a place where it is felt that all eminence is arrived at by crookedness” (78). Ganesh deceives the masses into believing that he is a Hindu visionary as well as a learned man:

People came to hear him not only because of his reputation but also because of the novelty of what he said. He spoke about the good life, about happiness and how to get it. He borrowed from Buddhism and other religions and didn’t hesitate to say so. Whenever he wished to strengthen a point he snapped his fingers and a helper held a book open towards the audience so that they could see that Ganesh wasn’t making it all up. He spoke in Hindi but the books he showed in this way were in English, and people were awed by this display of learning (161-2).

In the above passage, Ganesh is likened to an actor who is conscious of the public eye on his performance. He uses words to invent lies and to inflate his self-image rather than delivering spiritual truths. As is the case in Conrad’s work, it is important to suspect the surface structure of language which is made up of lies, pretensions, and rumours, misinterpretations.

Naipaul also questions the false position held by Stewart - the wandering Englishman who is a pretentious self-annointed Hindu. Despite his claim that he is a Kashmir Hindu, he is a questionable guide. He is merely mimicking the Hindu life-style by roaming the streets of Trinidad. Yet it is Stewart who inspires Ganesh to pursue Hindu spirituality and Ganesh acknowledges Stewart’s lasting influence on his life. Here Naipaul explores a murky area full of contradictions and lies. Ganesh honours Stewart by dedicating his autobiography *The Years of Guilt* to his ‘mentor’: ‘TO LORD STEWART OF CHICHESTER, Friend and Counsellor of Many Years’.
Ganesh confers an arbitrary title of Lord on Stewart to impress the public with his own self-importance.

It is thus important to treat Ganesh's exercises in public relations with suspicion. Naipaul satirises Ganesh's fetishism regarding books: he buys a book for its smell, typeset, binding, and size, so Naipaul mocks Ganesh as 'a connoisseur of paper-smells' (82). Ganesh also publishes his own non-literary books such as *The Years of Guilt* (an autobiography full of false confessions and lies; when he becomes an eminent politician he bans the publication of this book which now does more harm than good to his reputation). He uses his books, both those he buys and those he writes, as a means of attaining fame and reputation. Ganesh becomes the seedbed for the mimic men who cling to style without substance.

In his speech at Lorimer's Park addressed to the strikers - mostly embittered labourers from the sugar estate - Ganesh pretends to be deeply committed to the cause of liberation of the oppressed:

'My friends,' he said (he had got that from Narayan), 'my friends, I know about your great sufferings, but I have yet to give the matter further study, and until then I must ask you to be patient.' He didn't know that their leader had been telling them the same thing every day for nearly five weeks. And his speech didn't get better. He talked about the political situation in Trinidad, and the economic situation; about constitutions and tariffs; the fight against colonialism; and he described Socialinduism in detail (216-7).

It is expediency not conviction that prompts him to mediate in this dispute. Out of his hunger for popularity he pushes himself into a disastrous involvement in mob violence from which he narrowly escapes. He then offers face-saving conclusions about the violence at the public inquiry he himself conducts: 'He warned that labour movement in Trinidad was dominated by communists and he had often unwittingly been made their tool' (218). He once again uses words as a means of fabricating the truth. Ganesh is a liar for whom only his personal survival matters.
Ganesh also manipulates the media in such a way as to remove his political rivals and to inflate his image. He publishes his own newspaper the *Dharma* (ironically meaning 'the faith') for a propagandistic purposes. His wife Leela also publicises her social work among the destitute by writing an article entitled 'REPORT OF MY SOCIAL WELFARE WORK', telling lies which are designed to broadcast her 'devotion' to the poor. Naipaul shows how the media in a Trinidadian society fail to serve their self-proclaimed purpose of delivering 'the truth'.

So Naipaul satirizes a Trinidadian society incapable of creativity and self-renewal. Indarsingh, a member of the colonial *élite*, promises much, yet delivers little. Indarsingh is a mimic man who borrows foreign ideas like Russian Revolutionism while espousing English mannerisms. While wearing Oxford blazers and speaking with an impeccable English accent, he adopts an empty rhetoric of anti-colonial resistance. Both Ganesh and Indarsingh are in a position to transform the nation, yet they are unable to fulfil their social duties. The absence of a real hero makes the future of the nation bleaker. Indarsingh says things like 'Funny people in Trinidad, old boy. No respect for ideas, only personalities' (212). As Landweg White observes, Naipaul's purpose in presenting Indarsingh in this way is to 'dramatize the irrelevance of seeing Trinidad through borrowed Oxford spectacles'. By showing the inadequacies of Ganesh's and Indarsingh's thoughts and actions, Naipaul paints a bleak picture of a society which is left drifting without any promise of Trinidadian advancement.

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A House for Mr Biswas (1961) is widely regarded as Naipaul’s masterpiece in its scope and depth. This book captures the changing face of a Trinidadian society evolving from a quasi-feudal peasant community into a modern capitalist state. The protagonist Biswas is a non-conformist capable of rebellion against social norms, although success evades him and every attempt to improve his self-image is thwarted. Biswas is far removed from the power and glory that Ganesh enjoys, yet he essentially remains the outsider who questions the norms of a Trinidadian society. But Naipaul shows considerable sympathy for his tragicomic central character.

The rebel Biswas thus contrasts with the trickster Ganesh: in contrast to Ganesh’s meteoric rise, Biswas remains in oblivion. Yet Biswas’s code of honesty (which allows him to be deceived and fooled) contrasts favourably with Ganesh’s exploitative skill (which safeguards his success). While Ganesh publicly asserts his belief in the hand of Providence guiding him on the road to success, Biswas tries to control his own destiny, as suggested in his motto - ‘paddle on his own canoe’. Biswas makes a heroic struggle for independence and freedom from the collective values which the Tulsi household impose on him and achieves a moral victory which is lacking in Ganesh:

How terrible it would have been, at this time, to ... have died among the Tulsis, amid the squalor of that large, disintegrating and indifferent family; to have left Shama and the children among them, in one room; worse, to have lived without even attempting to lay claim to one’s portion of the earth; to have lived and died as one had been born, unnecessary and unaccommodated (13-4).¹

Biswa is able to see the inadequacies of the older generation’s fatalism and the new generation’s opportunism. When Biswas’s mother Bipti goes to her father’s house to deliver her baby and tells of her husband’s miserliness, her father says

casually, 'Fate. There is nothing we can do about it' (15). Bipti’s father represents the old generation who had made the middle passage from India to Trinidad and who embraced karma - a passive acceptance of life. The frame narrator speaks of an element of fatalism which is a barrier to self-renewal:

Fate had brought him from India to the sugar-estate, aged him quickly and left him to die in a crumbling mud hut in the swamplands; yet he spoke of Fate often and affectionately, as though, merely by surviving, he had been particularly favoured (15).

Anand represents the new generation which goes to England for study and refuses to return home. Subsequently he is left doubly stranded like Bipti’s father who was destined to live in a temporary shelter as a result of his transplantation. Both the old and new generations share a crippling dislocation.

Standing at a transitional stage between generations, Biswas reflects upon the pitfalls of both fatalism and opportunism. He finds himself a stranger when he, as a reporter working for the magazine section of the Sunday Sentinel, returns to his birthplace at Pagotes which is completely transformed by the combined forces of the oil industry and a redevelopment project. He bears witness to the disappearance of the pastoral:

When Mr Biswas looked for the place where he had spent his early years he saw nothing but oil derricks and grimy pumps, see-sawing, see-sawing, endlessly, surrounded by red No Smoking notices. His grandparents’ house had also disappeared, and when huts of mud and grass are pulled down they leave no trace. His navel-string, buried on that inauspicious night, and his sixth finger, buried not long after, had turned to dust. The pond had been drained and the whole swamp region was now a garden city of white wooden bungalows with red roofs, cisterns on tall stilts, and neat gardens. The stream where he had watched the black fish had been dammed, diverted into a reservoir, and its winding, irregular bed covered by straight lawns, streets and drives. The world carried no witness to Mr Biswas’s birth and early years (41).

Biswas is not nostalgic about the vanished past but registers his sense of shock at the pace of social change taking place. Later when he works as an officer in the Welfare Department, he recognises an important aspect of his society:

The interviews completed, it was Mr Biswas’s duty to analyze the information he gathered. And here he floundered. He had investigated two hundred house-holds; but after every classification he could never, on adding, get two hundred, and then he had to go through all the questionnaires again. He was dealing with a society that had no rules and patterns, and classifications were a chaotic business (510).
Biswas's double exposure to the countryside of Pagotes and the city of Port of Spain enables him to offer a comprehensive view of Trinidadian society.

A House for Mr Biswas also highlights Naipaul's ambivalent relation to a Trinidadian society which he perceives as drifting. Both Sartre's nausea and Camus' outsider stance are particularly helpful in the elucidation of Biswas's personality. From childhood until his death, Biswas questions rather than accepts the Hindu rituals which have become anachronistic, being cut off from their origin. Nevertheless, he cannot easily shake off the shadow of these rituals which preside over his life-time. When he is born with a sixth finger at an inauspicious hour, a pundit, a preserver of old ways of life and belief, is called in to exorcise evil spirits. When he dies, his funeral ceremony takes place in Hindu style: 'The cremation, one of the few permitted by the Health Department, was conducted on the banks of a muddy stream and attracted spectators of various races' (590).

An erosion of the Hindu value system is one of the key ideas that Naipaul develops in A House for Mr Biswas. His satiric impulse is felt when he deals with those who try to combine Hinduism with Westernisation. Mr. W.C. Tuttle provides one example: 'He regarded himself as one of the last defenders of brahmin culture in Trinidad; as the same time he considered he had yielded gracefully to the finer products of Western civilization: its literature, its music, its art' (459). Naipaul also sees the absurdity of Mrs Tulsi, the head of the Tulsi clan, who practises Hindu rituals with a Roman Catholic service:

Regularly too, she had pujas, austere rites aimed at God alone, without the feasting and gaiety of the Hanuman House ceremonies. The pundit came and Mrs Tulsi sat before him; he read from the scriptures, took his money, changed in the bathroom and left. More and more prayer flags went up in the yard, the white and red pennants fluttering until they were ragged, the bamboo poles going yellow, brown, grey. For every puja Mrs Tulsi tried a different pundit, since no pundit could please her as well as Hari. And, no pundit pleasing her, her faith yielded. She sent Sushila to bum candles in the Roman Catholic church; she put a crucifix in her room; and she had Pundit Tulsi's grave cleaned for All Saints' Day (521-2).
Naipaul thus exposes the inadequacies of Trinidadian Hinduism, disintegrating under the pressures of Westernization. The sanctity attached to a pundit is gone; while the death of Pundit Tulsi in a motorcar accident symbolises the bruising collision between spirituality and materialism.

Naipaul shows the Hanuman house (named after the  
\[\text{Māyā} \text{Kṛṣṇa} \text{God}\]) in decay. When Pundit Tulsi is killed, the patriarchy associated with traditional Hinduism is finished; Mrs Tulsi is an invalid and gradually loses her matriarchal authority and power. What precipitates the Tulsi clan’s disintegration is the new ethics of self-interest which rocks communalism to its foundation. Its members begin to plunder the property of the Tulsi store while the invalid Mrs Tulsi loses her authority. They also compete with one another to provide their children with a modern education. Seth, one of the sons-in-law, plans to insure and burn Biswas’s rumshop in the Chase, successfully claims the insurance and shares the money with Biswas. Sekhar, Mrs Tulsi’s eldest son, is more enthusiastic about running a film business and a restaurant than he is about representing the Hindu tradition. He is further removed from Hindu tradition by marrying a Presbyterian wife. It also becomes a commonplace for the Tulsi children to watch American films and drink Coca-Cola. An influx of Western individualism and American commercial culture finally destroys the solidity of Hindu communalism.

Before this disintegration, through his accidental marriage to one of Tulsi daughters, Biswas becomes a member of a Hindu communal organization to which he belongs and from which he disengages himself. Although he is sheltered and fed, he cannot bear the claustrophobia within the Tulsi clan. So he soon finds himself trapped in a Kafka-esque situation, being torn between the oppressive reality surrounding him and his longing for freedom. He explores this static, decaying world without a sense of belonging. He goes further in raising a dissenting voice against the Tulsi regime which
demands obedience to monolithic collective values. This distaste for monolithic power is a feature also found in the works of Conrad and Lowry.

Whereas Ganesh is a subservient figure who joins the colonial establishment, Biswas is a subversive. In Part I Biswas finds himself under Mrs Tulsi’s tyranny and in Part II he is under the new editor’s tyranny as a reporter. In both the Hanuman House and the newspaper office, Biswas mobilises oppositional forces against the ‘culture of right behaviour and thought’. The new editor introduces a booklet called Rules for Reporters which is distasteful to Biswas:

The booklet contained rules about language, dress, behaviour, and at the bottom of every page there was a slogan. On the front cover was printed "THE RIGHTEST NEWS IS THE BRIGHTEST NEWS", the inverted commas suggesting that the statement was historical, witty and wise. The back cover said: REPORT NOT DISTORT (370-1).

Biswas lets his disobedience be publicly known rather than being intimidated by opposition. He declares his independence and freedom from the Tulsi regime by possessing a house of his own and finding a job. He also hands his resignation to the new editor who is a sort of puppet serving British colonial rule rather like the headmaster who exhorts Ganesh to ‘form, not to inform’. An endemic hatred of the authorities is a common feature linking the outsiders - Conrad, Lowry, and Naipaul. These writers invariably see the danger of an extinction of individuality under tyrannical power. In Part I Biswas is caught between the Hanuman House which provides him with warmth and protection and his own freedom; in Part II he has no choice but to resume his job as a reporter when he loses a new job as an officer in a Welfare Department which is closed down. His ambivalent position becomes a central issue, making Biswas an intriguing character with a double capacity for submission and rebellion.

It is important to explore Biswas’s psychic space which is at once unstable and potent. Naipaul dramatises Biswas’s psychic rhythm which swings between the two extreme poles of despair and revolt. Naipaul also shows, as Lowry does, the thin screen
between madness and sanity of what William Walsh calls the 'crumpling self' which characterises Biswas; he is seen poised in trance-like immobility when he undergoes nightmarish experiences in the makeshift barracks which is hit by storms. There is the additional element of fear of a possible lynching at the hands of the embittered labourers facing dispossession from the Tulsi estate. Biswas is on the verge of mental breakdown inside and outside the Hanuman House - inside he feels the stifling atmosphere and outside he is terror-stricken. So his derangement is firmly rooted in a hostile reality which feels quite 'unreal' to him.

Some critics have read Biswas's struggle as an allegory for a painful process of decolonization or for emancipation from slavery. Using this approach, they have read Biswas's imprisonment in the Tulsi House (rather forcedly, in my view) as a metaphor for slavery and his independence from it as a metaphor for nation-building. Nevertheless, Biswas's struggle is still disappointing to those who adopt the Fanonian line of clearly expressed anti-colonial resistance. Naipaul rather speaks of the paradoxical nature of freedom and loss. In return for the protection and warmth which the Tulsi House provides, Biswas has to accept a humiliating parasitic dependence on it and to give up his individual right of abode. In return for the relative freedom he finds outside the Tulsi House, he is left unprotected and alienated. After his humiliating return to the Tulsi House from the barracks Biswas says, 'this surrender had brought peace' (299). But his return marks only a temporary setback because in Part II he embarks on a new adventure to Port of Spain in search of opportunities. Nonetheless, he is soon lost in the impersonal city where he remains anonymous. William Walsh likens the wanderer Biswas to 'a floating particle of being'. The freedom of Joycian wandering is short-lived when it turns into another kind of bondage. Although the openness of the city is contrasted with the claustrophobic air in the Tulsi House, it proves to be full of emptiness and loss. Naipaul continues to explore this paradox of freedom and loss throughout his work.

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3 William Walsh, V.S. Naipaul, 34.
In Part II Biswas explores all the facets of a city life which is alien to him, first as a reporter and later as a social worker. What is of special interest to me is Biswas's questioning of a logical approach to Trinidadian society under British colonial rule. He refuses to follow Rules for Reporters which curbs his freedom of expression. While working for his boss Miss Logie (referring to 'logic') at the Welfare Department, Biswas sees the irrelevance of a categorization of a 'society that had no rules and patterns' (510). Yet Biswas is not all hero. Keith Garebian comments on Naipaul's ambivalent characterization of Biswas, arguing that Biswas 'has resistance or opposition in him, although this does not negate his essential passivity in most instances, especially when he is confronted by the existential void'. Alongside his heroism discernible in his obstinate resistance to the Tulsi regime, there is his buffoonery which helps to make this novel a tragi-comedy. Like Conrad's Jim, Biswas is pictured as at once hero and clown. He makes unsuccessful attempts to improve his image both on his Birth Certificate and in his obituary. He clearly suffers from an inferiority complex about his parasitic dependence and his origins. He dresses himself up in a new suit and goes out to cover an international cricket match. He adopts English mannerisms and becomes an actor performing to the public when he 'shows off his new suit and his cigarette tin, and mechanically applauds the sportsmen on the field when the rest of the crowd are clapping their hands'. Yet he cannot assert his authority as a father over his son and he says in self-pity, 'I am just somebody. Nobody at all. I am just a man you know' (279).

Naipaul singles out mimicry as a barrier to progress for Trinidadian society. He has been accused of 'negrophobia', but his satire does not target any specific race. His satiric vision is universally applied to all characters of various races who prove incapable of creativity and self-assessment. Ganesh is impeccably dressed and insists on his

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anglicised name. Biswas is a reporter who adopts effete English mannerisms. Naipaul maintains a self-contained detachment from anyone who apes English culture. It is a narrow reading to regard Naipaul as a racist who denigrates any particular race or society.

Certainly one object of satire is the colonial élite represented by Indarsingh in *The Mystic Masseur* and Owad in *A House for Mr Biswas* who borrow fancy ideas and dandyism. Owad’s dandyism is described thus: ‘He was wearing a suit they had never known, and he had a Robert Taylor moustache’ (536). Owad is trained as a modern doctor and is in a position to improve his society by curing the sick, yet he dodges his wider social responsibilities by merely parroting Russian Revolutionism. He talks about the ‘extermination of capitalists and what the Russians had done to the Czar’ (548), yet without renouncing the privileges of his profession: ‘He played tennis at the India Club. And, almost as suddenly as it had started, talk of the revolution ended’ (572). Like Indrasingh, despite his grandiose rhetoric of radical social change, Owad serves an existing system rather than subverting it. Anand takes a sceptical view of Owad, asking ‘how, as a communist working for the revolution, he [Owad] could take a job in the government medical service’ (544). But Anand’s scepticism is in turn undermined by his mimicry of Owad’s literary knowledge: ‘“Eliot is a man I loathe”; and [he] added, “I know someone who knows him” ’ (545). Naipaul takes a harsh view of a soulless mimicry which is seen as a national disease.

As I have shown, Naipaul refuses to idealise Biswas whose power of rebellion is limited because of circumstances he cannot control. Burdened by domestic responsibilities, he cannot fully develop a political consciousness. He reflects upon his ‘cat-in-bag’ (referring to his confinement in domestic duties) business rather than a larger political issue like decolonialization. He seeks a route of escape through fantasies fed by books and finds personal redemption through his habitual reading of the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius and the *Discourses* of Epictetus. He also invents a story entitled ‘Escape’ which provides a fictional alternative to the actuality of escape. One night in the barracks in Green Vale, Biswas and Anand conjure up alien landscapes
like ‘snow-covered mountains and fir trees, red hulled yachts in a blue sea below a clear sky, roads winding between well-kept forests to green mountains in the distance’ (279). Fantasy cushions his misery, yet it removes him from the real world; it is at once legitimate and dangerous.

Biswas’s desperation also pushes him to fetishize some lines from the newspaper put up on the wall of the barracks such as *Amazing scenes were witnessed yesterday when...* (a wish that his life would be completely transformed in future) and ‘*Of him I will never lose hold and he shall never lose hold of me*’ (a sort of a talisman which will get him through at a moment of personal crisis). As a preparation for being a reporter or a potential writer, Biswas has to borrow some lines from newspapers and books and uses them in composition, but those lines he cherishes, like Lowry’s alcohol, function as a sedative.

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I shall now look at whether Anand holds out any hope for a Trinidadian society or whether he is held in contempt. As the novel advances, at some points it is narrated from Anand’s points of view. He follows in his father’s footsteps as a scholarship boy and is sent to England. But he is soon left stranded in England with no intention of returning to his homeland. Like the narrator ‘I’ in *The Mystic Masseur*, Anand escapes from the narrowness of the tropical island which is often described as a ‘small dot on the map of the world’, yet he fails to assume social responsibilities towards the society from which he came. Naipaul thus takes a sceptical view of the new generation (his own) which promises much, yet delivers little.

It is also important to explore Anand’s estrangement from Hinduism. He finds himself caught in a head-on collision between Hindu rituals and the modern education he receives, and struggles to assert his own identity. Yet despite his emotional disengagement from the Hindu rituals, he cannot wholly reject what is imposed upon him. For example, despite his enthusiasm for science, he chants Hindu hymns at a moment of panic in the barracks in Green Vale.
In his struggle to shape his own identity, like his father, Anand lacks the political consciousness which leads to an assertion of nationhood. Anand recites a tragic love poem set in Algeria without knowing its political context of anti-colonial resistance which runs in close parallel with colonial Trinidad. His performance is designed to show off his reading skill in front of Hari and his sobbing wife, with all the gestures he picked up elsewhere: 'A soldier of the legion lay dying in Algiers' (414). Naipaul seems to suggest that the political agenda of anti-colonial resistance is only a remote possibility in the Trinidadian society of Anand’s youth. While the war is going on outside the island, the Hindu community in Trinidad is engaged in slanders and petty rivalries between political and religious factions. Biswas is tied up with domestic duties, Anand escapes involvements, and the colonial élite who return employ an empty rhetoric of radicalism. Naipaul shows a Trinidadian society which saps energies, squanders opportunities and creates outsiders. I shall next examine Naipaul's non-fiction where he expresses his anger at the failings of post-colonial societies.
No writer can be blamed for reflecting his society. If the West Indian writer is to be blamed, it is because, by accepting and promoting the unimpressive race-and-colour values of his group, he has not only failed to diagnose the sickness of his society but has aggravated it (75). 1

In The Middle Passage (1962) and An Area of Darkness (1964), Naipaul drops the mask of irony and instead adopts non-fiction as a viable genre for cultural critique. He assumes the role of an outsider which is to see, to witness, and to assess the former colonial societies incapable of creativity and self-renewal. In The Middle Passage he delivers a despairing verdict on five societies of the West Indies and South America - Trinidad, British Guiana, Surinam, Martinique, and Jamaica. Naipaul’s acid dismissal has provoked outrage in readers and critics from those regions, accusing him of being a traitor or raising doubts about his authority to observe and measure these five colonial societies. But in what follows, I shall draw attention to Naipaul’s balanced perception of the failings of both the colonized and the colonizer. What engenders Naipaul’s despairing verdict on the Caribbean regions, according to William Walsh, is its ‘disillusion with the past, horror at the present, and what personal bitterness we do not know’. 2 What has been belittled is the fact that Naipaul’s critique falls on slavery’s victims and its perpetrators. His scathing attack on the domestic enemy is balanced by his anti-imperialist stance.

By adopting the genre of non-fiction, Naipaul presents himself as a cultural critic rather than a novelist, breaking with the comedy of his early work and instead depending upon the discursive, analytical method used by an anthropologist. He aims to clarify the obstacles to progress and evolution in human societies. He blames the domestic enemy as incapable of creativity, but he also never fails to denounce the

cruelties of slavery. In addition, Naipaul examines the diasporic condition of those who had taken a middle way, both African slaves and indentured Indian labourers. Here again, Naipaul’s ire falls on both the colonizer who exploited cheap labour in the sugar plantations and the colonized, crippled by their dislocation and dispossession.

Naipaul’s preference for detachment is not so much an act which denies social responsibilities towards the colonial societies, as a means of reassessing its priorities. In *The Middle Passage* Naipaul’s persona says, ‘I couldn’t be a tourist in the West Indies, not after the journey I had made’ (253). Naipaul himself once said that his aim is ‘not to reject, but to inquire’. Nevertheless, because of his anger, he still courts controversy: he makes no secrets of his distaste for Trinidad, for example. Gordon Rohlehr argues that parts of *The Middle Passage* strike one as superficial, and a retrogression in sensibility. However, I shall argue for Naipaul’s approach as an impartial inquiry into a colonial encounter which failed to develop into creative interaction.

I shall look first at the internal problems of the former slave societies as Naipaul describes them. In Jamaica he voices his anger at the rigid stratification of race and class which makes a collective movement like nationalism difficult:

For seven months I had been travelling through territories which, unimportant except to themselves, and faced with every sort of problem, were exhausting their energies in petty power squabbles and the maintaining of the petty prejudices of petty societies. I had seen how deep in nearly every West Indian, high and low, were the prejudices of race; how often these prejudices were rooted in self-contempt; and how much important action they prompted. Everyone spoke of nation and nationalism but no one was willing to surrender the privileges or even the separateness of his group. Nowhere, except perhaps in British Guiana, was there any binding philosophy: there were only competing sectional interests. With an absence of a feeling of community, there was an absence of pride, and there was even cynicism (253-4).

This may be scathing, but it is even-handed, and does focus on the pressing problem of a community which is fragmented.

Naipaul then moves on to attack the passivity of those who had taken the middle passage, condemned to live in the alienating atmosphere of the sugar plantations or the shacks of remote settlements. Naipaul captures the predicaments of an old Indian

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indentured labourer displaced in a remote settlement deep in the district of Coronie, Surinam:

He was born in India and had come out to British Guiana as an indentured labourer. He had served his indenture and gone back to India; then he had indentured himself again. He spoke English of a sort and Hindu, no Dutch. How did he come to Surinam? . . . He could scarcely conceive a world outside British Guiana and the Coronie - even India had faded, except for a memory of a certain railway station - but he felt that the outside world was the true, magical one, without mud, mosquitoes, dust and heat. He was going to die soon, on that moated plot in Coronie; and he spoke of death as a chore. . . . A derelict man in a derelict land; a man discovering himself, with surprise and resignation, lost in a landscape which had never ceased to be unreal because the scene of an enforced and always temporary residence; the slaves kidnapped from one continent and abandoned on the unprofitable plantations of another, from which there could never more be escape: I was glad to leave Coronie, for, more than lazy Negroes, it held the full desolation that came to those who made the middle passage (208-9).

Like Conrad's Almayer, a trader of European origin displaced in a remote settlement, this ageing Indian is finally abandoned to his fantasies, while Naipaul reflects upon the large issue of the Indian diasporic condition of those scattered in and around the West Indies and South America.

Naipaul sees an element of anachronism in the freed bush-Negroes in the forest of Surinam who cling to their pure African descent. They resist interaction in favour of Africanization. Having achieved independence from slavery, these bush-negroes reorganize their life on the African pattern and further choose a reversion to their past. Naipaul thus criticises both the lack of self-renewal and the slavery which had inflicted a debilitating wound on those who had made the middle passage. Naipaul sees a link between slavery and the Holocaust in terms of cruelties inflicted: ‘Stedman's descriptions of atrocities (of slavery) resembles accounts of German concentration camps in the last war’ (202). Naipaul certainly recognises the bleak legacy of slavery.

He also takes a hostile view of the Ras Tafarians who he regards as fantasists. He examines what he sees as the symptomatic neurosis of Ras Tafarians who in their enslavement in Jamaica envisaged returning to the Kingdom of Ethiopia as their promised land. They provide another example of spiritual displacement. Like the East Indians, the Ras Tafarians are dreaming of an imaginary homeland without returning to it when an opportunity comes. The chilling side of this religious fanaticism is apparent in its campaigners' reaction to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935: ‘exterminate the
white race’ is comparable to Kurtz’s ‘exterminate the brutes’. Both racist phrases highlight the unreason of fantasy, so-called convictions becoming monstrous aberrations, although indeed imposed slavery as opposed to Kurtz’s voluntary submission give infinitely greater reason for the Ras Tafarian racism.

Naipaul also blames alcoholism which is one of the problems in British Guiana. The local brewery industry flourishes on the neo-colonialist’s subsidy; the alcohol anesthetizes a political consciousness required for social change. Naipaul also blames the mentality of parasitic dependence on a mother country which, for example, reduces Martinique to a helpless colony: ‘Scarcely any development is possible, for no Martiniquan industry could compete with a French one; and without her connexion with France Martinique could be lost’ (219). Naipaul takes a harsh view of drunks, fantasists, and mimic men - all of them are incapable of rebellion.

Naipaul examines the dismal condition of th ‘Negroes’ whom he considers incapable of creativity. His apparent ‘negrophobia’ is a contentious issue and must be carefully examined. John Keith Fairless argues that ‘with the publication of The Middle Passage Naipaul’s reputation as racist, anti-black nostalgic imperialist begins to emerge’. But the existence of Naipaul’s alleged racism is questionable because, as I shall demonstrate, Naipaul does not reaffirm the received racist view of blacks. It is thus important to explore the basis of his disapproval. John Keith Fairless gives a satisfactory explanation, arguing ‘It’s the “existence” or condition of “the Negro” as a construct as a direct or indirect product of slavery and post-colonial socio-economic pressures, that Naipaul critiques, rather than the essential or essence of “the Negro” per se’. Naipaul is nauseated by a soulless mimicry which is not confined to ‘negroes’ but is found in Indians as well. His denunciation is even-handed when he argues that ‘Like monkeys pleading for evolution, each claims to be whiter than the other, Indians and Negroes appeal to the unacknowledged white audience to see how much they despise one another’ (87). More controversially, in the chapter ‘Trinidad’.

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6 John Keith Fairless, Ibid., 162.
Naipaul approves of what Trollope wrote in 1860 - twenty-six years after the abolition of slavery - and quotes it to highlight the issue of the loss of identity:

But how strange is the race of creole Negroes - of Negroes, that is, born out of Africa! They have no country of their own, yet they have not hitherto any country of their adoption. They have no language of their own, nor have they as yet any language of their adoption; for they speak their broken English as uneducated foreigners always speak a foreign language. They have no idea of country, and no pride of race. They have no religion of their own, and can hardly as yet be said to have, as a people, a religion by adoption (71).

And Naipaul shows some understanding of the dilemma facing the first generation of freed AfroCaribbeans, arguing ‘Everything in the white world had to be learned from scratch, and at every state the negro exposed himself to the cruelty of the civilization which had overpowered him and which he was mastering’ (72). And indeed Naipaul blames the perpetrators of slavery and colonization. There is, for instance, this measured attack on colonialism which ‘distorted the identity of the subject people, and the Negro in particular’ (181). His critique of mimicry is not therefore directed at any specific group.

2

I shall now move on to explore Naipaul’s analysis of the failings of the white colonizers. As Karl Miller observes, ‘it is his [Naipaul’s] nature to occupy the middle ground’. Naipaul makes no secrets of his bitterness about the brutalities of the slave plantations, describing sugar cane as an ‘ugly crop with an ugly history’. In Surinam Naipaul reads Steadman’s narrative of the cruelties of slavery inflicted on the rebel slaves with a sense of horror, ‘Stedman later spoke and gave a few coins to a slave who was chained for life in a furnace room; he sketched a slave who was hung alive by the ribs from an iron hook and left to die’ (202). This is reminiscent of Kurtz’s half-glimpsed cruelty, or of Lowry’s critique of the atrocities committed by the crew of the S.S. Samaritan who put German captives into the furnace alive. All these outsiders

promote a moral awakening to shameful crimes such as the cruelties of slavery, the
Belgian atrocities, and the savageries of war. Such crimes are committed through an
exclusive faith in the purity of race and blood. In Surinam Naipaul sees the link
between the cruelties of slavery and the Nazi atrocities:

The Surinam he describes is like one vast concentration camp, with the difference that visitors were
welcome to look around and make notes and sketches. The slave-owner had less on his conscience than
the concentration camp commandant: the world was divided into black and white, Christian and
heathen (203).

Just as Conrad questions the 'civilising' mission, so Naipaul questions the validity of a
Christianity reduced to an ideological tool for preaching the superiority of a white,
Christian, European ethic. In British Guiana Naipaul exposes the hypocrisy of this
Christianity:

The missionary must first teach self-contempt. It is the basis of the faith of the heathen convert. And
in these West Indian territories, where the spiritual problem is largely that of self-contempt,
Christianity must be regarded as part of the colonial conditioning (172).

In Heart of Darkness Kurtz provides another example which highlights the failings of
'Christian' society, as suggested by a yawning gap between the grandiose rhetoric of
'civilising' mission and the atrocities committed by him. In Under the Volcano the
alcoholic Consul also despairs over the absence of a Christian ideal of love in an age of
wars. What is relevant to my argument is Walter Benjamin's tragic awareness of human
history: 'There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document
of barbarism'. Naipaul quotes Hartsinck's accounts of the failed Berbice slave-
rebellion which had invited brutal retribution from the Christians. Similarly, in Under
the Volcano, Lowry shows an erosion of the Christian ideal of love and the rise of
barbarism.

Naipaul also dismantles the myth of the motherland held by the colonials. He
shows that the colonials are victims of a massive illusion that they belong to their

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8 Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," ed., Hannah Arendt and trans. by Harry Zohn,
motherland. For instance, France is the mother country for the Martiniqueans as Holland for the Surinamers. He exposes the danger of a naivété in those who are deluded by that illusion. He also exposes the double standard maintained by the European colonial powers, showing that both their benevolent gestures and their grandiose rhetoric are a screen for their ruthless exploitation of cheap labour, rich resources and markets. Naipaul examines various ideological positions held by Western colonial powers. While in British Guiana the British had a profound scepticism concerning assimilation, both the Dutch in Surinam and the French in Martinique have fostered an illusion of equality. Naipaul's critique demonstrates how both approaches commonly bypass the real issue of an improvement of the situation in the colonies.

Naipaul says, 'The paradox is that Dutch idealism is leading to rejection, while out of British cynicism has grown a reasonably easy relationship between colonials and metropolitans' (186). It would be mistaken to think that he panders to the British who, as their cynicism attests, have been indifferent to the situation of their colony. Naipaul argues that Britain maintains colonial power because the former colonials are blind to her sense of her racial and cultural superiority. In contrast to the British cynical approach, the French have rather absorbed their colony by feeding an illusion that 'Martinique is France' and imposing 'the organized, single-standard society' within a racially diverse colony. Ironically, this policy of assimilation in Martinique has triggered the rise of black nationalism or an anti-colonial resistance instigated by Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire. From an outsider's perspective, Naipaul sees the problems and contradictions of 'assimilation [which] has not made Martinique an integral part of prosperous France, but has reduced the island to a helpless colony where now more than ever the commission agent is king' (219). There is his moral indignation at the fact that a colonial encounter has failed to develop into creative interaction, but has only produced colonial wreckage.
In *The Middle Passage* Naipaul remains observant and vigilant against the racist and exploitative policy which is characterized by slavery and colonialism, and even neo-colonialism today. This means that he sees a historical link between the past and the present. It is no accident that he embarks on his journey on the Spanish immigrant ship *Francisco Bobadilla* which is strongly reminiscent of the slave ships of the old days.

On the ship Naipaul sees a sharp dichotomy between the tourists dreaming of a luxury cruise on the Caribbean islands and the returning immigrants who are bringing home their disillusionment with the promised land of England. He also observes the newly-arrived immigrants at Southampton who come to England in search of low-paid jobs. They will soon face the grim reality of being the new untouchables in their promised land. From the position of detached observer, he also explores the volatile racial tensions found on the ship. Mr Mackay describes the newly-arrived immigrants as a ‘pack of orang-outangs’ (23) and another white passenger makes the remark, ‘The holiday is over. The wild cows are coming on board’ (26). This recalls Conrad’s satirical portrait of the German skipper on the *Patna* who describes the pilgrims heading for Mecca as ‘dese cattle’. A failure to read an ironic tone of voice in both writers has given rise to a misconception that they are racist writers. The returning immigrants have been the victims of racism in England where landlords and foremen put up big signs bearing racist slogans such as ‘Please No Coloured’, ‘Keep Britain White’, and ‘Niggers Go Home’. Here, Naipaul condemns unequivocally racism. He sees in racial antagonisms a sense of crisis for culture and civilization, as evidenced by the cruelties of slavery, the holocaust, and other forms of ethnic cleansing.

Naipaul also comments on the rise of neo-colonialism, as suggested by an influx of foreign tourists and investors into the Caribbean islands. In this respect, he shows us that the post-colonial societies are under threat. Both an exodus of the immigrants and an influx of foreign businessmen are the factors which contrive to cripple the economy. Tourism becomes a main source of revenue and the Jamaican
Tourist Board advertises, ‘Tourism matters to you’. But Naipaul takes a sardonic view of tourism which demands a humiliating servitude from the islanders who have to make a living by serving their old masters:

Every poor country accepts tourism as an unavoidable degradation. None has gone as far as some of these West Indian islands, which, in the name of tourism, are selling themselves into a new slavery (210).

Naipaul convincingly argues that even after independence the slave islands are still occupied by the neo-colonialists: he is alarmed, for instance, to learn that in Antigua they have sold a portion of the tiny island to property developers. Tourists exploit the beauty of the tropical islands, foreigners flock to the islands in search of new opportunities. By doing so, like Conrad’s imperialists, they continue to enjoy the privileges and glamour of their white race and feel superior to the islanders.

4

I would locate Naipaul’s despair in both the exploitative power of colonialists and neo-colonialists, and the lack of revitalising force among the islanders. In other words, his critique falls on both the domestic enemy and the foreign exploiters. In British Guiana Naipaul observes the hotel in decay which is emblematic of a defunct colonial society:

The hotel, new and pink, already felt like a ruin, like a relic of a retreating civilization. It smelt of disuse. Two barefooted children, dirty and shy, wearing clothes into which, following the Boa Vistan pattern, they had yet to grow, showed me to my room: a bed, a chair, a bulbless reading lamp, an ugly unshining wardrobe, a hot-water tap that didn’t run and had possibly never run, a window that overlooked a patch of wasteland where much garbage had been dumped (116-117).

A central question arises as to which side is primarily to blame for such colonial wreckage. I began my discussion by disputing a one-sided reading of The Middle Passage; it now becomes quite obvious that he also raises a big question mark over European (post)colonial intervention which has achieved little in improving the situation of the colonies. From the position of an impartial explorer, Naipaul sifts through the
relics of colonialism and post-colonialism and aspires to tell a larger truth without being partisan. Combined with his impartial inquiry into a colonial encounter is his historical perspective on it, ranging from slavery through colonialism to neo-colonialism. Given all this, I strongly refute the claim that Naipaul is an imperialist writer. In an era of de-colonization, he remains a quintessential outsider with an independent voice which I shall continue to trace in *An Area of Darkness*. 
THE OUTSIDER'S LOSS OF IDENTITY AND SEARCH FOR ROOTS

After examining his estrangement from Trinidad and its surrounding islands in the West Indies, Naipaul next travels to India - his ancestral land - not only to explore his enigmatic relation to India but to examine another post-colonial society. *An Area of Darkness* (1964) is a product of his travel leading to the spiritual discovery of his unanchored self and an India which is alien to him. In this non-fiction Naipaul maintains 'the cool eye of a well-bred stranger', according to William Walsh. George Woodcock comments on Naipaul's restless nomadic quality, arguing 'he was in search of fulfillments and also of roots he could not find at home'. Naipaul indeed delves into his own rootlessness and restlessness in this non-fiction, and his nomadic voice provides an alien and alienated perception. Naipaul is an outsider who cannot feel a sense of belonging to England nor to India. He experiences only the enigma of arrival in both countries.

Naipaul unleashes his anger on India which he denigrates as 'the largest slum in the world'. But as with the reception of *The Middle Passage*, many critics have refused to accept Naipaul's negativism towards post-colonial societies. For instance, Rob Nixon regards *An Area of Darkness* as a 'deeply obsessive book' which reflects a strong Western bias against India. But a simplified view of Naipaul as someone who panders to the West should not be allowed to monopolize the whole debate because there are some subtle issues to be addressed: for instance, Naipaul's perception of India's colonial encounter with the British Empire. Eugene Goodheart approvingly assesses Naipaul as 'the virtuoso of the negative'. In what follows, I shall draw attention to Naipaul's capacity for distancing himself both from the Indians who are backward-
looking and the British (post)colonialists clinging to the idea of Englishness. In addition, *An Area of Darkness* establishes its own peculiar genre, 'a commentary written with the insight of a novelist'. It does not fit into a traditional genre of non-fiction, but marks Naipaul's experimental spirit which will continue to develop in his future works. His experimentalism with his mode of expression coincides with his attempt to accommodate his fresh outlook on the outside world. He goes against stereotypes in both narrative form and outlook.

In *An Area of Darkness* Naipaul is driven to explore an India which 'had in a special way been the background of my childhood' (27). Being in the state of in-betweenness of belonging to and separateness from it, for him India is at once intimate and remote. On arrival at the Bombay Port, he is struck by the enigma of arrival which he feels in England. He finds himself trapped in 'the labyrinthine maze of Indian bureaucracy' when he struggles to claim his confiscated bottles from the customs house. And also he confirms a distance between himself and India:

In India I had so far felt myself a visitor. Its size, its temperatures, its crowds: I had prepared myself for these, but in its very extremes the country was alien. Looking for the familiar, I had again, in spite of myself, become an islander: I was looking for the small and manageable. From the day of my arrival I had learned that racial similarities meant little. The people I had met, in Delhi clubs and Bombay flats, the villagers and officials in the country 'districts', were strangers whose backgrounds I could not read. They were at once narrower and grander (140-1).

Naipaul makes use of his defamiliarizing perspective on India, being a stranger rather than a local. He also tries to capture the changing reality of India, which has led him to write more books about India. While in *India: A Wounded Civilization* (1977) he portrays an India heading for chaos, in *India: A Million Mutinies* (1990) he regards the increasing disorders as a positive sign of genuine liberation. But he pursues a central question in these books about India - whether India is capable of self-assessment and

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revolution, escaping fantasy and passivity. Unsurprisingly, Naipaul underlines the importance of a Camusian rebellion. Using this approach, he exposes what he sees as the fundamental failings of India which are characterized as being dominated by a 'philosophy of despair leading to passivity, detachment, acceptance' (188). Here, Naipaul is comparable to D.H. Lawrence who when he visited Ceylon in 1922 took a dismissive view of Buddhism as a 'religion of passivity'- 'Yet I don't believe in Buddha - hate him in fact - his rat-hole temples and his rat-hole religion. Better Jesus'. 7 Both writers are seen as empiricists who not only deplore the lack of revitalizing forces but reject the idea of submission: Naipaul is certainly scornful about the Indian mentality of a 'hunger for the unseen'. He challenges the Indian obsession with a 'rich spirituality' which he sees as an antithesis to progress and modernity.

Naipaul also deplores the old caste system which 'imprisons a man in his function'(75). The following passage shows that Naipaul's critique falls on the lack of rebellion on the part of the street sweepers, the untouchables, and the caste system which perpetuates human enslavement rather than liberation:

They [the sweepers] are not required to clean. That is a subsidiary part of their function, which is to be sweepers, degraded beings, to go through the motions of degradation. They must stoop when they sweep; cleaning the floor of the smart Delhi cafe, they will squat and move like crabs between the feet of the customers, careful to touch no one, never looking up, never rising. In Jammu City you will see them collecting filth from the streets with their bare hands. This is the degradation the society requires of them, and to this they willingly submit. They are dirt; they wish to appear as dirt (75).

Naipaul is angry about the untouchables' passive submission to the caste system which perpetuates human degradation, and it is worth recalling Biswas's defiance against Tulsidom, a Hindu organization which disdains individuality and imposes collective values. Of course, Naipaul is not alone in raising a dissenting voice against an impersonal social organization. Before him, for instance, Conrad saw the predicament of the colonial agents who are reduced to puppets, subordinated within a web of

7 D.H. Lawrence, "Letter to Lady Cynthia Asquith (30th April, 1922)," The Selected Letters (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1950), 139. Lawrence also wrote: "It seems to me the life drains away from one here. . . . One could quite easily sink into a kind of apathy, like a lotus on a muddy pond, indifferent to anything".
bureaucratic imperial organization. Lowry also disliked those who serve a fascist organization in *Under the Volcano*. These outsiders commonly see the danger of an extinction of individuality under a rigid social system.

Naipaul also dismantles the myth of Gandhi as the national hero with a profound scepticism, seeing in it the danger inherent in veneration for an idol. He sees limitations in Gandhi's legacy, arguing 'The revolutionary became a god and his message was thereby lost. He failed to communicate to India his way of direct looking' (82). By challenging Gandhi's current role, Naipaul emerges as a dissenter who goes against a popular belief. To take another example, he refuses to share the public admiration for the beauty of the Taj Mahal, dismissing it as 'a building wastefully without a function' and 'a despot's monument to a woman, not of India, who bore a child every year for fifteen years' (206).

While travelling Naipaul happens to meet a Sikh who has an outsider's perception on India, yet who resorts to hysterical violence out of frustration. Naipaul takes an ambivalent view of him. On the one hand, he sees in the Sikh the potential merit of the outsider's fresh perceptions on the failings of India, saying 'he had learned to look at India and himself' (228) and 'the condition of India was an affront to him; it was to me, too' (228). On the other hand, as a violent brawl at the restaurant suggests, the Sikh is consumed by a self-destructive anger. In a sense, the Sikh is seen as Naipaul's alter-ego, representing the violent and irrational side.

Naipaul's denigration of India may give an impression that he is an anglophile writer, simply confirming the received view of India. But a closer inspection of the text reveals that he takes a harsh view of the failings of the British Empire in India, arguing for the danger of narcissism inherent in the myth of British supremacism. He questions the bigoted national and imperial consciousness evident in the empire-builders:
Englishness, unlike the faith of other conquerors, required no converts; and for the Bengali, who was most susceptible to Englishness, the English in India reserved a special scorn. An imperial ideal, well on the way to a necessarily delayed realization, was foundering on the imperialist myth, equally delayed, of the empire-builder, on the English fantasy of Englishness, 'the cherished conviction', as one English official wrote in 1883, 'which was shared by every Englishman in India, from the highest to the lowest, by the planter's assistant in his lowly bungalow... to the Viceroy on his throne... that he belongs to a race whom God has destined to govern and subdue' (210).

Here Naipaul challenges an official imperialist ideology that preaches that the British Empire represents something 'noble' or 'great'. As I shall argue in relation to The Enigma of Arrival, Naipaul continues to criticize those who cling to the vanished glory and power of the British Empire. Similarly, Conrad criticizes those who hark back to an imperial power in decline. But the two writers adopt a different approach in expressing their subversive view of British imperialism. Conrad maintains an ironic distancing from the imperialists who are collusive - in Heart of Darkness Marlow approves of the idea of colonialism and a frame narrator takes a jingoistic tone; in Lord Jim Marlow praises Jim for his idealism and the privileged reader is convinced of white supremacism. But Naipaul criticizes the legacy of British Imperialism in a straightforward way.

Naipaul thus maintains an even-handed approach to the colonial encounter. Larry David Nachman comments on Naipaul's power of detachment, arguing that 'he has somehow gained the intellectual freedom to perceive the world undistorted by the reigning ideologies and the current sentimentalities'. 8 Naipaul indeed shows a thin screen between the Indian 'paralyzing, defeatist philosophy' and British narcissism. By doing so, he achieves a synthesis through his comparative look at both India which is 'a closed civilisation, ruled by ritual and myth' and the British Empire which resists a principle of reciprocity because of an exclusive faith in her racial and cultural superiority. By stripping away illusions on both sides, Naipaul emerges as a 'cultural philosopher' 9 who sifts through the debris of colonial encounter.

8 Larry David Nachman, "The Worlds of V.S. Naipaul," Salmagundi 54 (Fall 1981), 62.
In the chapter ‘Emergency’ which exposes the absurdity behind various reactions to the fear of the Chinese invasion of India, Naipaul looks at both an Indian prophet and the British Commissioner from a distance. The Indian prophet captivates the minds of those Indians who are totally unprepared for modern warfare because what is available to them is talk, speculation, and prediction. Naipaul also ridicules the British Commissioner who, even after the threat of war is officially withdrawn, mounts an anti-Chinese campaign among the Indians through a flurry of activities such as fund raising and morale boosting - which are also irrelevant to reality. The serious purpose of Naipaul's burlesque satire is to offer a critique on the element of fantasy which is discernible to both sides. This can be compared with Conrad's satiric impulse which is felt in *Lord Jim* where Conrad's critique falls on both the fanatical side of religious faith (Islam) and the inadequacy of an imperialist ideology to which Christianity is allied. This quality of satiric impulse is a common factor linking Naipaul with Conrad.

'Darkness' (as in the titles of *Heart of Darkness* and *An Area of Darkness* and even Lowry's *Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid*) represents a metaphysical despair. As Conrad explores the 'Dark Continent,' so Naipaul explores India which is an area of darkness. Naipaul's spiritual journey leads to a final confirmation of his despair and disillusionment: 'India was part of the night: a dead world, a long journey’ (265). Marlow's journey into the Congo is nightmarish, too. Naipaul's journey culminates in his visit to the village from which his maternal grandfather had taken the middle passage from India to Trinidad. Marlow's journey into the interior of the Congo culminates with his encounter with Kurtz; In Lowry's *Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid*, the protagonist Sigbjorn's journey to Oaxaca, Mexico, culminates with his visit to the tomb of his old Mexican friend Fernando. Travel, thus, for all three outsiders, leads to the discovery of alarming facts which have been hitherto unknown to them. Joseph Hifree dismisses Naipaul's journey
into India as ‘a sentimental journey that ended in profound disenchantment’. This view fails to consider Naipaul’s serious exploration of a colonial encounter.

4

An Area of Darkness also demonstrates Naipaul’s ability to demystify the two central sites of his fantasies - the snow-clad Himalaya mountains and the magical lights of London - which have captured his imagination since childhood. He discloses a yawning gap between the imagined and the experienced. He first reduces the sanctity attached to the Himalayan cave known as ‘the adobe of the God’ by drawing attention to an influx of tourists and commercial culture into the ‘holy’ place:

While it was enclosed, this made it secure. Exposed, its world became a fairyland, exceedingly fragile. It was one step from the Kashmiri devotional songs to the commercial jingles of Radio Ceylon; it was one step from the roses of Kashmir to a potful of plastic daisies (144).

Here, Naipaul suggests that the notion of sacredness is a mere fabrication. He problematizes the notion of holiness in such a way as to show a thin screen between devotion and commercialism - which are brought into contact on one site. Modern pilgrims, mostly tourists and businessmen, come to the holy site by car to seek spirituality, the locals rely on tourism to make a living as guides and hoteliers.

Naipaul also talks about his disillusionment with London as ‘the centre of his world’. He registers his pain of loss at the heart of the metropolis which has captured the imagination of so many colonials including West Indian immigrants:

I came to London. It had become the centre of my world and I had worked hard to come to it. And I was lost. London was not the centre of my world. I had been misled; but there was nowhere else to go... All mythical lands faded, and in the big city I was confined to a smaller world than I had ever known. I became my flat, my desk, my name (42).

Naipaul explores in depth this paradoxical nature of freedom and loss in In A Free State. He embarks on his journey from London to which he returns after his

10 Joseph Hifree, "A Disenchanting Journey," The Saturday Review (May 1, 1965), 42.
disillusionment with India. But in London he is disenchanted and alienated and is
destined for anonymity in an impersonal city:

Some days later in London, facing as for the first time a culture whose point, going by the
advertisements and shop-windows, appeared to be home-making, the creation of separate warm cells;
walking down streets of such cells past gardens left derelict by the hard winter and trying, in vain, to
summon up a positive response to this city where I had lived and worked; facing my own emptiness,
my feeling of being physically lost, I had a dream (266).

It is out of his own loss of identity that Naipaul is prompted to grasp the
predicaments of those characters who are uprooted, displaced, and finally lost. He
speaks universally through his personal displacement. Naipaul is drawn to those who
are out of place in India. For example, Malhotra is a Europe-educated colonial of Indian
origin: ‘East Africa, the English university and the years in Europe had made him just
enough of a colonial to be out of place in India’ (51). Out of his growing frustration,
Malhotra bullies his junior Ramnath into a humiliating position: ‘What he was taking
down was Malhotra’s request for his sacking, for insubordination, for inefficiency as a
stenographer, and insolence’ (50). Naipaul sees the contradictions in this Westernized
Indian who mimics rather than questions Indian bureaucratic organization. On
pilgrimage Naipaul also captures the predicament of an American girl lost in India.
Obviously, Laraine is one of the casualties of freedom, a deracínée, as she is being
doubly stranded between an India where her marriage to a Muslim musician breaks up
and an America where her parents are divorced. She faces an uncertain future in an alien
country:

She didn’t know whether she had lost her American nationality as a result of her marriage, and she
wasn’t sure whether she would be allowed to work in India. She had some idea that she was now very
poor and would have to live in straitened circumstances - not, I felt, fully visualized - in some Indian
town (177-8).

Naipaul thus explores the diasporic condition of those who are displaced in India with a
certain degree of sympathy.
Unlike the characters he draws, Naipaul makes use of his uprooted, hybridised and fragmented identity. From that position, he satirizes, for instance, those who, like Vasant, are unable to create a new mode of life from the old and the modern. Despite his lowly origin as a slum-boy from Bombay, Vasant becomes a star by making a fortune collecting telegrams in the stock exchange market. But although he liberates himself from the old caste system and adapts reasonably well to capitalist society, he still cannot shake off his old habits of sleeping rough and eating little: 'When he was poor he had never eaten during the day. The habit remained with him' (54). From the posture of a detached observer, Naipaul thus explores the problems and contradictions of both Europe-educated and low-caste Indians. He also captures the changing face of India through the juxtaposition of the rise of a slum-boy within a capitalist society and the plight of Europe-educated Indians caught in the web of a bureaucratic society.

In the light of Naipaul's even-handed analysis in *An Area of Darkness*, I strongly refute the claim that Naipaul is a biased writer who denigrates India from an imperialist standpoint. Like Conrad before him, who saw the importance of scepticism as 'the tonic of the mind', Naipaul conducts a rational inquiry into the fantasy-promoted states of mind which characterize both Indian faith and British imperialist ideology. Eugene Goodheart argues that 'for the skeptical Naipaul faith is a disease'. Naipaul therefore raises an independent voice which substantiates William Walsh's view that Naipaul is 'a free, untethered soul'.

But Naipaul's achievement of a balanced view of India and the British Empire (and London) is at the cost of his continuing sense of loss of personal identity. At the very end of his journey, he confirms that his identity is irrepairably fractured, saying in a despairing tone: 'It was a journey that ought not to have been made; it had broken my life in two' (265). Added to his disillusionment about India is his alienation from the

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London to which he returns. Nowhere is his outsider status more apparent than when he says, 'I was not English or Indian; I was denied the victories of both' (98). Being an outsider, he can neither 'rhapsodize about the glories of ancient India' nor idealise the glories of the British Empire.

Nevertheless, Naipaul makes a rich art out of the tension between belonging and not belonging, between identification and alienation. In An Area of Darkness he reflects upon his conflicting relations to India where he can neither be the local nor the tourist. Eventually he chooses to be a resident who stays for only one year. In India: A Wounded Civilization: (1977) he again speaks of his emotional tension between engagement and detachment:

India is for me a difficult country. It isn't my home and cannot be my home; and yet I cannot reject it or be indifferent to it; I cannot travel only for the sights. I am at once close and too far (8). 13

Henry Reed comments on Naipaul's characteristic attitude of ambivalence shown in his exploration of post-colonial societies like India, describing Naipaul as 'an artist making that harrowing choice between the sorry things that can just be laughed at and those that can only be wept at'. 14 Yet Naipaul's neutral position still courts controversy through the radically divergent views taken by both activists and dispossessed critics. While his impartial inquiry is valued, his non-committal stance is deplored. Yet I would define Naipaul as a detached observer, a witness, who assumes social responsibilities.

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14 Henry Reed, "Passage to India," Spectator (Oct 2, 1964), 453.
THE UNIVERSALITY OF DISPLACEMENT

1

In *In a Free State* (1971) Naipaul explores a deceptive idea of freedom leading to loss. He also draws a large landscape of the diasporic condition of the immigrants and the expatriates - 'all the characters are in some sense "free": free of their countries, their roots, even simply their usual securities', according to Dennis Walder. Bruce King comments on this paradoxical truth of freedom and loss which is central to Naipaul’s thought, saying 'The freedom of the diaspora is both liberating and a source of danger'. Naipaul appears to be indebted to Conrad who explored the world of the *deracinés* before him. Leo Gurko argues that Conrad universalizes his personal deracination, saying 'Conrad keenly understood the plight of the foreigner seeking roots in an adopted country and of the exile in the process of finding a new home'. *In A Free State* is a collection of separate stories in a loose form which is integrated around a common idea of the 'casualties of freedom'. In what follows, I shall explore Naipaul’s new way of looking at the world which requires a new mode of expression.

2

Naipaul bears witness to the rise of a new world order in which the white travellers or colonialists cannot enjoy their glamour and privileges any longer. In the Prologue 'The Tramp of Piraeus' (depicted as an extract from a journal) the traveller, Naipaul's narrator, grasps the predicaments facing an English tramp - alienation and physical vulnerability - who regards himself as 'a citizen of the world' (9). He becomes a target for hostility among the passengers on a dingy Greek steamer partly because he assumes an anachronistic posture of being 'a romantic wanderer of an earlier

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generation’ (8) carrying a copy of Byron’s poems. But in the new post-colonial world order, this romantic traveller becomes a victim. He has to lock himself in his cabin and go into hiding in one of the lavatories. His imprisonment runs directly counter to his cherished notion of freedom of movement. The observing narrator captures the plight facing this English tramp: ‘He hadn’t wanted company; he wanted only the camouflage and protection of company. The tramp knew he was odd.’ (10). He justifies Richard Ellmann’s assertion that ‘the citizen of the world is a citizen of nowhere’.5 Similarly, Ivan Klima hints at the price paid for nomadism, saying ‘the fact is that “everywhere” is no more than a substitute for the too nihilistically-sounding “nowhere”’6.

Naipaul’s critique falls on both provocation and harrassment. The following passage illustrates the new power relationship developing in an era of post-colonialism:

It was to be like a tiger-hunt, where bait is laid out and the hunter and spectators watch from the security of a platform. The bait here was the tramp’s own rucksack. They placed that on the deck outside the cabin door, and watched it. The furniture-maker still pretended to be too angry to talk. But Hans smiled and explained the rules of the game as often as he was asked (15).

This scene of bullying has a theatrical element in the sense that the bait is laid on a sort of arena for the amusement of other passengers, mostly spectators including the narrator himself who, at this stage, does not intervene. Dennis Walder hints at ‘a final twist: he [the English tramp] is to be tormented in a way reminiscent of an old imperial past time of the British, hunting tigers in India on the backs of elephants’.7 Naipaul unsettles the traditional paradigm of the power game. As I shall argue later, this theatrical scene is repeated in the Epilogue, ‘The Circus at Luxor’, where the bait for beggars in the desert is laid by two Italian tourists who are keen to take photos of the scene for ‘amusement’. But this time the narrator intervenes to stop the hotel staff from whipping the desert boys, although, as I shall argue later, it is still debatable whether his intervention is a symbolic gesture of rebellion or a hysterical reaction combined with fatigue.

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7 Dennis Walder, “V.S. Naipaul and the Postcolonial Order: Reading In a Free State,” 91.
The power game becomes more intriguing when the English tramp decides to retaliate against his tormentors without the help of the detached narrator. Out of desperation he threatens to ‘set fire to the cabin’ (19), which proves to be effective. In this opening story there is no hint of reconciliation. Naipaul’s dark vision of the world is in stark contrast to that of Dana Hilliot in Malcolm Lowry’s *Ultramarine* who envisages a classless society by seeking harmony among his tormentors. Apart from this new power game, Naipaul explores another important issue: the displacement of both travellers and immigrants which he will continue to develop in the stories which follow. The immigrant ship carries Greeks returning to Egypt when the war is over who are in Naipaul’s own words the ‘casualties of freedom’.

3

The ‘casualties of freedom’ is an umbrella term which encompasses both immigrants and expatriates. ‘One out of Many’ and ‘Tell Me Who to Kill’ deal with immigrants lost in the metropolis. They are cheated and betrayed by an elusive idea of freedom. In the opening of ‘One out of Many’ the narrator, an Indian domestic, is driven to speak of the price he has to pay for being an American citizen:

I am now an American citizen and I live in Washington, capital of the world. Many people, both here and in India, will feel that I have done well. But (21).

The narrator is Santosh who comes to Washington D.C. - the capital of democracy - with his employer who is a diplomat. Santosh appears to move along the road to freedom and independence, but the downside of his ‘achievement’ is the fact that he has to marry an American-African cleaning woman to legalize his stay in America after his *sahib’s* desertion. He feels deeply humiliated when he has to propose to the *hubshi* (black) woman whose race he has learned to despise. Naipaul thus adds poignancy to Santosh’s ‘victory’ which is rather closer to ‘defeat’. Santosh indeed regards himself as a ‘prisoner’ in a free state. He begins to realize that he is trapped:
Aching for the Bombay ways. I spread my beddings in the carpeted corridor just outside our apartment door. The corridor was long: doors, doors. The illuminated ceiling was decorated with stars of different sizes; the colours were grey and blue and gold. Below that imitation sky I felt like a prisoner.

Added to his spiritual displacement is his physical alienation from others in alien surroundings. He experiences the horror of anonymity at the end of his quest for freedom:

I am a simple man who decided to act and see for himself, and it is as though I have had several lives. I do not wish to add to these. Some afternoons I walk to the circle with fountain. I see the [Indian] dancers but they are separated from me by glass. Once, when there were rumours of new burnings, someone scrawled in white paint on the pavement outside my house: Soul Brother. I understand the word; but I feel, brother to what or to whom? I was once part of the flow, never thinking of myself as a presence. Then I looked in the mirror and decided to be free. All that my freedom has brought me is the knowledge that I have a face and have a body, that I must feed this body and clothe this body for a certain number of years. Then it will be over (57-8).

As this passage suggests, ‘he [Santosh] becomes aware of a distance between the “I”, the subjective consciousness, and the “me”, the person as an object in society’. He is certainly capable of self-assessment, without the false consciousness which characterizes expatriates like Bobby. But he is on the verge of madness.

In ‘Tell Me Who to Kill’, Naipaul develops the internal monologue of Dayo’s brother. This story is told by an uneducated West Indian immigrant who comes to London to support his brother’s study (a surrogate dream), but becomes deranged as a direct result of his anger at his two enemies - his brother who betrays his surrogate dream and the young English louts who ruin his business. Like Santosh, Dayo’s brother is alienated from city life and his psyche is further divided when he is consumed by a destructive urge. He works like a slave (a modern untouchable who sells cheap labour) at day and night in the cigarette factory and the restaurant, to be fed only by illusions and betrayed - the issues of betrayal and self-deception are interrelated. Although the narrator is uneducated, he is able to question the Christian ideal of brotherhood. Naipaul thus shows a thin screen between his madness and sanity. On the one hand, there is his pathological side, looking for an enemy with a knife. On the

other hand, there is his self-knowledge. A supreme irony is that Dayo’s brother finds a sort of brotherhood in his English friend Frank. Like Dayo’s brother, Frank is socially marginalized from English society and needs company. But their relationship is intriguing and problematic because Frank’s identity is never clearly defined. Is he a male nurse accompanying Dayo’s brother to Dayo’s wedding or a prison officer or a homosexual seeking a prey?

The anger of Dayo’s brother has an added dimension when young English louts destroy the shop on which he spent all the money earned through hard work. But he gets confused about who are his enemies, who are his friends. He finds himself in an odd position at Dayo’s wedding which, he thinks, is closer to a funeral. In contrast to his alienation from city life, Dayo moves towards successful assimilation through his marriage to an English girl. Moreover, the brother finds it difficult to distinguish the English guests at the wedding from the English louts. The following passage highlights the emotional complexity of an embittered man:

I love them. They take my money, they spoil my life, they separate us. But you can’t kill them. O God, show me the enemy. Once you find out who the enemy is, you can kill him. But these people here they confuse me. Who hurt me? Who spoil my life? Tell me who to beat back. I work four years to save my money, I work like a donkey night and day. My brother was to be the educated one, the nice one. And this is how it is ending, in this room, eating with these people. Tell me who to kill (102).

His free choice in coming to the metropolis from the West Indies ironically leads him along a path of self-destruction.

Both ‘One out of Many’ and ‘Tell Me Who to Kill’ allow an uneducated and socially marginalised man to tell his own story in broken language through an internal monologue: Naipaul eliminates the detached narrator’s mediation. An individual voice which is directly addressed to the reader is able to assess and measure the speaker’s loss of identity. Moreover, Naipaul explores the idea of solitary confinement into which both immigrants and expatriates are led. In ‘In a Free State’ which will be examined next, expatriates like Bobby and Linda are trapped in a volatile African state which they mistakenly think of as free.
'In a Free State' is the longest story and the centrepiece. This is Naipaul's first African narrative which, together with A Bend in the River, has distinctive echoes of Conrad's Heart of Darkness. Naipaul explores the predicaments facing the besieged expatriates in a post-colonial African state which slips into civil war between the King's and the President's forces. The main characters are Bobby, a British expatriate given to facile liberalism and Linda, British expatriate wife. Their cherished notion of freedom is gradually undermined and finally denied, suggested in an expressionistic technique used by Lowry in Under the Volcano to convey his apocalyptic vision. Every movement Bobby and Linda make is being watched from the President's helicopter hovering overhead and hunting for the King who is hiding. On their long journey back to the King's Compound from the President's Collectorate, Bobby and Linda are constantly aware of dark clouds amassing in the sky, an ominous sign for them. In the end they are trapped rather than free.

Naipaul then moves on to pursue the familiar question of what hinders progress and the evolution of a post-colonial state, blaming both internal enemies (aggressive Africans) and external ones (irresponsible Europeans). I shall first explore the false consciousness which characterizes Bobby who pretends to be a pro-African liberal. He is returning empty-handed from a conference on rehabilitation projects for the African state: the goal of 'commonwealth' proves to be empty rhetoric. Naipaul also discloses an element of hypocrisy inherent in Bobby: while presenting himself as a sympathizer with the Africans, he essentially remains a firm believer in white supremacism. Bobby adopts the tone of a European colonialist when he argues for the 'noble' idea of the 'civilizing' mission in Africa, yet he is an unsuitable moral preacher. He preaches to Linda who is a bystander:

We mustn't let our minds grow rusty. We are among savages and we need our cultural activities. We are among these very dirty savages and we must remind ourselves that we have this loveliness (219).
Bobby’s racist and imperialist view is immediately challenged by Linda who argues for a pragmatic colonialism, that is, an adoption of a stand-offish stance, as she says, ‘it’s not your business or mine’ (217). She confronts his facile idealism as misplaced in a territory dominated by terror:

Every week there’s this list of people who’ve been killed, and some of them don’t even have names. You should either stay away, or you should go among them with the whip in your hand. Anything in between is ridiculous (218).

Naipaul develops conversations between these two so as to engender tensions. Bobby denounces Linda’s racist view to justify his bogus liberal view. At one point, he says to her, ‘You’ve been reading too much Conrad, I hate that book, don’t you?’ (161). Nonetheless, Naipaul shows the inadequacies of both of their ideological positions.

As Dennis Walder observes, Bobby’s reasons for living in the newly independent African state are at least partly bound up with a struggle to find sexual freedom.9 Both his words and clothes are used not only to disguise his homosexuality but to invent his image as a ‘liberal’. He wears a native shirt and appeases a Zulu boy with ‘When I am born again I want your colour’ (109); but he only wants to win the boy’s favour and is frustrated when the boy spits in his face. Like Ganesh, Bobby is a pretender for whom only self-interest matters. Fawzia Mustafa sees Bobby’s homosexuality as a ‘symptom of an overdetermined British liberal paternalism towards “black” Africa’.10

From his posture of moral superiority, Bobby despises Linda as ‘a man-eater’ and ‘a rotting cunt’, judgements which he is in no position to make. Yet Naipaul suggests that there is only a thin screen between Bobby’s whoring and Linda’s sexual rapacity. Both figures are indeed portrayed as ‘rotten colonialists’; seeking an opportunity abroad to compensate for failure at home. Naipaul discloses the hypocrisy of Linda who announces she hates the ‘African smell’ whilst trying to remove her own.

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9 Dennis Walder, “V. S. Naipaul and the Postcolonial Order: Reading In a Free State,” 102.
Naipaul gives expression to the new reality in which Europeans can no longer assert their authority and power over Africans. Bobby undergoes a series of humiliations at the hands of African boys and experiences raw and arbitrary violence from African soldiers. In addition, both Bobby and Linda are reduced to the status of refugees in this African state; even when Bobby’s safety is in question he has nowhere to go: ‘Bobby thought: I will have to leave. But the compound was safe; the soldiers guarded the gate. Bobby thought: I will have to sack Luke [his African houseboy who begins to ridicule the expatriates]’ (238). He in fact has no choice but to stay on in a volatile land. Linda is also in difficulties because she faces a bleak future once out of Africa. Both Bobby and Linda fall into the category of ‘casualties of freedom’.

Naipaul’s critique falls on the Africans as well as the expatriates. He paints a bleak picture of a post-colonial African state (which is unnamed to universalize its situation) degenerating into an internal power struggle after independence. His satiric vision is universally applied to all Africans, ranging from the President, whose hair is done in an English style and whose power relies upon foreign mercenaries, to an African car-washer who is unfit for his job. Naipaul dismantles the myth of the President as an African redeemer, exposing his mimicry of European style and his abuse of tyrannical power. Naipaul also exposes the lies which characterize both Bobby and the President. Bobby comes across the new photos of the President which are used for propagandist purposes:

In the lobby there was the new official photograph of the president. It has appeared in the city only that weekend. In the old photographs the president wore a headdress of the king’s tribe, a gift of the king at the time of independence, a symbol of the unity of the tribes. The new photograph showed the president without the headdress, in jacket, shirt and tie, with his hair done in the English style. The bloated cheeks shone in the studio lights; the hard opaque eyes looked directly at the camera. Africans were said to attribute a magical power to the president’s eyes; and the eyes seemed to know their reputation (108).

Like Ganesh, the President inflates his image and fabricates the truth to reinforce his authority and power. Together with words and clothes, photos are used to deceive the
public into thinking that he is a messiah in a new African state, an African version of Kurtz. As Bruce King argues, Naipaul 'offers a demystification'.

In a Free State ends with an extract from a journal, ‘The Circus at Luxor’ which again dramatises the theatrical power game between hunter and hunted found in ‘The Tramp at Picaeus’. This time the exploiters are two Italian tourists and the exploited are local beggar boys who are offered sandwiches as bait. In both stories we witness a cruel scene which is reduced to the stuff of entertainment for the spectators within the tale.

Naipaul sets this final story in Egypt, a meeting place of peoples of various nationalities. It is also no coincidence that he links the setting of the Epilogue with the Prologue which showed migratory people returning to Egypt on the dingy little Greek steamer.

In the Epilogue the narrator drops spectatorship and steps in to intervene at the scene of human cruelty where the two Italians are playing a childish game with beggar boys in the desert:

Still the Germans at my table didn’t notice; the students inside were still talking. I saw that my hand was trembling. I put down the sandwich I was eating on the metal table; it was my last decision. Lucidity, and anxiety, came to me only when I was almost on the man with the camel-whip. I was shouting, I took the whip away, threw it on the sand. He was astonished, relieved. I said, ‘I will report this to Cairo.’ He was frightened; he began to plead in Arabic. The children were puzzled; they ran off a little way and stood up to watch. The two Italians, fingering cameras, looked quite calm behind their sunglasses. The women in the party leaned back in their chairs to consider me (243).

This scene has elicited different interpretations among critics. While some have read the narrator’s intervention as a ‘confirmation of his alienation rather than as a symbolic gesture of rebellion’, others read it as a ‘positive action, the single instance of it in the whole book, a moment of indignant anger putting a stop to the whipping and the bullying’. So this scene needs careful examination to weigh up the narrator’s stance as regards a rebellion which is immediately cancelled out by his sense of futility. The narrator blames the collective failure to intervene of all present rather than any individual

group. Many groups are being criticized: the hotel member of staff with the camel-whip, the degraded beggar boys, the local guides and drivers who are quite as unresponsive as the foreign tourists, and the two Italians who play their unpleasant game with the beggar boys. Naipaul remains vigilant concerning the extinction of human conscience as a universal phenomenon.

This scene also reveals some points of comparison between Naipaul and Conrad and Lowry. Naipaul has a cherished desire for rebellion which, according to Paul Theroux, is a ‘vital attitude of mind, a writer’s best impulse’. The word ‘rebellion’ is central to Naipaul as well as to Camus. So it could be argued that Naipaul goes beyond Conrad’s guiding principle of healthy scepticism. In addition, Naipaul goes beyond the Consul’s cynical attitude of non-interference in the face of the dying Indian courier in Under the Volcano. But in general Naipaul is much closer to Lowry in the sense that both writers express their anger at the absence of human decency rather than suppressing it. It is sufficient to remember Bill Plantagenet in ‘Lunar Caustic’, who remains defiant even in despair. Nevertheless, Naipaul remains on the whole more neutral than Lowry who is readier to align his protagonists with socially marginalised groups. Naipaul’s catholic distaste for humanity is readily discernible in his description of both the two playful Italians and the beggar boys who will come back to ‘rake the sand for what they had seen the Italian throw out’.

Naipaul also assesses the situation of Egypt which is in a state of ruin and defeat. He offers a historical vignette, highlighting a series of humiliations suffered by Egypt at the hands of foreign imperial powers:

Peonies, China! So many empires had come here. Not far from where we were was the colossus on whose shin the Emperor Hadrian had caused to be carved verses in praise of himself, to commemorate his visit. On the other bank, not far from the Winter Palace, was a stone with a rougher Roman inscription marking the southern limit of the Empire, defining an area of retreat. Now another, more remote empire was announcing itself. A medal, a postcard; and all that was asked in return was anger and a sense of injustice (245-6).

14 Paul Theroux, V. S. Naipaul: An Introduction to His Work, 115.
The narrator suggests that this mentality of defeat is something that has come down to the present time. In terms of passivity, a parallel may be drawn between the Indians portrayed in *An Area of Darkness* and the Egyptians depicted here. Egypt is totally unprepared for repeated foreign invasions. The two Italians playing their childish game are seen as descendants of the Roman Empire, the Chinese troupe as secret agents on a mission from Red China, an emerging Empire. The Egyptian waiters allow themselves to be used by the Chinese: ‘For each waiter the [Chinese] lady had a handshake and gifts, money, something in an envelope, a medal. The ragged waiters stood stiffly, with serious averted faces, like soldiers being decorated’ (245). And the ending of the story captures the dejection of the Egyptian soldiers and peasants who are to face defeat in the desert:

In the dimly lit waiting room of Cairo station there were more sprawled soldiers from Sinai, peasants in bulky woollen uniforms going back on leave to their villages. Seventeen months later these men, or men like them, were to know total defeat in the desert; and news photographs taken from helicopters flying down low were to show them lost, trying to walk back home, casting long shadows on the sand (246).

The narrator in the Epilogue locates the problems of Egypt in both the absence of rebellion and her failure to confront the present, not as a new phenomenon but as something inherited. He argues that the ancient artist’s vision of the Nile as ‘fairyland’ is flawed because it is a fabrication. Naipaul delivers a despairing verdict on Egypt by suggesting that both the ancient artist and the contemporary Egyptian people are incapable of assessing their own situation.

6

In *In a Free State* Naipaul incorporates fiction with non-fiction. Two extracts from a journal bracket three stories, shaping a subtle combination of transparency (fact) and probability (fiction). He chooses to avoid using the unified narratorial voice of a third-person narrator, dropping an artificial narrative device which requires pretensions to omniscience on the narrator’s part. Both Prologue and Epilogue are alleged excerpts from a journal; both ‘One out of Many’ and ‘Tell Me Who to Kill’ are interior monologues. ‘In a Free State’ is narrated by a detached observer. Naipaul thus aspires
to register minimal narratorial mediation. *In a Free State* is wideranging both in its choice of settings and in its characters of diverse backgrounds and nationalities. Naipaul is keen to grasp the changing reality surrounding him - a new world order developing in the post-colonial era - rather than rehearsing preconceived views. From the position of an outsider, Naipaul shows the shifting ground between old and new orders, between the centre and its margins.
SALIM: THE AFRICAN OUTSIDER

1

In *A Bend in the River* (1979) Naipaul presents the outsider figure Salim who gives his personal account of both African and metropolitan life. In this African narrative, Naipaul explores the aftermath of the withdrawal of Belgian colonial rule in the Congo which was the setting of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. A comparative study of the two novels will not only provide a historical link but disclose some features common to both writers, for instance, the outsider’s role of conducting an inquiry into the shifting relationship between Europe and Africa. As Edward Said argues, Naipaul sifts through the debris of colonialism and post-colonialism.¹

The central character Salim is an East African Muslim of Indian origin who is on the move. He first travels into the Interior from the East coast of Africa and later flees from Africa, ending up as a refugee in London. But as a result of his migrations, he acquires a comparative vision. Inside Africa, Salim not only assesses the legacy of the colonial past but bears witness to a new development - the rise of an African tyrant called the ‘Big Man’ (this sardonic naming reminds us of George Orwell’s hatred of the totalitarian state to which the new African state is likened). Outside Africa, Salim dismantles the myth of metropolitan life by looking at the depressing reality facing immigrants and refugees. Edward Said regards Salim as ‘an affecting instance of the modern intellectual in exile’² whose duties are to unsettle previous assumptions and challenge existing authorities. In *A Bend in the River* Naipaul drops the mask of irony and allows Salim to give his candid account of the circumstances and events developing around him. However, Naipaul draws Salim ambivalently and refuses to idealize his character. Karl Miller comments on this point, saying that ‘He is a hero, with a hero’s faults: an achiever and an adventurer who is also a victim and an outcast, a shameful

man and a faithful family man." So we can see Salim as a development from Biswas, since both of them can be characterized as existentialist dissenters.

*A Bend in the River* can be defined as a kind of diasporic narrative which deals with the predicaments facing those who are out of place, for instance, the natives under a new African regime, the expatriates residing in Africa, and the refugees lost in the metropolis. Salim himself is homeless and rootless, exposed to both Europe and Africa with an ability to connect things. Being brought up in an Asian Indian community on the East coast of in Africa, Salim suffers from anxiety about his African identity under a regime which, like Fascism, insists obsessively on purity of race and blood. So Salim is destined to become an exile. Yet even Ferdinand, a member of the African élite, is in fear of the tyrant he is serving as a Regional Commissioner and speaks to Salim about that fear: 'You mustn't think it's bad just for you. It is bad for everybody....We're all going to hell, and every man knows this in his bones....Everyone wants to...run away. But where? That is what is driving people mad. They feel they're losing the place they can run back to' (272). Salim's diaspora becomes emblematic.

2

Salim, a bachelor, breaks away from his family and community and heads for central Africa to take over Nazruddin's shop at the bend of the river. He is soon dispossessed when his new business is taken away under the radicalization scheme introduced by the new regime. He is arrested and imprisoned for illegal trade in ivory and gold by corrupt officials who demand bribes. With the help of Ferdinand, he narrowly escapes from the bend in the river which has now become no man's land and reaches London where his 'Intended', Nazruddin's daughter, is waiting for him.

There are many points of comparison with Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*; for instance, Salim's journey into the interior and his fleeing to the metropolis are comparable to Marlow's journey up the river and his return to the entombed city. But as

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Lynda Prescott argues, 'Naipaul takes some of the sections of Heart of Darkness over into A Bend in the River and reverses or even parodies them'. While Kurtz dies in the African jungle and leaves his 'Intended' in mourning, Salim escapes Africa and heads for London where his 'Intended' awaits him. But whether by echo or parody, the link between the two writers and their novels is strong, as Naipaul's personal comment shows: 'Conrad's value to me is that he is someone who, 60 or 70 years ago, meditated on my world, a world I recognize today. I feel this about no other writer of the century'. So Conrad's African tale is source material for A Bend in the River, but Naipaul further advances Conrad's dark vision of Africa in the days of imperialism and offers an analysis of post-colonial Zaire. A Bend in the River is indeed 'an evocation and inversion of some major features of Conrad's tale'. Compared with Conrad's narrator Marlow, Naipaul's narrator Salim has a greater strength in that he has an inside view of Africa which Marlow only glimpses from a distance. And Constantin von Barloewen has suggested a crucial difference between Conrad and Naipaul: 'Conrad remains a novelist while Naipaul is largely a political and cultural philosopher'.

Salim plays a double role of insider and outsider. As Lynda Prescott argues, Salim is 'an outsider with a degree of detachment from the public events he describes, but at the same time he is part of the mixed history of Africa'. Being in a state of in-betweenness he is free, yet unprotected. He reflects upon his sad fate as an outsider, saying 'I was unprotected. I had no family, no flag, no fetish'. (61) But what is distinctive about him is a stoic acceptance of life. As with Biswas, for Salim 'the code of survival is the only viable approach'. He is a resilient character who guards himself against the double danger of fatalism and cynicism. Indeed, Naipaul's creation of such a stoic African character is a clear indication that he 'takes a more optimistic view of the

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possibilities of survival in a post-colonial world’. The positive role that Salim plays has elicited a positive response from Edward Said who is known as one of Naipaul’s detractors. By contrast, Adewale Maja-Pearce makes scathing attacks on the Naipaul brothers (Shiva Naipaul as well) for their negative portrayal of Africa as ‘a destructive, primeval force incapable of the refinements of civilization’. There may be some truth in this, but in my view, Naipaul is not making an absolute judgement; he is concerned with the present problems and contradictions of a new African state which has for the moment degenerated into anarchy. In his essay ‘A New King for the Congo: Mobutu and the Nihilism of Africa’ (1975), Naipaul makes a savage attack on a specific African tyrant’s fantasy and mimicry. And his hatred of tyranny leads him to create a positive dissenter like Salim.

Salim is driven by the urge to advance himself in the world and to establish himself as a self-made man by making use of his skill in trading, breaking away from the narrow bound of his family and static Asian-Indian community. This capacity for distancing becomes part of his nature:

So from an early age I developed the habit of looking, detaching myself from a familiar scene and trying to consider it from a distance. It was from the habit of looking that the idea came to me that as a community we had fallen behind. And that was the beginning of my insecurity (22-23).

With his voluntary departure from his roots, Salim becomes a sort of nomadic outsider. Edward Said defines the condition of an exile as follows: ‘the exile exists in a median state, neither completely at one with the new setting, nor fully disencumbered of the old; beset with half-involvements and half-detachments; nostalgic and sentimental on one level, an adept mimic or a secret outcast on another’. But Salim is a stoic who refuses to be fed by illusions:

I, too, breaking out of old ways, had discovered solitude and the melancholy which is at the basis of religion. Religion turns that melancholy into uplifting fear and hope. But I had rejected the ways and comforts of religion; I couldn’t turn to them again, just like that. That melancholy about the world

11 Hellen Tiffin, 'V.S. Naipaul's "Outposts of Progress"', 315.
remained something I had to put up with on my own. At some times it was sharp; at some times it wasn’t there (115).

Here Salim is clearly breaking with collective values, for instance, the Hindu religion with what he sees as its false consolation, and he is instead adopting an existentialist stance. Salim says, ‘with me the fatalism was bogus’ (25) and ‘I could be master of my fate only if I stood alone’ (25). He is thus comparable to Biswas who struggles to proclaim his own independence by ‘paddl[ing] on his own canoe’. Bruce King rightly regards Salim as a ‘Camusian rebel, an alienated outsider who, unwilling to accept fate, attempts to live fully’. In addition, Salim is capable of questioning and doubting a dictator’s ideological programme which is designed to foster a personality cult.

Salim’s anti-imperialist stance is strongly reminiscent of Conrad’s indictment of Belgian imperial practices in the Congo which he describes as ‘the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience and geographical exploration’, while the idealisation of Kurtz demonstrates the need for ‘statues’. And what Salim criticises about the African tyrant is precisely his mimicry of the worst of imperialism: he too wants his statues:

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Portraits, maxims, occasional statues of the African madonna - they continued all the way to the hotel. If I had come to the capital fresh from out town I would have felt choked. But after Europe, and after what I had seen of the country from the air, and still with my sense of the flimsiness of the capital, my attitude was different, and I was surprised by it. There was to me an element of pathos in those maxims, portraits and statues, in this wish of a man of the bush to make himself big, and setting about it in such a crude way. I even felt a little sympathy for the man who was making such a display of himself (258).

Since his first novel *The Mystic Masseur*, Naipaul has questioned the notion of the greatness of many self-styled heroes which is essentially a sham. In doing so, he plays the outsider’s role of deconstructing fabrication and interrogating acts of veneration.

Salim’s outsider status is used by Naipaul as a way to expose the pretensions of those who adhere to the new republic’s President. So Salim scrutinises the President’s lackey, the Belgian historian Raymond, and indeed finds him wanting. Raymond eschews all criticism of his patron, the President, and even idealizes him as a man of action:

In a more conversational voice, as though he was commenting on his own story, Raymond said at last, breaking the silence, ‘He’s a truly remarkable man. I don’t think we give him enough credit for what he’s done. We take it for granted. He’s disciplined the army and brought peace to this land of many peoples. It is possible once again to traverse the country from one end to the other - something the colonial power thought it alone had brought about. And what is most remarkable is that it’s been done without coercion, and entirely with the consent of the people. You don’t see policemen in the streets. You don’t see guns. You don’t see the army’ (140).

Raymond also colludes with the President who actually controls the people through fear and misery. As the President’s white adviser, he serves rather than subverts the regime by writing speeches for his patron to flatter him. This Belgian historian, as Salim reveals, is far from being a white liberal who supports the cause of revolution in an African state, but is rather an opportunist who wants to be associated with the centre of power. When he loses the President’s favour, he is a defeated man.

Salim also observes how Indar, who is a member of the African élite but is of Indian origin, also fails to see the problems and contradictions of the President. Being disillusioned with the shrinking status of Europe Indar remains optimistic about his Africa. But this wishful thinking induces him, like Raymond, to misinterpret the President as an achiever with a vision of Africa and he loses all his critical abilities:
He is the great African chief, and he is also the man of the people. He is the modernizer and he is also the African who has rediscovered his African soul. He's conservative, revolutionary, everything. He's going back to the old ways, and he's also the man who's going ahead, the man who's going to make the country a world power by the year 2000. I don't know whether he's done it accidentally or because someone's been telling him what to do. But the mish-mash works because he keeps on changing, unlike the other guys. He is the soldier who decided to become an old-fashioned chief, and he's the chief whose mother was a hotel maid. That makes him everything, and he plays up everything. There isn't anyone in the country who hasn't heard of that hotel-maid mother (144-5).

By contrast, Salim is someone who sees the emperor's new clothes; he challenges the dictator's ideological programme and exposes the absurdity of his myth-making. The President consolidates his power by forcing Africans to make a pilgrimage to the shrine where his mother was born and to erect statues of this African madonna. He is a man who reinvents history to serve his own purpose, transforming his mother's image. Unlike Raymond and Indar (outsiders as they ultimately are, since they are marooned in a new cycle of power), he does not seek security by embracing the new régime and blinding himself to its faults which so disturbing mimic what has gone before; he risks himself, despite his instinct for self-preservation, by remaining clear-eyed and independent.

4

Salim also remains vigilant against the practice of neo-colonialism in an African state. A young American smuggles out Father Huisman's collection of African artefacts into the gallery of an American city. He is a con-man who conceals his exploitative motivation behind the façade of self-professed love of the Africans:

The collection began to be pillaged. Who more African than the young American who appeared among us, who more ready to put on African clothes and dance African dances? He left suddenly by the steamer one day; and it was discovered afterwards that the bulk of the collection in the gun room had been crated and shipped back with his belongings to the United States, no doubt to the nucleus of the gallery of primitive art he often spoke of starting. The richest products of the forest (89).

But Salim is all too aware that the American is only one of the neo-colonialists plaguing the new African state. After the European settlers, foreign mercenaries and profiteers have come who are invariably indifferent to the situation of the country. And then there
are the representatives of Christianity. The Belgian priest Father Huismans is seen as a neo-colonialist who is more interested in collecting African primitive artefacts than in fulfilling his 'noble mission' to implant European culture and education there. He is a bogus liberal-minded European who pretends to bond with Africans whilst hiding his passion for collecting African masks and wood carvings. For this Christian priest and the young American, Salim perceives, Africa is an object to be exploited. Kurtz is also a greedy ivory agent whose exploitative mind contradicts his benign image as a missionary from a Christian culture. Both Conrad and Naipaul urge us to see a discord between the expression of noble ideals and the performance of ignoble actions.

But Naipaul's critique is directed against African officials as well as neo-colonialists; both take advantage of the dispossessed. As the novel advances, Salim the outsider finds himself at the mercy of arbitrary policy and the tyrant's law. Dispossessed and homeless, Salim has to resort to black-marketing in ivory and gold, which his house-boy Metty reports to the officials and he is imprisoned. Salim is left in no doubt as to the current domestic enemies - corrupt officials and a tyrant - who, in aping the worst traits of their predecessors, are making the country regress.

5

In the new Zaire, the Belgian priest and the Belgian historian, both self-absorbed and backward-looking, become, as Salim observes, victims rather than victors in the post-colonial era: Father Huismans is beheaded and Raymond loses favour. Their predicaments reflect the erosion of Belgian colonial power in Zaire: the old masters become the new dispossessed. Naipaul shows a new reality emerging from an African state after the withdrawal of colonial power; the names of the African towns have been Africanized and the statues of King Leopold and the colonial explorers defaced or removed. In this new post-colonial context, Salim explores the interior world of the expatriates who are indifferent to the situation of the country; or rather, their exploitation appears more crudely directed, when it does not have the sanction of imperial policy. They are neither empire-builders nor genuine liberals, but profiteers who collude with
the President’s secret agenda. Salim questions the moral position of these expatriates who are more interested in making profits than in improving the situation of the country, and he recalls that ‘we had considered them parasites and half dangerous, serving some hidden cause of the President’s, people we had to be careful with’ (124). The lucrative business of building the Domain, for instance, is based upon complicity with a tyrant. Salim sees the cracks behind the shoddy modern grandeur:

There were more households like his in the Domain now. The polytechnic was still there, but the Domain had lost its modern ‘show-place’ character. It was scruffier; every week it was becoming more of an African settlement. Maize, which in that climate and soil sprouted in three days, grew in many places; and the purple-green leaves of the cassava, which grew from a simple cutting even if you planted it upside down, created the effect of garden shrubs. This piece of earth - how many changes had come to it! Forest at a bend in the river, a meeting place, an Arab settlement, a European outpost, a European suburb, a ruin like the ruin of a dead civilization, the glittering Domain of new Africa, and now this (269).

When this project is abandoned after continued conflicts, the Domain reverts to African ways; the various attempts to impose alien and alienating images on the bend of the river finally fail, but at great human cost.

Salim captures the universal predicament of those who are displaced and paints a large picture of the diasporic condition in a post-colonial era. As his dual exposure to African and metropolitan life attests, Salim looks at both European expatriates in the Domain and Africans adrift in their own place from in-between. His dismal view of metropolitan life is initially influenced by Indar, a member of the colonial élite of Indian origin educated in England, who takes the cynical view that ‘civilization is dead’ and ‘our civilization had also been prison’ (148). Salim later makes a journey to London and explores the horrors of metropolitan life through the eyes of an outsider. Indar and Salim indeed share their disillusionment about London. During his visit to London, Salim is horrified at the predicaments facing the young African girls locked in their kiosks (outcasts in the metropolis, an evocation and reversal of Conrad’s ‘an outcast of the islands’):
I saw the young girls selling packets of cigarettes at midnight, seemingly imprisoned in their kiosks, like puppets in a puppet theatre. They were cut off from the life of the great city where they had come to live, and I wondered about the pointlessness of their own hard life, the pointlessness of their difficulty journey (238).

It is illuminating to draw a parallel between the young girls imprisoned at the heart of civilisation and the expatriates locked in the Domain. Here and elsewhere, Naipaul sees London as a canopied city, which strongly evokes Conrad’s tomb-like city to which Marlow returns after his nightmarish journey into the Congo. Salim shuttles between what used to be the centre (Europe) and what used to be its periphery (Africa), acquiring his dual vision. On his way back to the bend in the river from London, he says, ‘it was like being in two places at once’ (237). But the disadvantage of his mobility is his homelessness and rootlessness.

In A Bend in the River Naipaul portrays the Africans who wrestle with a bruising collision between African and European traditions. As her double role of African sorceress and retailer suggests, Zabeth reconciles the bush tradition with the modern without causing too much friction. Her son Ferdinand, however, is an embodiment of the conflict between the old and new Africa, being a bush boy educated in the lycée, according to his mother’s wish, and later the Regional Commissioner serving the President. He gradually transforms himself from the lycée boy wearing the white shorts of the school uniform into a cadet wearing khaki trousers. Salim sympathizes with Ferdinand, who finds himself in an odd position in the new African state. So when the insurrection breaks out, although it is his duty to control it, he commits treason by releasing Salim from jail and helping him to escape from Africa. Yet while his mother feels sympathetic to the rebels from the bush, Ferdinand serves the President. He is someone who suffers from a divided loyalty, and like Salim himself is ultimately rootless.

And the same is in the end true of Indar, a polyglot, yet having no deep connection with Africa, India or England. Dissillusioned about London, he realises that he cannot belong to India from which his ancestors came to Africa. When he goes to the
Indian High Commission in London to seek the possibility of joining the diplomatic service, an interviewer says 'But you say in your letter you are from Africa. How can you join our diplomatic service? How can we have a man of divided loyalties?' (155). Indar too then plays the role of outsider, looking at the framed photographs of Gandhi and Nehru with no affection, refusing to venerate these Indian national heroes out of a belief that the cult of personality demands a humiliating obedience. The echoes of Naipaul himself are very clear.

Salim bears witness to the changing face of an African society with fear and hope. He sees all too clearly that the natives have become internal exiles, as it were, under the rule of a tyrant. And alongside his hatred of the dictator, there is his warm empathy with ordinary Africans who, like himself, are dispossessed and unprotected in their own land. For example there are the two characters, Zabeth and Metty, who suffer their changing status rather differently. Salim speaks about the strength of Zabeth without irony: 'I had treated Zabeth so far as a marchande and a good customer. Now that I knew that in our region she was a person of power, a prophetess, I could never forget it. So the charm worked on me as well' (16). Zabeth is dignified; although her marriage with a man from another tribe was broken up, she remains a 'celibate who wears the smell of protective ointments to repel others'. Moreover, she has no time for the President's revolutionary army, taking a sympathetic view of the rebel cause. Zabeth is the sort of character who offers hope for the future of Africa.

Salim meanwhile fulfils his moral duty to his family servant Metty by treating him as an equal and letting him go free. However, the government officials still despise Metty as a half-caste rather than treating him as a citoyen - Metty becomes a free man, yet he is left unprotected and dispossessed. He represents then the freedom and loss which is one of the central ideas running through Naipaul's works. Like Ferdinand, Metty undergoes crises of identity, as suggested by his shifting relationship with his master Salim whom he initially called monsieur, then citoyen and finally patron. Metty eventually achieves freedom by shaking off the bondage of his caste, yet he, like Zabeth, lives in fear of political barbarism.
Through his detached observations of both the injustice of tyranny and the response of ordinary people, Salim fulfils his social responsibilities rather than dodging them. What is relevant to Naipaul’s own outsider role is Joseph Brodsky’s view: ‘Since there is not much on which to rest our hopes for a better world, since everything else seems to fail one way or another, we must somehow maintain that literature is the only form of moral insurance a society has’.15

Like Guerrillas, A Bend in the River is a dark book which paints a very bleak picture of the future of a post-colonial African state. In both novels, Naipaul maintains a balanced perception of the failings of both Europeans and non-Europeans. Salim says that ‘his nature is to occupy the middle ground’. So it could be argued that here and elsewhere Naipaul aspires to tell a larger truth through not being partisan. Salim exposes lies or detects an air of collusion between the President and the Belgian historian Raymond who writes according to the wishes of a dictator rather than drafting the new nation’s political future: here is the danger of partisanship. And the African tyrant Raymond serves so uncritically pushes the nation into the Fourth World, not a Third World, but a partly real, partly fantastic Fourth World.16 The ending of the novel indeed conveys an apocalyptic vision of a post-colonial African state where the ‘Big Man’ ruthlessly crushes the rebels, ironically enough, with the help of foreign mercenaries:

The searchlight lit up the barge passengers who, behind bars and wire-guards, as yet scarcely seemed to understand that they were adrift. Then there were gunshots. The searchlight was turned off; the barge was no longer to be seen. The steamer started up again and moved without lights down the river, away from the area of battle. The air would have been full of moths and flying insects. The searchlight, while it was on, had shown thousands, white in the white light (287).

The bend in the river finally turns into no man’s land, not a flourishing town as Father Huismans naively predicted. The rapid growth of the water hyacinth (which the locals call a ‘new thing’) is indicative of a regression into a vegetable state which is the

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opposite of 'civilization'. The Domain in decay also returns to the world of vegetation. It is the water hyacinth that catches the corpse of Father Huismans in the beginning and that brings the steamer service to a halt at the end. Ferdinand lives in fear of execution; the safety of his mother travelling in a dugout is questionable. While Metty is left behind, Salim narrowly escapes. The vivid visual image of 'moths and flying insects' caught in the searchlight is suggestive of the natives under threat.

This vision is an evocation and reversal of the Belgian atrocities committed in the Congo. Both Conrad and Naipaul condemn rather than condone acts of barbarism which betrays human conscience. Lowry also expresses his fear at the rise of Fascism, not to mention the Nazi Holocaust. These three writers invariably bear witness to the reign of tyranny in their respective times and all, I would argue, emerge as men of conscience in their very different ways.

The strength of Salim as the narrator and, more importantly, as an outsider, lies in his double distancing from Europe and Africa. More specifically, it is his ability to expose the lies invented by both European colonizers and the African tyrant. As European colonizers have built statues and monuments to mark their 'achievements' in the 'Dark Continent,' so the African dictator orders 'a gigantic statue of an African tribesman with spear and shield' (259), and Africanizes European relics. Salim convincingly shows us that both sides use statues and plagues to invent 'greatness'.

Louis Simpson argues that for Naipaul 'anything, even confrontation with the worst, is better than being in suspense'. Salim indeed refuses to take an illusory view of both the old colonial world and the new post-colonial African world. As an outsider in the post-colonial era, he maintains an intellectual and critical independence from the prevailing ideologies.

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There was no village to speak of. I was glad of that. I would have been nervous to meet people. After all my time in England I still had that nervousness in a new place, that rawness of response, still felt solitude. And every excursion into a new part of the country - what for others might have been an adventure - was for me like a tearing at an old scab (13).

_The Enigma of Arrival_ (1987) reveals the blankness and anxiety of a colonial writer-in-exile displaced in the English countryside and it also provides the outsider’s defamiliarising perception of the changing face of a post-imperial and post-war Britain. This work contains both elements of self-scrutiny and fresh observations of English society and its people. The narrator is a thinly veiled version of Naipaul himself - a Trinidadian writer of Indian descent residing in England - and he reflects upon his oddity in the English countryside of Wiltshire near Stonehenge. This book is largely set in the English countryside except for the chapter ‘Farewell’ where the narrator returns to Trinidad to attend the funeral of his sister Sati. Naipaul looks at English society in depth but from a distance, a strategy which has engendered different critical responses which I shall chart later.

One may ponder over Naipaul’s decision to write a book about English society. Like Conrad in _The Secret Agent_, Naipaul makes use of estranging perceptions and actually disturbs rather than entertains an English audience by exposing the _malaise_ of the society which has taken him in. Selwyn Cudjoe gives a distorted reading of _The Enigma of Arrival_ as a sort of imperialist narrative which is ‘written for an English audience’ by someone who is ‘infatuated with the magic of Wiltshire’. Yet in essence, I would argue that this book is far closer to _The Secret Agent_ where Conrad explored the dark side of London when it was still the heart of the British Empire. In a similar vein, in _The Enigma of Arrival_ Naipaul observes the disintegration of the old order of the

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British imperial past. While Conrad adopts the mask of irony to inflict a savage attack on an English society, Naipaul rather makes his personal voice heard by employing a first-person narrator.

While in *A Bend in the River* Naipaul explores the rising rage in a newly emergent African nation, in *The Enigma of Arrival* he explores the vanished world of the British Empire. A comparison of the two works suggests that Naipaul is essentially conducting cultural negotiations between old and new worlds, exposing the absurdity of fantasy inherent, for instance, in an ailing English landlord as well as in an African tyrant. Here it is worth recalling Peter Hughes’s view that ‘Naipaul would have been lost had he been caged within a West Indian audience and culture’. Naipaul’s satirical vision of (or double distancing from) a post-colonial Zaire and a post-imperial Britain strengthen his credentials as a detached observer in our times.

2

*The Enigma of Arrival* is an autobiographical fiction inspired by Giorgio de Chirico’s surrealist painting entitled ‘The Enigma of Arrival’ (which is about a traveller who arrives in some ancient port and soon realises that he is unable to disembark). The narrator starts writing a novel based upon his personal displacement and loss. So one strand of reading is to look at the unfolding of the consciousness of an aspirant colonial writer. Salman Rushdie calls this narrative ‘one of the saddest books I have read in a long while, its tone one of unbroken melancholy’. The direct participation of the narrator in what amounts to an autobiographical novel is an embarrassment to some critics who regard such a move as a decline in artistry. Rushdie sees an obvious danger in this kind of narrative where ‘the writer becomes the subject’. Similarly, Frank Kermode regards it as an ‘intensely personal book’ containing ‘too much solemn self-scrutiny’. He continues to hint at the artistic failure of an autobiographical novel,

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saying: ‘To readers, after all, the most interesting thing about writers ought to be what they write, not the peculiar fate that has come upon them’.7 Together with Lowry’s autobiographical novel *Dark As the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid*, *The Enigma of Arrival* is often wrongly classified as ‘failed art’, where Naipaul cannot make what Roland Barthes calls the ‘essential gesture’ - a transformation of personal experiences into art embodying the artistic goal of objectivity.

Is *The Enigma of Arrival* doomed as art then? Of course not. Naipaul finds it is rewarding to blur, or discount, the boundary between the fictional and the factual.8 In his talks to Alastair Niven, Naipaul defends his decision to adopt his *persona* ‘I’, saying ‘I didn’t want to invent a character and give him a bogus adventure to set him there’.9 In a letter, Susan Sontag refutes Peter Kemp’s dismissive view that *The Enigma of Arrival* is a ‘morbidly solipsistic work’,10 defending it as a ‘profound, and profoundly upsetting book, judged as literature’.11 Bruce King sees the potential merit of *The Enigma of Arrival*, regarding it as ‘one of the major postmodern, post-colonial works of our time’.12 Fawzia Mustafa also argues that *The Enigma of Arrival* is ‘Naipaul’s most self-consciously modernist text’.13 It is also a sort of metafiction full of self-reflexivity and self-referentiality. The narrator is a writer commenting upon the origins of his writing and his reviewing process. Some may dismiss it as a commentary on the composition of Naipaul’s previous works, yet it is a work which sheds much light on an interaction between life and art. To say the least, Naipaul appears to resist the idea of the death of the author in favour of delivering the truth without the mediation of a third-person omniscient narrator. This novel is a meditative book about the condition of exile; like Singh in *The Mimic Men* whose act of writing a memoir is seen as ‘an attempt at exorcism through frankness’,14 the narrator seeks in the act of writing a personal

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redemption: 'writing strengthened me; it quelled anxiety. And now writing restored me again' (154).

The Enigma of Arrival gives the impression that it is a final summing up, yet Naipaul has produced another book since then, A Way in the World (1994) and is expected to produce more. A question may perhaps arise as to whether this novel represents what John Barth calls the 'literature of exhaustion' in the double sense of an exhaustion of the writing material (a decision to write about self) and the author's psychological exhaustion. The narrator creates a universal tone of melancholy by choosing an ancient burial site as the setting for the novel and bringing together the invariably grief-stricken local people, an ailing landlord, and the narrator himself in fear of approaching death.

There is another strand of reading which reveals Naipaul's detached observations of a community in the English countryside and people who migrate from the town to the manor. The narrator can be likened to Conrad's secret sharer in the sense that he explores the interior world of an ailing landlord whose grounds his cottage shares. It is also possible to compare the narrator's encounter with the landlord with Marlow's encounter with Kurtz who is also a fantasist. Transgression or intrusion become a means of knowing another world. Moreover, Naipaul explores the dismantled British Empire by observing the disintegration of the manor which is an emblem of the glory and wealth of the old regime. Sara Suleri sees the landlord's disablement as a 'synecdoche for imperial devolution'. Susan Sontag's reading, 'Illness as a Metaphor' is relevant to an exploration of the broad significance of an ailing landlord. Being a colonial under the British Empire, the narrator reflects upon an ironic contrast between the fall of his former master and the rise of a colonial writer in England. Both the displacement of his Indian ancestors who indentured themselves in Trinidad and his odd presence in England as a colonial writer are indicative of the process of migration which took place under the British Empire. So it could be argued that The Enigma of Arrival offers insights on the impact of a colonial encounter. Indeed, the narrator

articulates the idea of the end of the British Empire which Conrad explored first in *The Secret Agent*. More recently in *The Remains of the Day* (1989), Kazuo Ishiguro also gives a satirical presentation of an English society in decay, questioning Stevens’s fidelity to the notion of Englishness which wrecks his chance of finding romance with Miss Kenton and his misplaced loyalty to his former employer, an English Lord, who through misplaced idealism worked to appease the Nazis and was disgraced. All three novels are written by foreign outsiders who look afresh at English society with a satiric impulse.

3

Naipaul’s observation of an alien society is a painful task, albeit a rewarding one. The narrator has to correct false notions of an English landscape and its people which are largely based upon his colonial education and reading, bridging the gap between the imagined England and the explored one. Despite the intensity involved in capturing rural details and observing country people, the narrator misinterprets and misunderstands what he sees and only gradually moves towards a proper understanding of it. He corrects his initial mistaken view that the gardener Jack is a ‘remnant of an old peasantry’ (32) after his realization that Jack is a newcomer from the town who has no true feeling about gardening. The narrator also comes to realise that his landlord is infantile rather than benign. In ‘Why I Could not be an Exile’, Ivan Klima comments on the difficulty facing an exiled writer like Naipaul:

In alien surroundings one is always feeling one’s way. One may well understand a great deal and actually see many things more clearly, but it usually requires mental effort. In trying to respond to the questions posed by one’s new surroundings one is always worried about getting it wrong. The reason is that, consciously or not, one is linked by unbreakable threads to an entirely different experience of one’s original home.16

Unlike Conrad who, I have argued, often obscures his view to protect himself in alien English society, Naipaul chooses to state his views clearly. But the fear which constantly

plagues Naipaul is the possible misinterpretation of this alien society. Both Conrad and Naipaul have undergone an internalization in England without forsaking their critical consciousness of their adopted country.

Ivan Klima protests at the life-style of exile which both Conrad and Naipaul chose by hinting at the possible loss caused by exile, saying ‘At home one not only understands all the nuances of people’s speech, one is also more concerned by the problems of the people around one. Usually one has an instinctive understanding of them’.\textsuperscript{17} It is a well-known fact that Conrad never wrote about his homeland Poland, yet he achieves a lot through using his first-hand knowledge of outsider status. The same is true of Naipaul, yet in his case he performs a balancing act by making use of his dual vision of home and abroad. By employing a sort of shuttle service, he breaks the shell of isolationism and broadens his outlook. In \textit{Finding the Centre} (1984) Naipaul speaks of the dilemma facing him: ‘To become a writer, that noble thing, I had thought it necessary to leave. Actually to write, it was necessary to go back. It was the beginning of self-knowledge’.\textsuperscript{18} He benefits from creative tensions between staying at home and exile. So it would be mistaken to think that \textit{The Enigma of Arrival} is a novel which is exclusively about the English. Naipaul indeed constructs his narrative by interweaving impressions of both England and Trinidad; this kind of narrative structure mirrors the narrator’s fractured identity. Together with Conrad and Lowry, Naipaul thus defies Klima’s fear and makes a rich art out of his exile.

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In \textit{The Enigma of Arrival} Naipaul captures the changes taking place in the rural English countryside. He deliberately sets the novel near Stonehenge to deepen a sense of the past, and then he juxtaposes the ancient with the contemporary. In and around this historic place, he observes such transformations as military activities - firing ranges, military barracks and the vapor trails of military aircraft. He also shows us how

\textsuperscript{17} Ivan Klima, “Why I Could Not be an Exile,” 27.
industrial farming has replaced traditional farming, giving rise to the presence of tractors and a silage pit made of tyres. The following passage demonstrates the narrator’s ability to see a historical link between the past and the present of Britain:

It was astonishing that now - after its ineptitude in the nineteenth century, which was yet the century of the great glory of the empire; and after its great but wasting achievements in the second world war, at the end of that imperial glory - it was astonishing that now, when there were no more big wars for the country to fight, the British army should be concentrating on producing this kind of elite (210).

Here, the narrator refers to British military exercises taking place after the fall of the British Empire and post-war depression. His position is thus to capture shifting reality, as suggested by his personal belief in ‘a world subject to constant change’ (23).

The narrator also observes the movements of English people from a distance and discovers that they are uprooted and homeless like himself. Town people come to the manor to seek shelter and a job; when they are fired they return to the town and live in council flats. The narrator also indicates that traditional feudal links between master and servant have disappeared. Like the Tulsi clan in A House for Mr Biswas, the manor in decay is losing its old certainties. Jack is a newcomer to the manor. When Jack dies Mr Pitton takes over Jack’s job with no sense of true vocation - for him gardening means a ‘repetitive brute labour’ and when he is fired returns to the town where he works as a laundry-van driver. After Jack’s death, Jack’s wife also returns to a council flat in the town, while, when the caretaker Mr Phillips dies, his grief-stricken wife becomes homeless like ‘a bird whose nest is smashed’. By the time the manor is unable to assert its authority, dropouts and vagrants flock to the manor in decay for shelter. Even in a quiet rural community, Naipaul captures such features as nomadic existence and homelessness and once again orchestrates the theme of a universal displacement.

The centrepiece of The Enigma of Arrival is seen as the narrator’s dramatic encounter with the ailing landlord of the dilapidated manor. The narrator is an intruder exploring the interior world of the landlord who lives in a state of fantasy. The landlord’s withdrawal from the outside world coincides with the onset of the post-war depression. The landlord suffers from accidia, a slow death of the soul or ‘the monk’s
torpor or disease of the Middle Ages' (53). Like Marlow who is present at Kurtz’s deathbed, the narrator peeps into the soul of the landlord whose health is declining, although there is no suggestion that they have a direct encounter. The narrator looks at the landlord and his fantasy world from a distance, examining the historical significance of an encounter between his former master and himself, a colonial subject:

I was his opposite in every way, social, artistic, sexual. And considering that his family’s fortune had grown, but enormously, with the spread of the empire in the nineteenth century, it might be said that an empire lay between us. The empire at the same time linked us. This empire explained my birth in the New World, the language I used, the vocation and ambition I had; this empire in the end explained my presence there in the valley, in that cottage, in the grounds of the manor. But we were - or had started - at opposite ends of wealth, privilege, and in the hearts of different cultures (174).

Here, standing in the grounds of the manor which was ‘built at the zenith of the imperial wealth and power’, the narrator confirms that a sense of glory is finally dead. Naipaul adds a touch of poignancy by making the arrival of a successful colonial writer coincide with the downfall of the landlord. In a sense, imperial power is inverted. There is important imagery of death such as ‘ivy’ which strangles and kills the trees around the manor and a flock of rooks (the messengers of death) hovering overhead when the strangled trees are cut down. The narrator conveys the idea of the death of Empire in the oppressor’s garden.

The landlord’s fantasies centre around Keatsian romantic reveries and a phobia about the rise of colonial rage among the Africans. The two prime sites of his fantasies are India and Africa. In a protected and secure environment, he seeks sensual pleasure from Hindu deities, as suggested by his drawings based upon Hindu divinities such as ‘the lascivious Krishna and the drug-taking Shiva’. In addition, he is preoccupied with the tragic fate of a white woman missionary whose imperial body is ‘cooked in a cannibal pot and eaten’ (253). The narrator indeed exposes the landlord’s psychological abnormalities as the residues of the British Empire.

Naipaul challenges the inviolability attached to the lord of the manor as he does in the case of an African tyrant or a Hindu pundit. He sees in all of them a common danger of reversion to the past - imperial, tribal or Hindu. His power of demystification
knows no frontiers. Therefore, confronting the present remains an overriding issue. In 'Is Nothing Sacred?' Salman Rushdie argues for the need to question and doubt the old certainties - the outsider's role that Naipaul plays:

And events in history must always be subject to questioning, deconstruction, even to declarations of their obsolescence. To respect the sacred is to be paralysed by it. The idea of the sacred is quite simply one of the most conservative notions in any culture, because it seeks to turn other ideas - Uncertainty, Progress, Change - into crimes. 19

It is quite legitimate to relate Naipaul's distrust of 'greatness' to Rushdie's denial of 'sacredness'. Nevertheless, differences between the two writers remain, as suggested by Rushdie's dismissal of The Enigma of Arrival as 'bloodless prose', full of passivity and despair. 20 Rushdie fails to see that element of stoicism which underpins the narrator's passivity. Naipaul's narrator is pictured as an undestructable man: 'These ideas, of a world in decay, a world subject to constant change, and of the shortness of human life, made many things bearable' (26).

The narrator also questions the literary and artistic talents of the landlord. Bray shows one of the landlord's books to him:

The book was by my landlord. It was nearly fifty years old, something from the 1920s. It was a short story in verse, with many illustrations. The paper was good, the book was expensively bound in cloth; and though it carried the name of a reputable London publisher of the period, it was clear that the production of a slight work in this lavish way had been subsidized or paid for by the author (253).

This passage shows that the landlord seeks style rather than substance. Naipaul has a profound scepticism about any publication which is full of lies, not to mention the stratagems used to cover up one's true identity and to inflate one's image. The landlord is comparable to Ganesh who publishes his own books and newspapers to inflate his image and to the African President in A Bend in the River who publishes his Maxims as part of his ideological programme - such figures are hardly creative writers.

The landlord is comforted by his friendship with Alan who is widely known as an 'important' writer in the literary Establishment. The landlord falsely believes that

Alen is a serious writer who is active in the public domain. On a radio programme Alan shapes his public image as a literary-minded person, yet he is in fact an actor without much substance. He also seeks patronage to impress his self-importance on the public. The landlord finds in Alan's public performance an alternative to his withdrawal, while the narrator sees the dark side of Alan's publicity, exposing a discord between Alan's public and private self which has been traumatised by the war with Germany. In the end Alan commits suicide because he, like the landlord, is a victim of post-war depression and is therefore incapable of self-renewal. Both the landlord's accidia and Alan's suicide are emblematic of post-imperial and post-war British malaise. Alan can be seen as the landlord's alter-ego in the sense that he acts differently in the public domain, yet faces a similar tragic fate in the private domain.

The narrator observes Mr Pitton pretending to be a country gentleman whilst he has what he sees as the undignified job of gardening; he provides yet another example of Naipaul's dislike of pretension. In a class-bound English society, Mr Pitton serves rather than subverts an existing class system through his mimicry. By contrast, Lowry's rebellious characters like Dana Hilliot in *Ultramarine* choose to be declassé, since Lowry, in his very different way, eschews the pretensions of the class system quite as much as Naipaul.

In contrast to Mr Pitton's parasitic dependence on the manor, Bray seeks freedom and independence by shaking off his family's humiliating servitude to it, choosing to run his own business of providing a car service rather than being attached to the manor like his father. But the narrator weighs up Bray's capacity for rebellion and exposes its limits. Bray is portrayed as a mimic man in the sense that his political views are 'borrowed from radio or television programmes, popular newspapers' (272). So his political views are more quixotic than convincing because they are a 'mixture of high conservatism and wild republicanism, a worship of the rich [mainly, the users of his cars] with a hatred of inherited wealth and titles' (272). Thus, since his political views
are shaped by expediency, Bray is hardly a genuine rebel within society. In addition, his
declaration of freedom from servitude ironically leads to his slavish worship for a
spiritual healer in the evangelical church (who may be a false redeemer like Ganesh).
Bray's fervent evangelicalism carries the danger of the cult of personality which Naipaul
addresses throughout his works, from The Mystic Masseur (Ganesh as spiritual healer)
to A Bend in the River (African tyrant as new Messiah). In the light of Naipaul's
personal belief that religion offers only false consolation, Bray's passion for
evangelicalism is satirized. Bray is comparable to Indar in A Bend in the River whose
motto is 'we have to learn to trample on the past'. As his conversion of the garden into
a garage attests, Bray indeed shares Indar's extreme attitude towards the past: 'the
garden [is] trampled until it becomes ground' (148). But an outright rejection of the
past, whether it is Hindu, African tribal, or British imperial, is not a solution that Naipaul
offers any more than a nostalgic reversion into the past.

At this juncture, it is worth exploring the narrator's personal philosophy
according to which he ridicules and mocks those characters incapable of creativity and
rebellion. Naipaul, through his narrators, is keen to capture the shifting reality of any
society - Trinidadian, Indian, African, and English - with as much neutrality of
perception as possible. He would like to see changes taking place in these societies as a
process of transformation rather than a sign of decline. The following passage
demonstrates this point:

I lived not with the idea of decay - that idea I quickly shed - so much as with the idea of change. I
lived with the idea of change, of flux, and learned, profoundly, not to grieve for it. I learned to dismiss
this easy cause of so much human grief. Decay implied an ideal, a perfection in the past (190).

The narrator is neither nostalgic about the past nor cynical about it, but sees the present
as part of a process of change; just as his predecessor observe the changes in the Tulsi
clan, so he observes the manor and those affected by it. Early in the book the narrator
said, 'To see the possibility, the certainty, of ruin, even at the moment of creation: it was
my temperament' (52), accepting the transience of all human concerns. Apart from his
dismantling of the magical light of the city in, for instance ‘The Journey’, there is a further dismantling of the legacy of crumbling imperialism, whether abroad in the Caribbean, Africa, or India, or at home in the symbolic manor. Naipaul’s narrators thus emerge as colonial outsiders with no illusions about Britain today.

The Enigma of Arrival discloses Naipaul’s double distancing from Trinidad and England which is his second home. Through his travels which provide a ‘spiritual nourishment’, the narrator offers a link between two places and commands a dual vision of home and abroad. Being a product of colonialism like his Indian ancestors who were transplanted to Trinidad under the British rule, he is fitted to explore the colonial encounter between Britain and one of her colonies - Trinidad.

The narrator travels back to his Asian-Indian community in Trinidad and sees the changes taking place there. From his latter day position of physical detachment, he reflects upon his ambivalent feeling about an Asiatic-Indian community to which he belongs and from which he distances himself:

He was close to the village ways of his Asian-Indian community. He had an instinctive understanding of and sympathy for its rituals, like the farewell at the airport that morning. He was close to the ways of that community, which was separated from peasant India only by two or three generations in a plantation colony of the New World. Yet there was another side to the man: he did not really participate in the life or rituals of that community. It wasn’t only that he was educated in the formal way of a school education; he was also sceptical. Unhappy in his extended family, he was distrustful of larger, communal groupings (103).

Back in Trinidad, the narrator sees the absurdity of the anachronistic practice of Hindu rituals by exploring a problematic relationship between the pundit who has style without substance and a new generation who have no deep connection with the Hindu tradition. The pundit argues that the Gita is ‘the most important Hindu scripture’, equivalent to the Koran and the Bible, although he admits that his pundit’s duties leave him little time to read the Gita. The narrator questions the authority and power of this Hindu pundit whose performance he sees as based upon a mimicry of the original. The narrator then turns his attention to a new generation beset by ignorance. One of them, Sati’s son, has
no understanding of the basic concept of *karma*. After Sati's cremation, when the pundit says, 'our past lives dictated the present' (313) Sati's son asks, 'in what way Sati's past had dictated the cruelty of her death' (313). Such people, the narrator sees as dispossessed and, through their clinging to what have become empty rituals, barring both themselves and their community from development. The narrator's double exposure to England and Trinidad is essentially guided by a feeling of Camusian *nausea*.

Back in England, the narrator is seen as a writer-in-exile in limbo because of his crippling dislocation, first in the metropolis and then later in the countryside. The migratory instinct which he has inherited from his Indian ancestors leads him to a place without redemption:

The older people in our Asian-Indian community in Trinidad - especially the poor ones, who could never manage English or get used to the strange races - looked back to an India that became more and more golden in their memory. They were living in Trinidad and were going to die there, but for them it was a wrong place. Something of that feeling was passed down to me. I didn't look back to India, couldn't do so; my ambition caused me to look ahead and outwards, to England; but it led to a similar feeling of wrongness (120).

Like his Indian ancestors, the narrator suffers from a transplantation into alien and often uncongenial soil. But while his Indian ancestors lived in a state of fantasy, he, who is at once a rebel and an outsider, refuses to harbour any illusions. What is distinctive to Naipaul is an imperative to 'act upon the realities of changing situations, not on illusions'. Through his mobility, his narrator also breaks the shell of isolationism. As a result, he hardly settles down, being a restless nomad. While Conrad's Almayer enacts fantasies in displacement, leading to tragedy, Naipaul's narrator refuses to take an illusory view of reality and comes to terms with a dominant mood of melancholy and death (despite encountering so many deaths - Jack's death, Alan's suicide, the landlord's accidia, Sati's death, and his own fear of his approaching end). Despite a crippling displacement, he achieves at once self-examination and detached observation of Trinidad and England. Through his defamiliarizing perceptions, he exposes the inadequacies of the two main societies to which he is historically attached and so, I would argue, fulfils

his social responsibilities. Therefore I strongly refute the claim that Naipaul is someone who writes under British tutelage in order to seek approval from a British audience. *The Enigma of Arrival* is indeed characterized by his sense of estrangement on arrival in England rather than any sense of joy at his internalization. Naipaul the outsider not so much entertains as disturbs an English audience.
Conclusion

As I stated in my introduction, this research has been prompted by a perceived need to defend outsiders who have been discredited and undervalued. I have argued for the need for a 'rethinking' about the lives and works of a triad of exiles under attack. I have suggested that neither an ethnocentric approach nor an approach which demands an overt politicization does justice to the outsider's internal dynamics which shape his aesthetics and philosophy.

It is futile to assess the outsider's hybrid consciousness in the light of a narrow nationalistic line. The outsider is often bruised by collisions and tests of loyalty, but he merits serious consideration because his very psychological disturbance and uprootedness often produce a rich art. The outsider's exilic sensibility and nomadic voice do indeed pose a perennial problem with regard to the effects of uprooting, boundary crossing, and displacement. Nonetheless, it is possible to see the merit of crossing or breaking boundaries leading to a cross-fertilization between cultures and a formation of an internationalist outlook, as a result of a writer acquiring for whatever reason the role of an exile. The triad of exiles in my thesis were fortunate enough to choose voluntary exile from their homelands and created rich art by making use of their uprooted, fragmented, and hybridised identity. Conrad began his belated career as a writer with his triple identity of Polish, French, and English and he travelled into many parts of the world. Lowry chose voluntary exile from an insular England and aspired to a universal citizenship abroad. Naipaul also resists any easy categorization, as I have shown. I have demonstrated how in all three cases, their personal deracination intersects with a political reality: Conrad fled from the political turmoil sweeping over Europe, Lowry fled from a Europe caught in the vortex of World Wars, and Naipaul is very much a product of colonialism resulting in a diasporic perspective. My appraisal of these displaced writers has led me to appreciate the positive side of their uprooting, their transgression, and their displacement which have been so often belittled under the banner of nationalist rhetoric and cultural essentialism. What is distinctive to these
outsiders is the hybridity of consciousness as opposed to a national and/or imperial consciousness.

As I have shown, there is in the outsider an element of the universality of subversion which is either subtly concealed or openly expressed. I have argued that Conrad's texts can be read as highly politicized in the sense that they promote a moral awareness on the reader's side of the deficiencies of an imperialist monolithic view of the 'Other.' In other words, his subversive energy is hidden, but not wholly removed. And as Conrad can be read as against Empire in the age of imperialism, so Lowry can be seen as writing against the war machine in the age of twentieth-century World Wars. Naipaul, however, living after Conrad’s age when imperialism was widely accepted as an inevitable aspect of Western political thinking, and after the inroads of Fascism which caused Lowry such existential despair, chose to offer an outspoken critique of the failings of the post-colonial societies incapable of rebellion and creativity. He has, as I have shown, been accused of arrogance and insensitivity. But it is equally true to say that he disturbs rather than entertains a European audience in such a way as to problematise white norms. All three of these outsiders, as I have demonstrated, react strongly to political tyranny. They bear witness to a world in crisis and emerge as men of conscience rather than apologists. Given such readings, the oft-repeated claim that these outsiders evade social responsibility is a gross misconception. The outsider deals with politics whilst avoiding overt politicization or the sacrificing of artistic integrity, while it is fair to say that these outsiders feel tensions between exile and commitment, between despair and subversion, and make a rich art out of them.

The outsider acquires a dual vision of home and abroad by straddling cultures. His detachment from national and imperial consciousness enables him to overcome boxed-in perceptions and further puts him in a position to conduct cultural negotiations between the 'centre' and its peripheries. The downside is of course a fear of being lost between cultures. Nevertheless, the outsider’s fractured identity is rewarded with a broad perspective. It is unfair for hostile critics, almost all with a political axe to grind, to monopolize the whole debate about the outsider by denigrating him as someone who
is politically crippled. They run the risk of ignoring those aspects of the outsider’s artistic and intellectual vigour which cannot be articulated in their own self-imposed limited formula.

Like Conrad, Lowry sees in a dying civilization a sense of crisis; Conrad confronts this with irony which can be misinterpreted, while Lowry takes to cynicism and drink, but both, I have argued, can be read as writers of conscience. Naipaul however has clarity of vision and the courage to express it. He underlines the interpretative function of the writer and indeed produces a straightforward prose, appearing to disapprove of ‘high art’ with which both Conrad and Lowry are associated. There are then considerable differences amongst these writers, and I have avoided making generalizations about them in favour of looking at subtle variations with regard to their temperament, their political stance, and their aesthetic considerations. But the options available to all of them are distancing, reflecting and writing - the act of writing itself links the self with the world; the word becomes the ultimate weapon to deliver their versions of truth; detachment is a guiding principle.

I conclude by suggesting potential areas for further study in relation to the outsider’s role. I had to confine discussion to three outsiders and have undertaken an examination of a good selection of works by each writer because it leads more readily to an elucidation of the outsider’s role and outlook than the common practice of focussing on one work by one writer, or broad generalisations. Nonetheless there is advantage in examining a writer’s entire oeuvre; because of the limited space available to me, for instance, Nosromo has been omitted, although it would certainly help to define more clearly Conrad’s radical political stance. I chose instead to put more emphasis on comparing and contrasting him with Lowry and Naipaul for the purpose of revealing affinities and differences between them. Also a further study of Lowry’s more experimental work will be needed because it will show the ways in which he develops the artistic potential out of his restless nomadism. Since Naipaul is still alive and can be expected to produce more work, it is still premature to give any final verdict on him. It would be valuable to examine how he preserves rather than forsakes his intellectual
independence in works not discussed here, to compare Naipaul's individual works with Conrad's in greater detail, for instance, by exploring similarities and contrasts between the two political novels, *Guerrillas* and *Nostromo*. It would also be valuable to study female outsiders (or exiles) like Doris Lessing who has come to the cultural centre without forsaking her critical consciousness of Africa and Britain; or Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, who has lived in a state of in-between, in India and the United States.

As I have argued, writers like the three outsiders I have discussed have tended to suffer in the age of post-colonialism, since their concern with the fate of the individual caught up in the uncertainties of exile and dispossession have tended to attract adverse criticism from those wanting uncomplicated commitment to their own particular favoured causes, and of course there is need for writers with outspoken commitments too. But the fate of the individual, the effect on his psyche of his uprootedness is not an issue that deserving of disparagement. And if the experience of crossing boundaries becomes the norm rather than the exception (and Naipaul, in *The Enigma of Arrival*, suggests that this has already happened), the literature of exile which these three writers have produced may well provide valuable paradigms for future writers when exploring their individual experiences in the light of their historical and cultural contexts.
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