



THE NATURE AND CONDITIONS OF PERSONAL "LIFE":
SOME ASPECTS OF THE ART OF JOSEPH CONRAD & VIRGINIA WOOLF

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Summary

This thesis is about a central feature of Modernist literature - its perception and presentation of human character; in particular, the ways that Conrad and Virginia Woolf explored the nature of human-beings and the difficulties of giving any adequate account of human lives. Each novelist focused on different aspects of experience: Conrad on human actions, and on the complex moral questions they raise; Woolf on more elusive states of "sensibility" and the emergence of a sense of identity from within a person's thoughts and responses to the outward world. But despite this, they show some important similarities and affinities, both in the ways they conceive their material and in the ways their conceptions develop.

Both recognized that revealing the deepest truth about human lives required an art calling upon the writer's fullest integrity. Both found that the integrity required was too complex to be realized in a single novel; they found they had to follow certain questions through a number of novels. I have tried to examine the logic and integrity with which they do this in some of their works.

In the first section, I have taken "Youth", "Heart of Darkness" and To the Lighthouse, all of which focus on the power of a particular "self" to compel attention and invite exploration, and on the kind of attention and exploration it prompts. All three works discover the inadequacy of clear-cut distinctions - e.g. between past and present, between one individual and another, and between moral ideals and inner, personal necessities. The key images of "light" and "darkness" in each work become ambivalent; the journey that is a central motif in each work emerges as a voyage of moral understanding that has no end (in both senses of the word).

The second section discusses Lord Jim and The Waves. These works seem less bothered by the fact that the essential nature of human lives is inaccessible, and less concerned with trying to resolve lives into a single, though complex formula. This, I argue, is (paradoxically) because each writer is now able to release his own self more fully into his work, and take greater risks with his moral assumptions and outlook. Thus the relationship between "witnessing" and "bearing witness" is central to both the themes and method of the novelists' art.

A major difficulty about "bearing witness" with the necessary openness and integrity is that it means acknowledging not only the limits

of one's own self and therefore of one's own art, but also the possibility of the life beyond the self disrupting, altering, or even destroying the self. In the last section of the thesis, I discuss Chance and Between the Acts as examples of how the novelist can respond to these problems. Conrad's novel, I argue, shows a retreat from the difficulties to the simpler imaginative activity of merely "witnessing": the central weakness of Chance is that the writer remains no more than a spectator of the life he depicts. The strength of Between the Acts, on the other hand, is that the writer does "bear witness" fully to the life she presents; and one mark of this strength is the novel's capacity to include real gaps and real disruptions as part both of its material and of its own imaginative life.

Such a summary account mis-represents the subtle and open explorativeness of these works - which are concerned, in fact, with the impossibility of such summings-up. This is why I have tried to avoid any explicitly theoretical approach to the works discussed, and to follow a developing line of insight I see in the novels themselves.

I hereby declare that this thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university, and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

24/6/82

INTRODUCTION

This thesis has two closely connected strands. The first is the more general: to examine one of the central features of the modern novel - or rather, of what has come to be known as the "Modernist" novel; the second, to trace some of the ways the art of two Modernist writers in particular developed, and some of the reasons why it developed as it did.

One of the most obvious differences between Modernist literature, that of the half-century from the 1880's to about 1940, and nineteenth-century literature is the way it portrayed human-beings, human nature, and human society. Critics and historians are agreed that the great Modernist writers - Conrad, Henry James, Chekov, Proust, Kafka, Eliot, Yeats, Rilke, Mann, Joyce, Lawrence and Virginia Woolf - come at the problems of character and personality, the relationship between the individual, society, and nature, and the structure and dynamics of the Self, in ways very different from those of Jane Austen, Dickens, Flaubert, George Eliot, Trollope, Tolstoy or Hardy. There is no doubt, either, that the forms and techniques of the Modernists differ sharply from those of their immediate predecessors. In the Victorian novel, for instance, the relationships between "character" and "setting" and "plot", and between the "omniscient narrator" and the substance of the story and the reader of the novel, involved conventions (or "codes") that seemed so realistic that they were hardly seen as conventions at all. In the Modernist novel, all these relationships and the conventions by which they are presented seem to be more or less radically questioned.

That these changes are somehow connected with wider changes in life and thought is likewise generally agreed. Novelists live in the world as well as try to portray it, and those living through the fifty years from 1880 onwards could hardly fail to be affected by the changes that the world was undergoing: the development of mass industrial society and new forms of social organization, together with the "alienation" that accompanied these, and also developments in science, technology, and (perhaps most of all) in the "human sciences", especially anthropology, sociology and psychology. But though this is obvious enough, literary critics and historians agree far less about explaining the changes in literature itself. Some, for example, explain them as a simple, straight "reflection" of changes in society or ideas;¹ yet this seems to produce a remarkably pre-determined view of the literature, one that finds important in it only what the critic's views about modern society generally prompt him to find. All too often he offers an account of the modern age which is simply illustrated from the literature, rather than tested by a sensitive responsiveness to it and by a properly critical understanding of what the literature actually shows. For what is still far from clear, let alone generally agreed, is what kind of change Modernism in literature is, what precisely it was a change in.

The most common answer given by literary scholars is that it was a change in the ways human-beings and their lives were portrayed, a change in style, narrative technique, "point of view" and approach.

¹ See, for some extreme examples of this, Irving Howe (ed.), The Idea of the Modern in Literature and the Arts (N.Y., 1967); and Malcolm Bradbury & James McFarlane (eds.), Modernism 1890-1930 (Harmondsworth, 1976). There is an excellent criticism centering on this book, its assumptions and enterprise, in S.L. Goldberg, "Hunting the Time-Spook in New York & Norwich: or, Who Needs Modernism?" in The Critical Review, 19 (1977), 110-35.

At one level, this is plausible enough; the trouble with this kind of answer, however, is that it assumes we can somehow have direct knowledge of what human-beings and their lives really are, and therefore can see how this writer and that are using very different methods to represent it - as if Jane Austen, for example, Emily Bronte, D.H. Lawrence and James Joyce had all been looking at the same model in the drawing-class, a model that we too can see directly, but that each had deliberately chosen to use a particular style of portraiture. It may be true that we have to think of all these novelists as being concerned with the same subject - human life, and its possible meaning. But it does not follow from this that they are all depicting the same objects - people as we "know they really are" - with varying degrees of technical or stylistic "realism" or technical or stylistic "distortion". If we are not to oversimplify the general nature of Modernist literature, or to underestimate the uniqueness of each writer's achievement, it is important to keep in mind that the great novelists had no such deliberate choice of style or technique available to them. It would probably be more accurate to say that for each of them human-beings actually consisted in different things. Indeed, Virginia Woolf's celebrated remark in her essay "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" (1924) makes this very point: "in or about December, 1910, human character changed".¹

Similarly in D.H. Lawrence's famous comment to Edward Garnett about

The Rainbow:

You mustn't look in my novel for the old stable ego - of the character. There is another ego, according to whose action the individual is unrecognisable, and passes through, as it were, allotropic states which it needs a deeper sense than any we've been used to exercise, to discover are states of the same single radical unchanged element. (Like as diamond and coal are the

¹ Virginia Woolf, Collected Essays, Vol. 1 (London, 1966), p. 320.

same pure single element of carbon. The ordinary novel would trace the history of the diamond - but I say, 'Diamond, what! This is carbon.' And my diamond might be coal or soot, and my theme is carbon.) You must not say my novel is shaky - it is not perfect, because I am not expert in what I want to do. But it is the real thing, say what you like. And I shall get my reception, if not now, then before long. Again I say, don't look for the development of the novel to follow the lines of certain characters: the characters fall into the form of some other rhythmic form, as when one draws a fiddle-bow across a fine tray delicately sanded, the sand takes lines unknown.¹

Modernist writers differ in their very idea of what a person is, and what aspects of his existence as a social, moral, and psychological being need to be explored in order to understand what he is, what determines what he is, and how and why he is significant to others (including the novelist himself and his readers). Expressing this required different aesthetic conventions, techniques, styles and forms. Only if we grasp the particular ways that the Modernist writers conceived people, the way the whole idea of "character" presented itself as a problem at the very centre of their enterprise, can we attempt to understand Modernism. For if human nature, to the Modernist writer, was not the puzzling but relatively clearly-defined thing that nineteenth-century writers had (on the whole) supposed it to be; if the human individual was not quite the clear-cut self (or "ego") with clearly-defined qualities and a clearly-defined psychology, acting in a clearly-defined social context, that nineteenth-century writers had (on the whole) presented him as; and if human actions and lives were not to be understood and judged in terms of a correspondingly clear-cut moral and social value-system, as (on the whole) nineteenth-century writers and readers had understood and judged them; what then are these and how are they best to be understood and judged?

¹ Letter dated 5 June, 1914. Rpt. in Harry T. Moore (ed.), The Collected Letters of D.H. Lawrence, Vol. 1 (London, 1962), p. 280.

This, then is the kind of general question I want to raise and at least begin to examine in this thesis: how did two English Modernist writers conceive human-beings and explore their significance, and how did that relate to their whole conception of "reality"? But there is another question this brings up too: how do these conceptions relate to the way they thought about the novel itself? For they come to think of it, I believe, not so much as a representation of a common, publicly-acknowledged "real world", as most nineteenth-century novels seem to conceive themselves, but as a kind of "world" in itself - one that reflects on ordinary "reality", but only because the novelistic "world" is fashioned in a way that brings out structures, possibilities of order and meaning, that lie obscure in ordinary reality and that also remain elusive of any system of ideas, even those of the newly-born "human sciences". For Conrad and Woolf, I would argue, the creation of a novelistic "world" is the only means by which they can focus on the human issues they regard as central: the problematical nature of the "self", taken in isolation, even perhaps in exile, from the social conditions that might, or apparently do, define it; and the problematical relationships between the self and the world in which it nevertheless has to act in order to realize its potentialities, and which in turn observes it, seeks to comprehend it, and ultimately delimits the potentialities it can realize.

The criticism of Conrad's and Woolf's novels could be very generally characterized as showing three distinct, though certainly interrelated, areas of interest. Firstly, some critics have seen their task as one of setting the novels in a broader ideological and intellectual perspective. Thus there have been studies of Virginia Woolf's particular version of the modern concept of interior time, of

her novels in the light of Roger Fry's aesthetic theories, of the influence of G.E. Moore in her thinking, and of her place in a comic tradition of British fiction that Woolf herself describes in her essay "Modern Fiction".¹ Similarly, Conrad's writing has been variously discussed as "impressionist" or "symbolist" or "Romantic", as revealing the influence of writers he admired (e.g. Flaubert, or Henry James), or as being itself a profoundly individual response to important issues raised for many late-Victorian and early twentieth-century thinkers.² Ian Watt, for instance, argues that "an understanding of Conrad's intellectual attitudes, and of their relation to various ideological battlegrounds both of his own and of our time, seems to me to illuminate several literary problems which have not yet been satisfactorily answered, despite the increasing critical attention which his works have lately received".³ Other critics have stressed more heavily Watt's point that Conrad's ideas have contemporary relevance. It is often argued that Conrad expresses the same sense of individual isolation that we have now come to feel very acutely.⁴ And similarly with Virginia Woolf. Some critics have taken the present popularity of her work as an indication of the enduring importance of

¹ See, for example, Erich Auerbach, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature (Princeton, 1953), pp. 525-53; John Hawley Roberts, "'Vision and Design' in Virginia Woolf", P.M.L.A., 61 (1946), pp. 835-47; Maria Di Battista, Virginia Woolf's Major Novels: The Fables of Anon (New Haven & London, 1980).

² Cf. Norman Sherry (ed.), Joseph Conrad: A Commemoration. Papers from the 1974 International Conference on Conrad (London, 1976); David Thorburn, Conrad's Romanticism (New Haven, 1974); Elsa Nettels, James and Conrad (Athens, 1977).

³ Ian Watt, "Joseph Conrad: Alienation and Commitment", in The English Mind: Studies in the English Moralists Presented to Basil Willey (Cambridge, 1964), pp. 257-78. His recently published study, Conrad in the Nineteenth Century (London, 1980), is a far more extensive response to the issues raised in his earlier sketch.

⁴ This is the line taken by C.B. Cox in his study, Joseph Conrad: The Modern Imagination (London, 1974).

some of her ideas. She has been seen as an important social critic, and even as an important social theorist, by those who value her arguments about feminine and masculine identity and the relationships between the two.

The second broad approach to the novels of Conrad and Woolf focuses on the way the art expresses their particular lives. This is understood very differently by different critics, however. For some, the novels evidently offer direct insight into the author's self. When Roger Poole questions some common assertions about Woolf's mental health, for instance, he goes to the novels "to see if Virginia Woolf herself had offered us the key to what she suffered from in her bouts of so-called 'insanity'."¹ Some critics explicitly deny any distinctions between the writer's life and his art;² most, however, argue that only a specially sensitive reading of the novels can reveal the author's self in the art. Thus scholars such as Thomas Moser and Albert Guerard probe the varying quality of Conrad's writing, and they use their critical understanding of the novels as a touchstone for the psychological, political and moral qualities Conrad expresses in those novels. For them there is always a larger Conrad as it were behind the novels, and they take it that an understanding of

¹ Roger Poole, The Unknown Virginia Woolf (Cambridge, 1978), p. 2.

² See, for example Ralph Freedman (ed.), Virginia Woolf: Revaluation and Continuity (Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1980), p. 6:

The line between a writer's person and her artistic persona may be gross or fine, but in Woolf's case it has been deliberately and purposefully trespassed. Here, then, a reappraisal of her work and self extends beyond her relationship with her readers and her craft and reaches for a revision of modern life as a whole. A refusal to observe the line between narration and life, as between daily and artistic language, entails a revaluation of the relationship between social and artistic existence which has, for some time, been part of the American scene and has accelerated the decline of fiction.

the novels will necessarily be an understanding of this Conrad. An interesting confusion emerges, though, when Moser makes this point. At first he says that: "looming over these three Conrads [psychologist, political observer, artist], including them all, stands Conrad the moralist. Surely it is the author speaking when the narrator of Under Western Eyes says that 'moral discovery ... should be the object of every tale.'"¹ Later on, however, he makes an apparently contradictory claim:

We have been discussing at some length Conrad the moralist and Conrad the psychologist, with a glance at Conrad the commentator on politics. There remains still another Conrad, in some respects the most important and complex of all, the Conrad who reveals the morality, the psychology, the politics - Conrad the artist. (p. 38)

Even more interesting is a shift in Guerard, a more acute critic than Moser. He too says he had problems in deciding how the moral, or "ethical" aspects of Conrad's novels were significant of his whole enterprise. Speaking of his earlier brief study of Conrad, Guerard says:

I suggested, almost, that Conrad wrote certain books in order to express an ethical view of life. The truth of the matter is that an ethical and conservative view of life was second nature in Conrad, holding in check a strong sceptical bent and strong rebellious drive.²

The stress on "ethical intent" becomes a stress on an "ethical spirit" - a quality of Conrad's whole nature, rather than a series of specific, and therefore limited, deliberate actions of Conrad's mind and will.

There are some critics of Conrad's and Woolf's novels, however, who see no need to place their subjects in some larger perspective,

¹ Thomas Moser, Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), p. 11.

² Albert J. Guerard, Conrad the Novelist (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), p. x.

whether ideological, intellectual, cultural or biographical.¹ This leads to the third area of critical interest: a focus on the novels as self-contained, autonomous entities, which present a movement of realization, rather than merely representing "real life" beyond or behind the novel. Some critics have concentrated on the structural significance of the symbols and metaphors (such as the "lighthouse" in Woolf's novel, or Conrad's "darkness") - a significance they see as created by, and only to be understood in relation to, that novel's particular themes and exploration of them.² The stress falls differently, however, in studies such as John Graham's "Time in the Novels of Virginia Woolf",³ where the whole novel, rather than particular symbols in it, is treated as the symbolically significant unit. But either way, it is hardly surprising that this kind of interest quite often leads to a rather unsatisfactory formalism. By concentrating on questions of style, characterization, and method, the critic seems to assess the novels' value merely in terms of formal "success" - in terms, that is, that have virtually no relation to any we might use to judge the worth of a person's nature or his way of life.⁴

Yet it is at this point that the distinctions I have tried to

¹ See, for example, Ted. E. Boyle, Symbol and Meaning in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad (The Hague, 1965); Wilfred S. Dowden, Joseph Conrad: The Imaged Style (Nashville, 1970); Robert F. Haugh, Joseph Conrad: Discovery in Design (Norman, Oklahoma, 1957); N.C. Thakur, The Symbolism of Virginia Woolf (London, 1965).

² Eg. Ian Watt's argument about what he calls "homeophoric" symbols in "Heart of Darkness", in his article "Impressionism and Symbolism in "Heart of Darkness"", rpt. in Norman Sherry (ed.), Joseph Conrad: A Commemoration (London, 1976), pp. 37-53.

³ John Graham, "Time in the Novels of Virginia Woolf", rpt. in Jacqueline Latham (ed.), Critics on Virginia Woolf (Coral Gables, Florida, 1970), pp. 28-44.

⁴ A leading example of this, I think, is David Daiches, Virginia Woolf (London, 1945).

make between the three areas of critical interest in Woolf and Conrad begin to break down. Indeed, the critical debates that I have found most interesting and stimulating to my own inquiry cross those boundaries. M.C. Bradbrook's article in Scrutiny, "Notes on the Style of Mrs. Woolf", which partly sparked the most crucial and longest-running debate about Woolf's entire fictional enterprise, did so precisely because it was about much more than just "style".¹ Bradbrook argued that Virginia Woolf's prose style showed her deep unwillingness to commit herself morally in the lives her novels present. Her prose style implies not judgement but a non-committal "relativism", and does not present "thoughts" ("thinking", Bradbrook suggests, "implies a thesis which one is ready to defend") but rather "reveries". This attack strikes in many directions, as did the subsequent Scrutiny accounts of Woolf. To counter it one would have to demonstrate (as A.D. Moody, for instance, tried in his book, Virginia Woolf²) from a close analysis of the novels, that each has a genuine imaginative integrity. To that extent, the novels do have to be treated as autonomous entities. But one would also have to demonstrate the human value of the novel's particular "human" enterprise. The way M.C. Bradbrook and Dr. Leavis put it, the presentation of character (for instance) has to be judged "morally", and this moral judgement reflects both on the reader who makes it, and on the novel that requires it. Eventually it will be also a moral judgement of the writer's self as that emerges in his work.

It is on this last point that the Scrutiny assessments are most interesting, I think, and most contentious. For there is a difficulty

¹ M.C. Bradbrook, "Notes on the Style of Mrs. Woolf", Scrutiny, 1 (1932), 33-8.

² A.D. Moody, Virginia Woolf (Edinburgh & London, 1963).

about the "moral" nature and responsibilities of a work of art, which comes out when M.C. Bradbrook seems to demand some coherent and articulated, even systematized, belief in Woolf's novels:

... Physical sensations, which are immediately present, and have no relations to any schema of values, are all that Mrs. Woolf dares to assume in her readers.

All attempt to order and select has gone. 'There is nothing that one can fish up with a spoon, nothing that one can call an event.... How impossible to order them rightly, to detach one separately or give the effect of the whole.... Nevertheless, life is pleasant, life is tolerable. Monday is followed by Tuesday, then comes Wednesday.'

Mrs. Woolf never, as is so frequently asserted, attempts to reproduce the process of thinking. Such generalized activity does not interest her: moreover, thinking implies a thesis which one is ready to defend. (p. 37)

These remarks echo E.M. Forster's complaint about Conrad, which F.R. Leavis used to help express his own judgement:

What is so elusive about him [Forster writes] is that he is always promising to make some general philosophic statement about the universe, and then refraining with a gruff disclaimer.... Is there not also a central obscurity, something noble, heroic, beautiful, inspiring half-a-dozen great books, but obscure, obscure?... These essays do suggest that he is misty in the middle as well as at the edges, that the secret cask of his genius contains a vapour rather than a jewel; and that we needn't try to write him down philosophically, because there is, in this direction, nothing to write. No creed, in fact. Only opinions, and the right to throw them overboard when facts make them look absurd. Opinions held under the semblance of eternity, girt with the sea, crowned with stars, and therefore easily mistaken for a creed.¹

Of course, it is possible to fault Forster's and Leavis's and Bradbrook's desire to see some "creed" maintained. A.D. Moody has done this neatly with regard to Leavis's assessment of To the Lighthouse, which Leavis overvalued because he saw it as a more thoroughly thought-through response to the "facts" of Woolf's life, rather than a mere

¹ Quoted in F.R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (Harmondsworth, 1962), pp. 192-3.

recording of emotional states. If anything, Moody argues, the novel's fault is that it specifically does not do what Leavis had claimed; on the contrary, "its art is so perfectly refined because it has not had to contend very directly with life". (p. 29). R.A. Gekoski in his book, Conrad: The Moral World of the Novelist, has also argued persuasively that clear thinking is not always demonstrable as clear presentation. Gekoski argues that Conrad is not, in any of the usual senses of the word, "obscure":

... indeed, his writing and understanding seem to me markedly - though not unfailingly - lucid. But the lucidity of Conrad the writer need not be matched by the clarity of what he thinks about: his view of the human condition is that it is, itself, "obscure": dark, unclear, uncertain. His eye is firmly fixed but his object wavers; the differing perspectives of his vision register the movement of what he sees.¹

While I doubt if Conrad's eye is as "firmly fixed" as Gekoski states, and that "the differing perspectives of his vision" register only movements in what is seen rather than the effects of Conrad's responses to the object as well, I take Gekoski's point about the constant, identifying "passion" in Conrad's vision, even when he speaks of things he feels unable to identify. Gekoski also seems to me right in his argument that Conrad regarded the true expression of his own vision, and the integrity of that, as his greatest moral responsibility, humanly the most affirmative act he could make (pp. 24-7).

It seems to me that the crucial problem for us about the "moral" quality of Conrad's and Woolf's vision is related to the difficulties they found with human character, with responding to it appropriately and adequately, and with exploring and assessing the deepest structures of human lives. This is why I find Leavis's apparent mistaking of

¹ R.A. Gekoski, Conrad: The Moral World of the Novelist (London, 1978), p. 4.

Marlow's role in "Heart of Darkness" interesting. His failure to acknowledge that Marlow is more than a means of getting us to Kurtz, and that indeed the story is as much about Marlow as it is about Kurtz, seems linked with his worry about Conrad's "obscurity". Similarly with M.C. Bradbrook's criticism of Virginia Woolf's moral irresponsibility in the following:

In reading any of the later novels [up to The Waves] of Mrs. Woolf, a curious and persistent trick of style obtrudes itself on the attention.

"But for women, I thought, looking at the empty shelves, these difficulties are infinitely more formidable ..."

"The mind is certainly a very mysterious organ, I reflected, drawing in my head from the window, about which practically nothing is known ..."

"There is a coherence in things, a stability: something, she meant, is immune from change and shines out (she glanced at the window with its ripple of reflected light). Here, she felt, putting down the spoon, here was the still space that lies about the heart of things ..."

The first two passages are ratiocinative, the last a description of a mood. Yet the little asides serve the same purpose in all three: by stressing time and place, they deflate the statement: the affirmation is given a relative value only: neither the reader nor the writer is implicated: they are not trapped into any admissions, or required to endorse anything in more than a qualified way. The effect has been described by T.E. Hulme:

"The classical poet never forgets the finiteness, the limit of man ... If you say an extravagant thing, there is always the impression of yourself standing outside it and not quite believing it."

Mrs. Woolf refuses to be pinned down in this way, and consequently she is debarred from a narrative technique, since this implies a schema of values, or even from the direct presentation of powerful feelings or major situations.
(p. 33)

Clearly Bradbrook is right about the deflating power of those asides, and that in these particular instances they seem to distance both reader and writer. The characteristic of Woolf's writing that seems to disturb her most, however, is what she regards as a tendency on

Woolf's part to offer a witnessed sense of life, rather than a direct and powerfully real experience of it. Conrad's novels clearly do offer that sort of engagement, and accordingly do express the passion of his committed beliefs - something that Leavis admires very much in them. Yet Conrad also makes important use of characters such as Marlow, who witness the lives and actions of others. And Conrad's interest in the moral (in the broadest sense of that word) responses of characters as they witness other human lives, and in the difficulty of responding with the fullest, most demanding integrity, is no less to be found in Woolf. Indeed, as I try to argue in this thesis, it is precisely this positive quality of her work, which can be so easily misunderstood as a negative one, as a lack of something, that is one of the central lines of its development and value.

Of course it is much more difficult for us to comprehend and assess an explanation which never states its findings in any direct and definitive way. The art of both Woolf and Conrad is essentially "dramatic" in that sense. Conrad's most significant study of human character in Lord Jim, for example, is presented - enacted by the work in the relationship of the various characters. Jim by himself would be pretty uninteresting, Conrad suggests, but as his case is seen and responded to by others it becomes not only compellingly real but also morally significant. So too with Virginia Woolf. It is not possible to point to particular insights about human nature or to definitive realizations of character as the central point of her novels. She is concerned with the fundamentals of human identity, with the ways a particular selfhood first articulates and defines itself in perception, and then in the distinctive quality of its responses to other people and to the world beyond it. As Woolf presents it, the moral significance, the value of a character is revealed in small, everyday, apparently

insignificant actions and in the way the self establishes and maintains and extends its particular identity.

Such novels have to be understood, therefore, as ongoing explorations of human lives, not as committed statements of belief about human nature, nor even as movements towards some more graspable abstract insights about it. The value of such exploration will lie in the extent to which the writer commits himself in his exploration - the quality that is, of that commitment - and in the quality and depth of his responsiveness to his own shifting and developing understandings of personal life.

This is the sort of open-ended questioning and as it were self-questioning that some of the best Modernist novels exhibit, I believe - one that is open even to finding that the questions it has asked are the wrong ones. And of course this has implications for any critical accounts of such novels. The critic must be similarly prepared to acknowledge that the really important questions to ask might not be the ones that seemed to be important at first sight. This is why my own approach to the Modernist novel tries to be as empirical as possible: to seek some understanding of the Modernist novel by focusing on certain specific novels of two Modernist writers, and exploring their notions of personal "life" - in both a descriptive and a normative sense of that word - by tracing a line of development over several novels. Moreover, it is partly because these particular two writers were not so intensely, or rather so intellectually, conscious of the importance of their fictional enterprise as Joyce or T.S. Eliot, for example, that I have chosen to examine their work rather than that of other, perhaps greater but certainly more complicated, Modernist writers. Of course there is yet another reason - my own personal interest in them, for without that there would have been no

thesis. But this brings me to the second strand of my inquiry.

At first glance, Conrad and Woolf seem to be so different as to preclude any revealing or useful examination of them together. One of them comes at the very beginning of the Modernist period, and still shares some of the preoccupations and outlook of his nineteenth-century predecessors; the other, more or less at its end: Woolf's last novel, Between the Acts, was published in 1940. One is usually thought of as a novelist of action, the other as a novelist of sensibility; and although that is hardly an adequate way of describing either of them, it is true that in Conrad the central issues are most often ones of individual (and social) conduct and morality in a world apparently devoid of, or indifferent to, moral values, while for Woolf the general issues are usually ones of individual (and social) insight into meaning, pattern, order, and significance in a world apparently fragmented and chaotic. But the closer we look at them, I think, the more they show in common; and certainly, if Modernism is ever to be properly understood, it will only be by using the critic's "chief tools" (as T.S. Eliot called them), analysis and comparison, in the examination of particular works by particular writers.

Specifically, I have focused on a particular problem arising from their artistic self-consciousness. For them, a human life is mysterious, not only in the way it comes to be itself, but also how it is known as that self, by itself and by others. Therefore both these writers show characters trying to make sense of other human lives - whether in the form of narratives or stories (as for Conrad's Marlow or Woolf's Bernard in The Waves), or of art (as for Lily Briscoe in To the Lighthouse), or of drama (as for Miss La Trobe in Between the Acts). In each of the Conrad and Woolf novels I examine, the action centres

upon the lives of characters who witness others' lives, as well as upon those whose lives are witnessed. Yet in almost every case, excepting Conrad's significantly unsuccessful Chance, this distinction collapses under the novel's scrutiny: those characters who have witnessed other lives, and who have been imaginatively fascinated, indeed compelled, by their significance, come to bear witness - with their whole selves - to what they have seen, and what they find they must deeply acknowledge it to have been. And this comes to apply to the reader in relation to the novel itself. We are led to see that the whole novel is also capable of that sort of witnessing and, in the novel's sense of the characters and in our response to the novel as readers, there is the same kind of testimony to the continuing mystery, the distinctive, identifying, shaping vital impulse, of particular human lives.

This sort of exploration requires the greatest possible integrity in the author himself. Conrad and Woolf both came to see that in order to realize the true nature of human lives they had to perceive, explore, and evaluate everything that mattered to them in particular human lives. In recognizing, for instance, that human identity mattered as a problem to them, they had to explore the importance both to others and to themselves of consciousness, self-consciousness, and unreflective action, along with the less specifically "modern" needs both of others and themselves: to wonder, to seek meaning, and to create. It is basically for this reason, I think, that we find the strong presence of an authorial self in the novel. At their best, Conrad and Woolf are fully implicated as subject-matter as well as creative explorers in their novels' inquiry, and show an openness, a willingness to allow the self as they know it to be fractured, if necessary, by the kinds of experience, the possibilities of disorder and moral doubt, that their innermost self seeks to explore. Their best

work puts the coherence of the writer's own self at risk in a rigorous imaginative search for the grounds and the nature of "selfhood", coherent human identity. In other words, each writer's imagination shows a willingness to be itself broken to the fundamentals of self by the particular possibilities of life, by the elements and the precarious nature of moral identity progressively realized by their novels. Yet the recompense for this lies in the novel's articulating as a single, coherent "passion", the whole identity of the writer engaging with the world beyond him. And, what is more, this articulation can take a physical yet abiding form. It can be both an open process and yet a completed pattern, in the spatial and temporal dimensions of the novel - the novel-as-dramatic-action, that is, and the novel-as-text.

Of course, the honesty, courage, coherence and unity of the writer's innermost self - its integrity - may reach outward to articulate itself over the span of many (or indeed all) of his novels. It was this consideration, I think, that led two of the best of Conrad's critics, Albert Guerard and F.R. Leavis, to see the need to talk in detail about the whole of Conrad's novelistic enterprise. My own enterprise, while it does not attempt anything more than a close account of one crucial aspect of Conrad's and Woolf's fiction, also tries in a much smaller way to be an account of the integrity of the exploration over four of Conrad's novels, and three of Woolf's. Thus in the first section of the thesis, I concentrate on two Conrad stories, "Youth" and "Heart of Darkness", and a novel by Virginia Woolf, To the Lighthouse, which pursue a sense of something mysterious and elusive in individual selfhood and, beyond that, in human life itself; and I try to explore the nature of that pursuit, why it takes the particular form it does, and how it therefore prompted yet further exploration and pursuit.

My second section deals with two novels in which Conrad and Woolf undertook just that. In both Lord Jim and The Waves, the writer has a more conscious sense of the way the novel can explore the mystery. This goes with a fuller sense of how the life witnessing the mysterious aspects of other human lives, and with that, the human potentialities those lives realize and fail to realize, actually embodies that mysteriousness and those aspects in itself as it witnesses. Both novelists concentrate now on the relationship between the "potential" of the individual, and its realization in the world; on how the individual self is both one and many; on the inter-dependence of subjective experience of self and objective views and reactions to it by others; and on how all these themes, as the novels uncover and present them, apply to the novelist's own relation to his material, and to the reader's relation to the novel as a whole.

The third and final section again treats two novels that I see as responses by Conrad and Woolf to the implications of their previous explorations. Their responses differ in quality, however, and the difference is very revealing about the nature of those explorations and the conditions of success in them. In Chance, I argue, Conrad fails to confront the question of his own artistic integrity; Between the Acts, on the other hand, I see as perhaps Woolf's best novel precisely because she does acknowledge the limited nature of her individual self, and the inevitable limitations of any story she can make - no matter how consciously "encyclopaedic" in scope. Because Conrad is not able to acknowledge himself truly in Chance, nor allow it to bear witness to his very deepest needs to write a novel, his novel fails just where Virginia Woolf's most succeeds. Between the Acts allows the writer's whole self into imaginative play - including even its most extreme consciousness of itself. Because its deepest

recognition is that there is always life which goes beyond the self and destroys individual identity in its ongoing rhythms, Woolf's own self is, paradoxically, released and realized most fully and most compellingly in the world of this last novel.

As I have tried to suggest, this thesis adopts no new methodological "approach" to the works discussed, and does not pretend to offer new detailed "interpretations" of their meanings. In fact, there is probably no detailed point I make about any of the novels which has not been already suggested somewhere by one or more of Conrad's and Woolf's many critics; certainly I am conscious of so many debts to other critics' particular insights about the novels I discuss that it would have been impossible (and hopelessly distracting) to try to note them all. (Even the "list of books consulted" can register only a fraction of them.) For this reason, I have deliberately avoided footnotes of that sort. Nor have I formed my own arguments in direct response to those of the critics whose work I have found stimulating. Indeed, I was aware that the nature of any of my own enterprise demanded that I should try to find the shape my own arguments should take in what the novels themselves suggested, even if this meant leaving my differences with other critics' accounts more often implied than explicit. Hence my own aim has been to point to a single, continuous thread or logic of imaginative interest in these works, to some important underlying similarities and inter-relationships between them - similarities and inter-relationships which I think stem from the central focus of each work, but which also help us to see more clearly what the central focus is. My own focus is on what I see as important inter-connections between, and the wider bearing and significance of, things that many scholars and critics have noticed in these works, but without (as I see

it) grasping this wider import. That critics have not seen, or stressed, these inter-connections is not because of any particular critical insensitivity, I am sure. It seems to me that it arises rather from preconceived ideas about the Modernist novel, or from too constricted an attention to each writer's enterprise, or from too ready an acceptance of preconceived notions about each writer's art. It is therefore in this context, where the effect of those general but limiting views seems to me most misleading, that I have tried to locate my own view of these two fascinating and revealing writers - or at least, my own view of a few of their most fascinating and revealing works.

SECTION A

"Youth", "Heart of Darkness" & "To the Lighthouse"



CHAPTER 1

"YOUTH" & "HEART OF DARKNESS": "THE PLANT & FLOWER OF LIGHT"

In an essay written in 1924, "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown", Virginia Woolf announced that "in or about December, 1910, human character changed".¹ The assertion was meant to startle, of course, and as Virginia Woolf admitted, the date she chose is rather arbitrary. But she did put her finger on a problem that had already become acute in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The generally accepted conception of "character" had begun by then to seem unsatisfactory, and the sense of dissatisfaction became increasingly acute as the twentieth century progressed.

The Victorian novelist had seen an individual's life as the sum-total of his consciousness and his deeds, and deeds as issuing from specific motives and from the interaction of "will" and circumstance. The individual's "consciousness", in this model, could be defined in terms of his particular conception (as distinct from perception) of the world: that is, the content of conscious reason and feeling as these have been modified by experience. The Self was thought of as a continuous ego (compounded of the elements of will and consciousness - that is, of memory, habits, loyalties and commitments and a particular social context); each act of this continuous ego largely determined its subsequent acts and also its subsequent conception of the world. Thus an individual's life could be portrayed by showing the Self (compounded of the elements mentioned above) causing the pattern of life to be what it is.

The new generation of novelists felt much to react against in this notion of character. For them, the Self seemed more mysterious and more elusive than had been recognized. They had come to see that an individual's

¹ Virginia Woolf, Collected Essays, Vol. 1 (London, 1966), p. 320.

very perceptions of the world revealed him, even before he formed any conscious conceptions of it. His very apprehension of the world was already coloured in a distinctive way; his Self, they realized, appears in the very style of his receptivity. Accordingly, one must look beyond the traits of his personality, his sensitivity, for example - and note the kind of sensitivity it is, beyond his conscious thoughts to examine the very process of thinking itself. The individual is best shown, therefore, in the particular way he encounters the world: in the very process of thinking itself and the most basic patterns of perception, feeling and action in him. The more obvious manifestations of his character - his actions and his conceptions - are of course no less important than they were; but for the Modernist writer, these had to be scrutinized much more thoroughly than before. In fact, those very actions and conceptions were seen as problematical because it was now recognized clearly that the reasons for a man's very conception of himself needed to be scrutinized as well, to see why he needs to conceive of himself in this way. The novelist now focuses on the nature of a life, rather than on "character" - or, to put it another way, on the nature of his "character" rather than its operations.

Individual lives are thus conceived in a holistic way - as a simultaneous whole - rather than in terms of causal progressions such as the one from conception of the world, to "will", to action. Any attempt to portray any human-being adequately must portray the unique shape of his life as a whole - including its trajectory in time. To use a metaphor of Virginia Woolf's, an individual life takes a curve that defines it in the same way as a wave's motion, from heaping together to breaking, defines it. But a wave may be depicted in two different ways: by travelling the entire pattern of the gathering to its shattering, or alternatively, by catching its shape in a momentary flash. So with a human-being. The essential quality of a human life, the obscure forces and structures and

issuings-forth which comprise the "shape" it must take on in the world and which manifest its vital energy, reveal themselves both momentarily and in its whole "curve" or trajectory. Either way, however, its nature is elusive, to be caught only indirectly and obliquely. Its "causes" lie behind or beyond the individual's consciousness, certainly behind his rational mind. Its core, its roots, are a mystery. All that can be clearly seen of it are its outward manifestations, which draw the observer's attention and compel his search - the flower, as it were, of a life whose sources and centre lie in darkness.

There is nothing absolutely new in this way of seeing human-beings and human lives, although the conscious exploration and depiction of them in this way is new in the Modernist writer. But what he is getting at is perhaps as well expressed in Ben Jonson's famous lines as in any later writer:

It is not growing like a tree
 In bulk, doth make man better be;
 Or standing long an oak, three hundred year,
 To fall a log at last, dry, bald, and sere:
 A lily of a day
 Is fairer far, in May,
 Although it fall and die that night;
 It was the plant and flower of light.
 In small proportions we just beauties see:
 And in short measures, life may perfect be. ("To ... Sir
 Lucius Cary, and Sir H. Morison")

Jonson's image of the individual's life as a "flower of light" is exactly right here. In both Conrad and Woolf, for example, we also find the polarized notions of "light" and "darkness", though developed in a very complex way, without Jonson's instinctive simplicity. Jonson's image of the tree, too, which he uses to accentuate the quality he sees in the flower, is likewise very apposite. Both Conrad and Woolf are also led to probe the question put by their contemporary, Yeats:

O chestnut-tree, great-rooted blossomer,
 Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
 O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
 How can we know the dancer from the dance? ("Among School
 Children")

Jonson's combination of images - a human life as both a "plant" and a plant of "light" - is also relevant. For it suggests the epiphany, the brief yet luminous moment, when the essential quality of the living thing shines forth, as if the life growing out of its dark root reveals its elusive, mysterious nature with almost blinding luminosity and clarity. The "flower" of light is the only accessible part of the plant, but its hidden core and its dark roots are the source and key to its being. As both Conrad and Woolf recognized (and this recognition is responsible for one aspect of their similarity), they could not merely portray the flower and assume that its whole nature would be made clear by that alone. Sometimes, it must be admitted, they tried to get directly at what necessarily lay hidden and mysterious, and the artistic results have drawn some very sharp criticism: F.R. Leavis's objection¹ to Conrad's repeated recourse to the adjective "inexplicable", for instance, or E.M. Forster's to Virginia Woolf's attempts to go straight to what may be called "the 'life' within life" which often made her characters fail to come "alive" for him. But in their most successful novels, Conrad and Woolf not only see that they must try to capture the relationship between the flower and its source, they actually do so. In their best work, the contrast between flower and source gives definition to both elements. The plant of light is actually seen to be also the plant of a darkness.

I

In "Youth", the "darkness" is primarily that of time, the conditions in which a human life realizes itself, and the "light" an intensity of experience, a blaze of vitality, in which a life seems to realize itself briefly but timelessly. The shortest-lived flower, as Jonson suggests, may achieve a perfection which, like beauty, the process of time can add

¹ F.R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (Harmondsworth, 1962).

nothing to. Indeed, it may make the process of time seem only a loss, a moving away from its brightness and perfection. And yet that very loss may bring with it some gain: at least a deeper and fuller understanding both of the brightness and of the transience of that vitality. In "Youth", Marlow's sense of loss compels him to tell the story of his own intense, "romantic", youthful brightness; but through the telling, Conrad seems to be groping toward some more comprehensive sense of the gain as well as the loss in Marlow - a vision of life that encompasses both the intense, perfect blaze of youth and the gradual, realizing trajectory of time.

At the start Conrad makes Marlow seem pretty decided about what his tale will show:

"Yes I have seen a little of the Eastern seas; but what I remember best in my first voyage there. You fellows know there are those voyages that seem ordered for the illustration of life, that might stand for a symbol of existence. You fight, work, sweat, nearly kill yourself, sometimes do kill yourself, trying to accomplish something - and you can't. Not from any fault of yours. You simply can do nothing, neither great nor little - not a thing in the world - not even marry an old maid, or get a wretched 600-ton cargo of coal to its port of destination." ("Youth", pp. 3-4¹)

Marlow's assurance here seems to rest on two things. In the first place, he feels that he has understood the significance of his voyage - that is, his distance from his experience has enabled his present awareness of how the journey fits into the scheme of life. In the second place, he expects his listeners to agree that, yes, they too see life in this way. But the interesting thing is that, while Marlow's general claim that the episode was representative is substantiated by the time he finishes his narrative, its significance comes to seem - both to him and to us - of a very different kind from the one he proposes here. His final sense of the experience, and the feeling his listeners assent to ("we all nodded at him ... our weary eyes looking still, looking always, looking anxiously for something out of life, that while it is expected is already gone" [p. 42])

¹ In Joseph Conrad, "Youth", "Heart of Darkness" and "The End of the Tether" (London, 1946).

is not a complacent understanding of life's futility, but rather a sense of something mysterious and wonderful in it.

Critics vary widely in the particular accounts they give of Marlow's shifting relation to his tale as he lapses away from his initial brisk certainty. But in the case of "Youth" an important general similarity underlies the critics' differences. Certainly Stanton de Voren Hoffman and William York Tindall, in arguing that the perspective which defines the tale is ironic and comic, differ from F.R. Leavis and Daniel Schwarz, who both feel that it is predominantly "emotionally self-indulgent", and with a "cheap insistence on the glamour". Clarence Lindsay argues a different position again: that neither the "sentimental" nor the "comic" accounts of "Youth" express its most important feature, which is rather "a refusal to yield to either of those two extremes", dramatized in "Marlow's capacity for seeing experience simultaneously from two extreme perspectives".¹ Yet each critic assumes that Marlow's narrative does primarily express, or come to express, just such an overview as he predicted, even if the tale does not turn out quite as Marlow expected. The more important assumption lies behind this: that Conrad's greatest interest with the tale is, like Marlow's, in showing something he has completely understood. So, for these readers, "Youth" has the fixity of a story completely, not to say complacently, grasped and presented by its author.

Thus while Leavis in passing notes Marlow's role as "participant in events", he is more concerned to use "Youth" as an illustration of the

¹ Stanton de Voren Hoffman, Comedy and Form in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad (The Hague & Paris, 1969), p. 100; William York Tindall, "Apology for Marlow", in R.C. Rathburn and M. Steinmann, Jr. (eds.), From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad (Minneapolis, 1958), p. 278; F.R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (Harmondsworth, 1962), p. 209; Daniel R. Schwarz, Conrad: "Almayer's Folly" to "Under Western Eyes" (Ithaca, 1980), p. 61; Clarence B. Lindsay, "'Youth': The Harmony of Past and Present", in The Critical Review, 19 (1977), 106-13.

temptations Marlow's capacity to give detached comment presents for Conrad. In this case, Leavis notes, Marlow gives Conrad the chance to indulge in some sentimental glamour-mongering. Tindall and Hoffman also agree in thinking the tale's most fully-comprehended aspects the most important. They only disagree over whether or not Marlow is aware of the tale's final irony: whether he mocks his own "aged sentimentality", or whether it is only Conrad who mocks it. Schwarz feels that the alternatives Conrad presents to Marlow are "self-irony", or, failing that, "escapist ecstasy". The self either controls rationally, or makes an equally deliberate, though irrational escape: "For Marlow, language becomes the only reality. His non-syntactical language is a psychic gesture, an effort to replace the temporal dimension of language, syntax, with an ecstatic chant, whose repetitions defy movement" (Schwarz, p. 61). Lindsay argues that Marlow's voice finally "harmonizes" the "contending attitudes towards experience" which are "Youth"'s subject, and so it remains for him "a minor work precisely because it presents us with an accomplished moral harmony rather than dramatizing a moral struggle" (Lindsay, p. 113).

Clearly the critics are right to remark the tale's impulses to generalize and to seek general truths. "Youth" does express those impulses fully, and not only in Marlow's more sardonic comments about the romantic folly and ignorant, bold optimism of youth, and in his more indulgent sentiment about the episode, but also through his capacity to feel and tell his experience as a whole, complete story. He narrates his tale with a competency which shows that he is satisfied, on the whole, that he has understood its meaning, and which makes us take his comments seriously. Sometimes, it is true, Marlow's brisk accounts of particular human episodes make us feel that he deals rather callously or offhandedly quickly with them. This is true of his account of the maddening of the mulatto cook as "one would think that the sole purpose of that fiendish

gale had been to make a lunatic of that poor devil of a mulatto" (p. 14), and of his remarks about some individuals' fates that seem properly to be outside the scope of his present tale:

meantime I read for the first time Sartor Resartus and Burnaby's Ride to Khiva. I didn't understand much of the first then; but I remember I preferred the soldier to the philosopher at the time; a preference which life has only confirmed. One was a man, and the other was either more - or less. However, they are both dead and Mrs. Beard is dead, and youth, strength, genius, thoughts, achievements, simple hearts - all dies... No matter. (p. 7)

For the most part, however, the key points of the story are enforced for us by Marlow's controlled, paced narrative, and through his capacity to show past episodes in the more various perspectives of his subsequent understanding. Perhaps the most important example of the control Conrad gives Marlow is in the way the changing pace of the narrative exactly reflects Marlow's subject, tracing changes from youth to old age. Marlow is much more quickly dismissive of characters and events in the first part of his tale; when he comes to the main voyage, where his capacity for responsible seamanship, and his new manhood are tested, the pace is slower. We see then how many subsequent impressions have been incorporated into his experience:

"Next day it was my watch on deck from eight to twelve. At breakfast the captain observed, 'It's wonderful how that smell hangs about the cabin.' About ten, the mate being on the poop, I stepped down on the main-deck for a moment. The carpenter's bench stood abaft the mainmast: I leaned against it sucking at my pipe, and the carpenter, a young chap, came to talk to me. He remarked, 'I think we have done very well, haven't we?' and then I perceived with annoyance the fool was trying to tilt the bench. I said curtly, 'Don't, Chips,' and immediately became aware of a queer sensation, of an absurd delusion, - I seemed somehow to be in the air. I heard all round me like a pent-up breath released - as if a thousand giants simultaneously had said Phoo! - and felt a dull concussion which made my ribs ache suddenly. No doubt about it - I was in the air, and my body was describing a short parabola. But short as it was, I had the time to think several thoughts in, as far as I can remember, the following order: 'This can't be the carpenter - What is it? - Some accident - Submarine volcano? - Coals, gas! - By Jove! we are being blown up - Everybody's dead - I am falling into the after-hatch - I see fire in it.' ... The first person I saw was Mahon, with eyes like saucers, his mouth open, and the

long white hair standing straight on end round his head like a silver halo. He was just about to go down when the sight of the main-deck stirring, heaving up, and changing into splinters before his eyes, petrified him on the top step. I stared at him in unbelief, and he stared at me with a queer kind of shocked curiosity. I did not know that I had no hair, no eyebrows, no eyelashes, that my young moustache was burnt off, that my face was black, one cheek laid open, my nose cut, and my chin bleeding. I had lost my cap, one of my slippers, and my shirt was torn to rags. Of all this I was not aware. I was amazed to see the ship still afloat, the poop-deck whole - and, most of all, to see anybody alive. Also the peace of the sky and the serenity of the sea were distinctly surprising. I suppose I expected to see them convulsed with horror. ..." (pp. 22-4; my italics)

Marlow recovers his sensation through remembering and recounting in detail, but also through adding details not accessible to him at the time. The account is rounded out because Marlow can now note Mahon's independent view of what happened, including his view of Mahon himself. Thus, Marlow can suggest why he found the peace of sky and sea "distinctly surprising". He can also express his impressions through simile: "like a pent-up breath released - as if a thousand giants simultaneously had said Phoo!" Later he describes the masts that "rose from that chaos like big trees above a matted undergrowth" (p. 25). But if Marlow's use of simile or metaphor suggests to us a richness of understanding acquired outside the experience itself, it also suggests a concomitant difficulty Marlow finds with recapturing the acute, vital feeling of that time.

By the time Marlow reaches the end of his narrative, his descriptions are slowly measured as he describes scenes without motion, nearly without life:

"And then I saw the men of the East - they were looking at me. The whole length of the jetty was full of people. I saw brown, bronze, yellow faces, the black eyes, the glitter, the colour of an Eastern crowd. And all these beings stared without a murmur, without a sigh, without a movement. They stared down at the boats, at the sleeping men who at night had come to them from the sea. Nothing moved. The fronds of palms stood still against the sky. Not a branch stirred along the shore, and the brown roofs of hidden houses peeped through the green foliage, through the big leaves that hung shining and still like leaves

forged of heavy metal. This was the East of the ancient navigators, so old, so mysterious, resplendent and sombre, living and unchanged, full of danger and promise. And these were the men. I sat up suddenly. A wave of movement passed through the crowd from end to end, passed along the heads, swayed the bodies, ran along the jetty like a ripple on the water, like a breath of wind on a field - and all was still again. I see it now - the wide sweep of the bay, the glittering sands, the wealth of green infinite and varied, the sea blue like the sea of a dream, the crowd of attentive faces, the blaze of vivid colour - the water reflecting it all, the curve of the shore, the jetty, the high-sterned outlandish craft floating still, and the three boats with the tired men from the West sleeping, unconscious of the land and the people and of the violence of sunshine. They slept thrown across the thwarts, curled on bottom-boards, in the careless attitudes of death. The head of the old skipper, leaning back in the stern of the long-boat, had fallen on his breast, and he looked as though he would never wake. Farther out old Mahon's face was upturned to the sky, with the long white beard spread out on his breast, as though he had been shot where he sat at the tiller; and a man, all in a heap in the bows of the boat, slept with both arms embracing the stem-head and with his cheek laid on the gunwale. The East looked at them without a sound." (pp. 40-1)

Yet despite the obvious importance of Marlow's (and Conrad's) generalizing and controlling capacities in "Youth", critics who focus only on that tend to miss something crucial about the tale. For, besides the generalizing and assured Marlow, there is a Marlow that Conrad's tale realizes less fully. Marlow also has the capacity to doubt the meaning of what he has witnessed, and to be arrested by particular instances of human nature that do not seem to fit any general pattern, and which disrupt his pre-conceived notions about human nature. Conrad shows this aspect of Marlow from the start, although the first instance is so minor that it could easily be missed. Marlow's description of Captain Beard is an example of his usual acute, pithy and confident insight into character:

he had blue eyes in that old face of his, which were amazingly like a boy's, with that candid expression some quite common men preserve to the end of their days by a rare internal gift of simplicity of heart and rectitude of soul. (p. 4)

But he ends by saying that something in this simple man still defies understanding: "What induced him to accept me was a wonder." There

seems to be something perpetually obscure to Marlow at the heart of the Captain's behaviour - a moral enigma.

Marlow has similar, though more pronounced difficulty later in his tale, when he tries to understand the crew's uncomplaining performance of their duties following the explosion. In this case, he is driven to ask those who listen to his tale whether they understand this enigma better than he can - a rare appeal from Marlow who normally assumes his audience's response, believing that their judgements and experience correspond more or less with his own. Here, however, Marlow keeps on saying, "What made them do it?", asking for some comprehension of the inexplicable moral life-impulse in their conduct. He considers various possible rational or causal reasons for this moral strength, but concludes that it is not explained by any of these. It is not even the sum of these reasons, but rather something other, something beyond:

"You understand this? I don't think one of those chaps expected to get down in the usual way. When we did I heard them saying to each other, 'Well, I thought we would come down overboard, in a lump - sticks and all - blame me if I didn't.' 'That's what I was thinking to myself,' would answer wearily another battered and bandaged scarecrow. And, mind, these were men without the drilled-in habit of obedience. To an onlooker they would be a lot of profane scallywags without a redeeming point. What made them do it - what made them obey me when I, thinking consciously how fine it was, made them drop the bunt of the foresail twice to try to do it better? What? They had no professional reputation - no examples, no praise. It wasn't a sense of duty; they all knew well enough how to shirk, and laze, and dodge - when they had a mind to it - and mostly they had. Was it the two pounds ten a-month that sent them there? They didn't think their pay half good enough. No; it was something in them, something inborn and subtle and everlasting There was a completeness in it, something solid like a principle, and masterful like an instinct - a disclosure of something secret - of that hidden something ..."
(p. 28; my italics)

Marlow simultaneously acknowledges here that external explanations will not serve, and that he is himself implicated in this human mystery. It applies to his present self, so that even as he tells his experience he must ask questions about it. He understands clearly that in this case it will not do to approach as an "onlooker" might, oblivious to the

details about these men that introduce doubt about what their behaviour means.

It is often said of Conrad that his novels proclaim the irreducible separateness of individual human lives. And a passage like the above, acknowledging some unfathomable enigma in human behaviour might seem to support such a claim. But to explain Conrad's point this way leads quickly on to seeing him, as many critics have done, as a relativist, and a sceptic, even as a nihilist; and yet nothing in this passage offers that sense of Conrad. Marlow's acknowledgement of the "otherness" of those lives is inseparable from his more acute and questioning awareness of his own life. What he acknowledges is not merely a mystery, but a mystery for him in the behaviour of those men. This is why I think that Albert Guerard's generally agreed point that "Youth" does not explore moral concerns is wrong.¹ Certainly it is not interested in issues of good and evil, or right and wrong conduct. But it is very much interested in the way Marlow's attempt to show the episode as "significant" eventually requires him to acknowledge a further significance in it. He has to confront the central fact that the experience he has made into a tale about a youthful, past self, is still somehow very significant to his present self. His capacity to sense some hidden root of human conduct and personality applies to his own self as well as to others', and it explains why his first account of why his experience was humanly representative differs from his final account. To the very extent that it is representative, he cannot be so sure, so complacent even, about what it represents. Conrad's story, in other words, depicts Marlow's attempt to come to terms with the question of why the episode has continued to haunt his mind.

¹ Albert J. Guerard, Conrad the Novelist (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), p. 17.

The tale's most significant achievement is in its realization of the central insight that, while an onlooker may feel he satisfactorily understands why the episode is significant to Marlow, Marlow has his keenest sense of what his experience means to him when he cannot identify its meaning. When the past's significance is felt most acutely, it is felt as something alive in the present. Thus when we feel, as in the following passage, Marlow "sees" his past for us most clearly, he does not have any detached awareness that he is "seeing" it for an audience. In this, I believe climactic, passage, it becomes impossible to distinguish between his memory of the past and a reliving in the present:

"I need not tell you what it is to be knocking about in an open boat. I remember nights and days of calm, when we pulled, we pulled, and the boat seemed to stand still, as if bewitched within the circle of the sea horizon. I remember the heat, the deluge of rain-squalls that kept us baling for dear life (but filled our water-cask), and I remember sixteen hours on end with a mouth dry as a cinder and a steering-oar over the stern to keep my first command head on to a breaking sea. I did not know how good a man I was till then. I remember the drawn faces, the dejected figures of my two men, and I remember my youth and the feeling that will never come back any more - the feeling that I could last for ever, outlast the sea, the earth, and all men; the deceitful feeling that lures us on to joys, to perils, to love, to vain effort - to death; the triumphant conviction of strength, the heat of life in the handful of dust, the glow in the heart that with every year grows dim, grows cold, grows small, and expires - and expires, too soon, too soon - before life itself.

And this is how I see the East. I have seen its secret places and have looked into its very soul; but now I see it always from a small boat, a high outline of mountains, blue and afar in the morning; like faint mist at noon; a jagged wall of purple at sunset. I have the feel of the oar in my hand, the vision of a scorching blue sea in my eyes. And I see a bay, a wide bay, smooth as glass and polished like ice, shimmering in the dark. A red light burns far off upon the gloom of the land, and the night is soft and warm. We drag at the oars with aching arms, and suddenly a puff of wind, a puff faint and tepid and laden with strong odours of blossoms, of aromatic wood, comes out of the still night...." (pp. 36-7; *my italics*)

Marlow begins by stressing that all that remains is a memory of his feeling. His repetition of "I remember" is, in one sense, an admission that "remembering" is very different from recapturing or being able to relive his experience: the repetition culminates with this

differentiation - "and I remember my youth and the feeling that will never come back any more". But the repetition is also, in part, an attempt to call up, to conjure the past into the present. In this passage we find again Marlow's typical oscillation between his past sensation and his present knowledge. Finally, however, he gives himself to the wave of his sensation. This release is signalled by his realization: "And this is how I see the East. I have seen its secret places and have looked into its very soul; but now I see it always from a small boat". He has made the more considered exploration of the mystery, but the enduring sense of it is this continuous "seeing".

By the end of "Youth" it is clear that Marlow cannot substantiate his original proposition that human life in general, as illustrated by this particular episode, is a futile endeavour. "Do or Die" read the old ship's defiant motto. But, while she certainly dies, and death is always certain, Marlow is not able to be so clear about what she "did". She did not reach her pre-determined destination, Bangkok; but in another, more profound sense, she absolutely fulfilled her destiny:

"A high, clear flame, an immense and lonely flame, ascended from the ocean, and from its summit the black smoke poured continuously at the sky. She burned furiously; mournful and imposing like a funeral pile kindled in the night, surrounded by the sea, watched over by the stars. A magnificent death had come like a grace, like a reward to that old ship at the end of her laborious days. The surrender of her weary ghost to the keeping of stars and sea was stirring like the sight of a glorious triumph." (p. 35)

Of course, in so far as Marlow's youth is past, he is able to see it as a flame, like the ship's, surrounded by the dark night of time. Yet Marlow's difficulty comes from the fact that, while his youthfulness is certainly past, the same spirit that gave him his identity then, still identifies him now. It is this that makes him "regret" the passing of his youth, when on this one special occasion his whole identity seemed fully aflame, fully realized and fully visible: "a moment of strength, of romance, of glamour - of youth! ... A flick of sunshine upon a

strange shore". - "The best time", Marlow asserts, and his listeners agree, was "that time when we were young at sea; young and had nothing, on the sea that gives nothing, except hard knocks - and sometimes a chance to feel your strength" (p. 42; my italics).

For all the acuteness of some aspects of Conrad's insight in "Youth", however, it is still a slender tale. While Conrad realizes that Marlow cannot remain disengaged from his tale if he is to reveal its significance for us, Conrad does allow us to remain disengaged in this way. And, as this contentment with the reader's detachment suggests, Conrad himself is never implicated in, and committed to, his tale as he requires Marlow to be.

In other words, "Youth" is a simple tale. Impelled as it is by a wish to recover a moment in the past that was unquestionably "light", luminous "with the youth, with the strength, with the romance of illusions" (p. 42), it is the elusiveness, the irrecoverable loss, of that light which is Conrad's theme. Yet there is little ambiguity for us about the "darkness" opposing and obscuring that light. It consists in the great seas of time that surround the glowing moment, the conditions into which the flower of light grows and dies, and the background against which it defines itself as something distinct - luminous in the darkness, and timeless within time. The simplicity of that idea of the "darkness" is what limits the achievement of "Youth" as a tale. As I shall argue, it is the same kind of simplicity, even if it appears in more sophisticated forms, that Conrad struggles to transcend in later works - and to which he succumbs in Chance, for all its evident sophistication. "Heart of Darkness" suggests why and how Conrad had to undertake that struggle. For here, he begins to ask more complex, more self-questioning questions about human nature: questions that might well have suggested themselves to him as he wrote "Youth", since he now has Marlow undergo an experience that will not stay in the past, much as Marlow (and, indeed, Conrad)

might wish it would. Nor does the understanding that comes with time console now as it had done in "Youth". Both "light" and "darkness" now take on much more complex meanings; the "plant and flower of light" is much less readily distinguished from the "heart of darkness".

II

There have been more critical essays written about "Heart of Darkness" than about any other one of Conrad's works. Not that critics have generally regarded it as his best work, but they are attracted, like Marlow in the novel, by a sense of something at the heart of this tale both elusive and significant. There are quite fundamental disagreements about the tale's focus and meaning, however, and critics also show a tendency to call upon some already-known coherent pattern or model to explain its focus or meaning - as like that of a Freudian or Jungian dream-voyage, for instance, or a systematic investigation of the meaning and basis of our civilization, or as a search for a kind of Grail, or even as a Dante-esque descent into Hell.¹ All this rather suggests that the tale's elusiveness is not one that critical analysis can resolve; and this may help explain why there is little agreement about the success and value of Conrad's enterprise in "Heart of Darkness". F.R. Leavis started a continuing impassioned debate by judging "Heart of Darkness" not "one of Conrad's best things", because Conrad's key concern is with a mystery that even he cannot, or as Leavis suggests more strongly, will not conceive.²

¹ See, for examples of these views: Albert Guerard, Conrad the Novelist,^{cit.} pp. 40-8; Jacques Berthoud, Joseph Conrad: The Major Phase (Cambridge, 1978), p. 45 ff.; and the following articles, all reprinted in the Norton Critical Edition of Joseph Conrad: "Heart of Darkness", ed. Robert Kimbrough (N.Y., 1963), Donald R. Benson, "Heart of Darkness: The Grounds of Civilization in an Alien Universe", Robert F. Haugh, "Heart of Darkness: Problem for Critics", Jerome Thale, "Marlow's Quest", and Lillian Feder, "Marlow's Descent into Hell".

² F.R. Leavis, The Great Tradition, pp. 193-201.

I do not offer my own following account of "Heart of Darkness" as more than a sketch of the complex inquiry I think it is. Nor is my own view offered as a more definitive interpretation, a more conclusive judgement of the novel than many critics have already made. I do not say this by way of defence, however, but rather to make what I feel to be a crucial critical observation about this novel. For I feel it to be itself undecided about exactly what its own chief insights are, so that it raises highly complex issues too sketchily and too quickly for us to be clear about them. The measure of critical disagreement it inspires signals, I think, real confusion in the novel itself, and its failure to probe some fundamental self-contradictions. Moreover, the novel's own confusions are exacerbated by continuing confusion in many modern readers about some of the key issues it tries to explore.

"Heart of Darkness" at least begins by being much clearer about the questions "Youth" had also raised, and much more certain as to how it must approach them. Thus from the start the central notions of "light" and "darkness" are shown as inter-defining, in a potentially very complex relationship. The big city, London, is at once the source of "light", sending forth great men bearing the "torch" of civilization (the generals, admirals, the men of the East India Fleet - all "knights" in Conrad's pun), and itself a "brooding gloom" in the late-afternoon sunshine. Furthermore, Conrad now creates a Marlow we are meant to see as specifically qualified to tell the tale that follows. Conrad suggests that it is especially significant that Marlow is a wanderer, a man who ventures out and beyond what is familiar to him, and who appreciates its distinct identity ("Heart of Darkness", p. 48¹). He is also characterized as a man with the capacity to live with uncertainties. His is able to accept that not everything will be accessible to his conscious understanding,

¹ In Joseph Conrad, "Youth", "Heart of Darkness" and "The End of the Tether" (London, 1946).

although he is impelled onwards into the heart of the Congo by a compelling, if inexplicable, need, and certainly not by ennui or diffidence. He is called to what he senses as the heart there of the moral darkness he had witnessed in Brussels, and to the man, Kurtz, who he feels to be at the very root of this mystery. There is a subtle balance, therefore, in passages such as the following, where Marlow is at once uncertain what meaning could be ascribed to his experience (and handed on to his listening audience), and certain that this experience was crucial for him (though, he also perceives, "not extraordinary in any way"):

"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." (p. 51)

Conrad shows us that this Marlow has more difficulty narrating his tale than the Marlow of "Youth" because this touches deeper, more elemental parts of his being. He has to respond to this mystery with much more of himself than did the narrator in the earlier story. His journey is the response to a series of moral impulses. Before fixing on the idea of going to Africa, Marlow wanders about - lacking the moral "backing" of belonging to a ship - evidently without direction. Yet the words Marlow uses, in reflecting on his behaviour at this stage, direct our judgement to his lack of moral direction and, so to speak, of moral "backbone". He implies some self-judgement when he says: "I was loafing about, hindering you fellows in your work and invading your homes, just as though I had got a heavenly mission to civilize you" (pp. 51-2). Marlow finds moral aimlessness and the kind of moral action that issues from empty impulses easy to judge, and so his language here is coloured definitely by his subsequent experience. It suggests, with the terms "invading" and "a heavenly mission to civilize", the great moral issue Marlow was shortly to encounter: the question of the Belgian exploitation

of the Congo. Going to the Congo, then, is going to the heart of a moral emptiness - a "darkness" that Marlow senses in himself, even if more strongly in Brussels, and which he cannot trace to any rational source.

He describes his moral uneasiness in Brussels:

"You know I am not used to such ceremonies, and there was something ominous in the atmosphere. It was just as though I had been let into some conspiracy - I don't know - something not quite right; and I was glad to get out." (p. 56)

He "gets out" to Africa, and to a further stage in his exploration of the mysterious relationship between moral distinctions and the fulness, the vigorous flow of human life, the "plant and flower of light". Right from the start, the story suggests that the source from which our moral distinctions arise is "dark" in the sense that it is the unknown root of all life, an inarticulate stage of vital apprehension rather than one of comprehension, a stage prior to any intellectual system added to life itself. It is from the very source, "dark" and obscure as this is, that the plant flowers, into evil (darkness) or into good (light); but the root is "dark" in another sense, for as well as being hidden from sight, it also contains both possibilities.

Marlow's journey to the heart of the Belgian Congo presents him with many flowers of the moral darkness he had sensed in Brussels. Seeing the futile wars on the coast against unseen "enemies", the waste and pointless activity at the settlement where the chained blacks are called "criminals" (both clear-cut terms of the morally self-righteous), and then the central station and the "hollow men", the "faithless pilgrims" there, confirm Marlow's feeling that there is an absolute darkness at the very heart of all this. He becomes increasingly sardonic as he moves into the centre of the continent, realizing how totally the white exploiters fail to see the implications of their behaviour, and how dead their hearts are to the suffering and waste they create all around them. As he comes closer himself to the heart of the emotional, moral and social darkness, he

becomes acutely aware how little the exploiters are alive to and how much they spread the deathliness in themselves all around them. He is bitterest when seeing the connections between surface and source, and the force of his exacerbated awareness is acutely re-enacted in the very form of his narrative. This occurs, for example, when he pits the "perfectly correct transactions" of the company, to which civilized society gives its approval, against the human suffering these cause in the blacks who have become "criminals" as the result of their meeting with civilized white men: "[the accountant], bent over his books, was making correct entries of perfectly correct transactions; and fifty feet below the doorstep I could see the still tree-tops of the grove of death" (p. 70). The connection is all the more powerfully stated because Marlow does not comment on it: he merely puts the two facts side by side just as he has first come to see them, and trusts that his audience will feel the impact, as he has done, when the two "connect" in their apprehension.

Marlow is drawn onwards by this need to find out what lies at the very centre of this whole system, what it means, what it can say for itself to the human imagination. He encounters one enigma after another during his journey. Nothing speaks out a clear meaning in the African coastline itself: "smiling, frowning, inviting, grand, mean, insipid, or savage, and always mute with an air of whispering, Come and find out. This one was almost featureless, as if still in the making, with an aspect of monotonous grimness" (p. 60). There is the no less "mute", enigmatic fact of the Swede hanging himself on the road; the placid-tempered late captain of Marlow's steamer losing control and beating the native headman; the enigma of the manager - paradoxically both "great" and "commonplace" - who "was great by this little thing that it was impossible to tell what could control such a man. He never gave that secret away. Perhaps there was nothing within him" (p. 74). What causes

Marlow to journey onward, rather than try to force any of these mysterious facts to speak its own solution to him, is suggested by that last quotation. For him, there is always a third possible motivation for behaviour: besides the good and the evil, there may be something that is neither of these. Marlow's worst lurking fear is not that there will be a moral darkness at the heart of the mystery, but that there will be nothing there: a void rather than a mystery. He passes these enigmas by, hoping that there will be something distinguishable at the heart of it all, that by dismissing the externals he will find a core inside. So the journey is a process of negation, approaching its goal without having any positive conception about what that goal might be.

This was so even in "Youth". The narrator's approach there to the question of what motivated the "crew of Liverpool hard cases" had much in common, we notice, with Marlow's method in the later tale. In both tales, the difficulty and the complexity of the mystery can only be suggested by a sequence of questions to which one has to answer, "no, that's not what I mean, nor even this, but ...". In "Heart of Darkness", Marlow's process of questioning and negation has a physical corollary in his journey. As he is drawn on, beyond all these examples of the darkness, he comes to realize more clearly at least what has been impelling him. He justifies his description of the immaculate accountant with characteristic conscious economy of narrative: "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" (p. 68). Though Marlow's tale is certainly, as his audience describes it, "inconclusive", and his inquiry, in any case, takes him beyond the wholly explicable, he is never uncertain about what the tale's focus is - and what parts of his experience are relevant to the central query. It is the accountant who, by voicing some word, however insufficient and enigmatic, first shows that Marlow's real interest is in an individual,

not in his task:

"On my asking who Mr. Kurtz was, he said he was a first-class agent; and seeing my disappointment at this information, he added slowly, laying down his pen, 'He is a very remarkable person.'" (p. 69)

A similar pattern occurs when Marlow questions the "brickmaker" about Kurtz:

"'Tell me, pray', said I, 'who is this Mr. Kurtz?'

'The chief of the Inner Station,' he answered in a short tone, looking away. 'Much obliged,' I said, laughing. 'And you are the brickmaker of the Central Station. Everyone knows that.' He was silent for a while. 'He is a prodigy,' he said at last." (p. 79)

Marlow narrows down the possibilities. He seeks the root of the whole society in the individual Kurtz: "I was curious to see whether this man, who had come out equipped with moral ideas of some sort, would climb to the top after all and how he would set about his work when there" (p. 88). Then it becomes apparent to him that he wants Kurtz to speak out his own meaning: it is as a voice unambiguously declaring its own nature that he seeks him. Moreover, Marlow realizes this about Kurtz in the same moment as he realizes something essential about himself. He suddenly becomes aware that the point of his own journey is not merely to see Kurtz, but to speak with him. He understands all of this clearly in the instant he thinks Kurtz dead, and believes his whole journey pointless, directed to a void:

"For the moment that was the dominant thought. There was a sense of extreme disappointment, as though I had found out I had been striving after something altogether without a substance. I couldn't have been more disgusted if I had travelled all this way for the sole purpose of talking with Mr. Kurtz. Talking with I flung one shoe overboard, and became aware that that was exactly what I had been looking forward to - a talk with Kurtz. I made the strange discovery that I had never imagined him as doing, you know, but as discoursing. I didn't say to myself, 'Now I will never see him,' or 'Now I will never shake him by the hand,' but, 'now I will never hear him.' The man presented himself as a voice. Not of course that I did not connect him with some sort of action. Hadn't I been told in all the tones of jealousy and admiration that he had collected, bartered, swindled, or stolen more

ivory than all the other agents together? That was not the point. The point was in his being a gifted creature, and that of all his gifts the one that stood out preëminently, that carried with it a sense of real presence, was his ability to talk, his words - 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. (pp. 113-4)

Of course, Marlow's journey does not end where he expected it to, at the centre of the continent. Precisely because he does meet Kurtz there, and because his own life does become inextricably connected with Kurtz's, he cannot wholly determine the directions his life and his narrative take thenceforward. We might well have expected the narrative to finish at the "farthest point of navigation and the culminating point" of Marlow's experience. But it does not because he finds what is behind the compelling power of Kurtz's speech - some force of "life" that makes Kurtz's words and himself great.

Many critics have commented on the increasing uncertainty of Marlow's narrative. Some explain it as Marlow's failure to grasp his experience properly, with the result that he becomes at once too vague and too insistent about its meaning. Others have felt Conrad to be baffled as well as Marlow, though Marvin Mudrick, for example, argues (contradicting Leavis) that Conrad achieved something important through his bafflement.¹ Mudrick tries to put his finger on the source of the trouble:

The problem is, of course, Kurtz. It is when we are on the verge of meeting Kurtz that Marlow's "inconceivables" and "impenetrables" begin to multiply at an alarming rate; it is then that we are urged to observe "smiles of indefinable meaning" and to hear about "unspeakable rites" and "gratified and monstrous passions" and "subtle horrors" - words to hound the reader into a sense of enigmatic awfulness ... (Mudrick, p. 42)

This is helpful both in what it is right about, and where it goes wrong.

¹ See, for example, H.M. Daleski, Joseph Conrad: The Way of Dispossession (London, 1977), pp. 75-6; J.I.M. Stewart, Joseph Conrad (London, 1968), p. 78; Marvin Mudrick, "The Originality of Conrad" in Conrad: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1966), pp. 42-3.

Marlow's difficulty is with Kurtz, because he finds this man at the heart of his moral inquiry, not any single "nut" of meaning, or a code of moral directives. In one sense Marlow's meeting with Kurtz immediately opens up his inquiry, because he now has to try to comprehend a whole moral life, rather than any moral truth, or set of truths, and this sort of comprehension involves the whole of his own moral being. For the same reasons, however, Marlow's inquiry seems to be shut down completely, because how can he comprehend a whole life, and how can he find any answer to his questions when the whole of himself is always absorbed in vitally apprehending Kurtz? Mudrick goes wrong himself, I think, when he tries to locate Kurtz so definitely, for that is exactly what the novel successfully prevents us from being able to do. Mudrick is led from identifying Kurtz as the source of Marlow's difficulty, to complaining that Conrad has failed to give Kurtz imaginative substance. (Thus Mudrick complains that, when Conrad gives us Kurtz's sentiments directly, in his famous report, and not mediated by Marlow, his "mealy-mouthed reformist exhortation would not do credit to a Maugham missionary let alone the 'extraordinary man' Kurtz is supposed by all accounts to be".) And Mudrick finally comes to identifying what Conrad conceived Kurtz's substance to be (always assuming that Kurtz is the key to Conrad's inquiry): it is "the primal unanalyzable evil", a theme which is "too much" for Conrad, "too much for perhaps any but the very greatest dramatists and novelists" (Mudrick, pp. 42-3).

In trying to point out Conrad's failure of imagination in "Heart of Darkness" Mudrick actually points us to one of Conrad's greatest achievements. We cannot identify Kurtz so definitively, partly of course because Marlow cannot do so even to his own satisfaction, but more fundamentally because Conrad himself takes these two characters seriously, conceiving them as living human lives and so not entirely definable even to him. There is an important point, therefore, to be made about the

likenesses between Marlow and Conrad, though not the biographical one usually remarked. Conrad is "like" Marlow in that he has a similar human susceptibility, in "Heart of Darkness" at least, to the lives he presents, half seen in the world, half acknowledged in himself.

In so far as this is the reason why Conrad is not able to see the full meaning of his characters and of his exploration, we accept a certain lack of clarity and an inconclusiveness in this novel. Indeed, some of Conrad's most subtle insights about human nature arise from his greater concern with particular instances than with general assessments. Again and again, for instance, he defines a particular person's identity by suggesting what he can embrace beyond himself, and what he cannot. Central to our sense of Marlow as a living person is our awareness of him as a man whose distaste for lying amounts to a personal necessity not to lie. He explains that his horror of lying does not arise from his general principles of conduct, but from a particular personal revulsion that he cannot explain clearly:

"You know I hate, detest, and can't bear a lie, not because I am straighter than the rest of us, but simply because it appals me. There is a taint of death, a flavour of mortality in lies - which is exactly what I hate and detest in the world - what I want to forget. It makes me miserable and sick, like biting something rotten would do. Temperament, I suppose."
(p. 82)

And, when Conrad does affirm general principles of conduct successfully it is through particular cases. When Marlow tried to affirm his considered belief in the rightness of acting by "a fixed standard of conduct" at the beginning of his tale, his words trailed off into silence:

"What saves us is efficiency - the devotion to efficiency.... The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea - something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to" (pp. 50-1)

But when Marlow affirms a comparable sort of devotion - his devotion to his ramshackle steamboat - as something not selfless, his words ring out confident and truthful. In this case he thinks of himself as if devoted to a "friend", rather than to an impersonal object:

"No influential friend would have served me better [than the steamboat]. She had given me a chance to come out a bit - to find out what I could do. No, I don't like work. I had rather laze about and think of all the fine things that can be done. I don't like work - no man does - but I like what is in the work - the chance to find yourself. Your own reality - for yourself, not for others - what no other man can ever know. They only see the mere show, and never can tell what it really means." (p. 85)

For us, Marlow's life is characterized as much by his need to flow beyond himself, to be "devoted" to tasks and to other human-beings, as by the limits to what he is. His life defines itself partly by pressing outwards and accepting the human lives, or, to put it another way, the "fates" that answer to his own self. Marlow expresses Conrad's insight about the half pre-determined, half willingly-sought nature of human fates, when he tries to explain his strange relationship with Kurtz:

"It is strange how I accepted this unforeseen partnership, this choice of nightmares forced upon me." (p. 147; my italics)

Conrad is to explore this very point further in Lord Jim, when Stein tries to advise Jim "how to be", given his particular nature and his indelible past. Here, however Conrad presents it sketchily, being apparently content to leave it as an explored paradox.

As this example suggests, Conrad's capacity in "Heart of Darkness" to see human truths as closely and bemusedly as Marlow does, is a source of the novel's weakness as well as its strength. We are worried by slides in Conrad's argument which he is apparently unaware of. We notice, for instance, that he sometimes conceives of Kurtz as having "real presence", something that gives his words meaning, if an undefinable one. At other times, however, he wants us to see him as "hollow at the core", and only a "shade of the original Kurtz". Yet Conrad would also have us

believe that Kurtz's words reverberate forever in Marlow's self, and that Marlow has an inescapable awareness of Kurtz's reality. Once again, Conrad sometimes seems really bewildered by, and really questioning of, the mysterious impulse in some human lives and in some events. But sometimes he seems content just with noting the mysteriousness.

At the heart of Conrad's trouble in this novel, it seems to me, is a basic indecision about whether he is attempting to penetrate and understand his story, or whether he is just presenting it with its mysterious aspects unfathomed. This is why he is so uncertain about how much speech can reveal selfhood, and how much a story can express the essential meaning of an episode. Marlow values Kurtz as a man whose speech betrays or manifests his nature, but Conrad does not distinguish between this and something rather different, a capacity in Kurtz to pronounce his meaning literally. Hence the confusion arising from Kurtz's last words: "The horror! The horror!". We can assent to some of the things Marlow says about this last cry of Kurtz's. He seems right in characterizing it as having "candour, it had conviction, it had a vibrating note of revolt in its whisper, it had the appalling face of a glimpsed truth - the strange commingling of desire and hate" (p. 151). But Marlow does more than characterize; he also tries to draw a definite, far-reaching moral meaning from Kurtz's cry. Marlow prefaces his comments about Kurtz by recalling his own scrape with death, although even in talking about his own extremity he mixes up retrospective feelings with what he experienced then:

"I have wrestled with death. It is the most unexciting contest you can imagine.... If such is the form of ultimate wisdom, then life is a greater riddle than some of think it to be. I was within a hair's-breadth of the last pronouncement, and I found with humiliation that probably I would have nothing to say." (pp. 150-1; my italics)

We are not convinced, for a start, by that self-analysis, "I found with humiliation that probably I would have nothing to say". After all, Marlow has just said that his contest with death took place "without the great

desire of victory, without the great fear of defeat, in a sickly atmosphere of tepid scepticism" (p. 150). The "humiliation" is felt retrospectively, as is the notion that life might be understood as a search for a "form of ultimate wisdom". Both retrospective analyses distort the character of his experience.

Similarly when Marlow tries to understand Kurtz's last moments. He affirms that Kurtz "was a remarkable man. He had something to say" (p. 151). What Marlow really means, however, is that Kurtz was remarkable because he had a particular sort of thing to say. Marlow supposes, indeed seems to need to believe, that Kurtz finally summed up, and articulated, an extensive moral judgement. At first Marlow says that this was "a judgement upon the adventures of his soul on this earth" (p. 150). Soon afterwards, though, he makes a larger claim. He asserts now that Kurtz's judgement - "the horror!" - also applies to everything Kurtz could see in that final stare, which "was wide enough to embrace the whole universe, piercing enough to penetrate all the hearts that beat in the darkness" (p. 151).

Thus Marlow finally leaves us behind, out of sympathy with his understanding, though more sympathetic about his need to find some clear moral meaning and confident moral judgement in Kurtz's final words and stare. Conrad, too, seems to let Marlow make his greatest affirmations of belief in Kurtz without either supporting or criticizing what Marlow says:

"it is not my own extremity I remember best.... No! It is his extremity that I seem to have lived through. True, he had made that last stride, he had stepped over the edge, while I had been permitted to draw back my hesitating foot. And perhaps in this is the whole difference; perhaps all the wisdom, and all truth, and all sincerity, are just compressed into that inappreciable moment of time in which we step over the threshold of the invisible. Perhaps! I like to think my summing-up would not have been a word of careless contempt. Better his cry - much better. It was an affirmation, a moral victory paid for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions. But it was a victory!" (p. 151)

It seems to me that the trouble with this passage, and with others in "Heart of Darkness", is that Conrad is undecided about the value of such "summings-up". Marlow is certainly too insistent about the meaning of Kurtz's cry for us to have confidence in what he says about it, and Conrad seems to realize that this will be so; nonetheless, he seems rather taken with Marlow's general conclusions. We notice that Conrad gives Marlow's words his fullest rhetorical force. A similar confusion bedevils the famous remark at the beginning of "Heart of Darkness" about the meaning of a tale:

to [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 those misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine. (p. 48)

This way of putting it shows the paradox of Marlow's, and, by extension, Conrad's position. Marlow can see his tale as a completed thing, and so expect to understand its meaning. However, as the teller of the tale which "brought [the meaning] out", he must concentrate on the glow itself, and leave the seeing of the haze to others. Yet the stress here seems to fall on the value of the "haze", rather than on the "glow" itself. Conrad puts a finger on the scales by that first description: nobody would maintain that the most subtle human insights can be found and grasped like a kernel in a nut. But as well as this, the whole description is external - the comment of somebody listening to Marlow's tale, who sees both him and his tale entire, because externally.

Of course, very often Conrad's doubt about the inward "glow", the identifying but elusive spirit in human-beings, becomes so great that he finds himself not believing that this inward glow exists at all. He slides from acknowledging there is something at the heart of certain human lives, which he cannot know because at the heart of each man there is "your own reality - for yourself, not for others - what no man can ever know" (p. 85), to asserting that the "realities" of life are

impersonal, and can be seen clearly by everyone. Yet he is very inconsistent in naming these outwardly-visible realities. At one point, "reality" is that code of seamanship expressed in Towson's book:

"at the first glance you could see there a singleness of intention, an honest concern for the right way of going to work, which made these humble pages, thought out so many years ago, luminous with another than a professional light. The simple old sailor, with his talk of chains and purchases, made me forget the jungle and the pilgrims in a delicious sensation of having come upon something unmistakably real." (p. 99; my italics)

The "light" of this "reality" recalls the aforementioned "glow" at the heart of an episode. Yet elsewhere Conrad contradicts himself, and says that it is the darkness and the jungle that is real, not the "light", not remembered moments of the past:

"There were moments when one's past came back to one, as it will sometimes when you have not a moment to spare to yourself; but it came in the shape of an unrestful and noisy dream, remembered with wonder amongst the overwhelming realities of this strange world of plants, and water, and silence." (p. 93)

Conrad's contradictory impulses to make definite statements about his tale's meaning, and to allow that meaning to show itself, are evident right to the end of "Heart of Darkness". Of the ending itself, where Marlow returns to Brussels and meets Kurtz's Intended, Conrad wrote to William Blackwood describing that episode as one

where the interview of the man with the girl locks in - as it were - the whole 30,000 words of narrative description into one suggestive view of the whole phase of life, and makes of that story something quite on another plane than an anecdote of a man who went mad in the centre of Africa.¹

Of course Conrad rather mis-states his achievement. The story does not require this final episode to lift it onto "another plane than an anecdote of a man who went mad in the centre of Africa". But Conrad is right, I feel, about two things. This episode does seem to involve him more wholly

¹ Letter of May 31, 1902 to William Blackwood, rpt. in Stanton de Voren Hoffman, Comedy and Form in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad, op. cit., p. 30.

than any previous part of the novel. And I feel, though many critics would disagree with me here, that the final episode does in a profound sense satisfy us by giving us an example of the novel's most significant inquiry.

Although this last part of the story is often criticized as sentimental, the complexity and density of the imagery here testify to the ambivalence and energy of Conrad's feeling, and to his urgent need to convey this feeling. He seems to be reaching for an understanding of human morality beyond anything he has recognized hitherto. Conrad confronts the heart of the problem when Marlow tells his lie and thereby goes against something important in his (Marlow's) nature, while yet, in another sense, being deeply true to himself. The lie calls up the most extreme implications of Marlow's (and Conrad's) need to maintain moral distinctions. If the most important thing is to avoid moral muddle, to accept the existence of moral evil in preference to confusing good and evil in an indeterminate grey, then this may ultimately mean abandoning the moral codes on which an individual depends in order to preserve his own sense of himself. By the end of Marlow's narrative, Conrad has suggested a far subtler idea of moral distinctions than was represented by Marlow's initial comments about lies. He had said then that for him there was a "taint of death, a flavour of mortality in lies" (p. 82). Yet the phrase, "a taint of death", cannot describe the feeling prompting Marlow's lie to the Intended. Only this lie can enable light/life to exist in her. Eventually Marlow obeys an instinctive moral imperative which, at least in part, is beyond his conscious understanding. He is still, at the end of his narrative, outwardly the same Marlow as at the start, characteristically wry and yet enthusiastic, consciously adhering to a moral code he believes civilized men must follow, although he is in no way absolute in his belief. But the lie to the girl shows that he will do something which is contrary to his nature, at least as he

understands that nature (or wishes that nature to be), and in doing so, it reveals to us, if not to him, a moral integrity rather different from his ordinary understanding of what moral integrity consists in. For he senses that the deepest moral integrity lies, not in being true to a code or to his self-defined "character", but in recognizing and acknowledging what fosters life, or diminishes it, in particular circumstances - even if it requires a lie to do so. He doesn't act out of sentimental respect for her romantic feelings as such, but out of respect for her capacity for moral belief in human-beings. This is why it isn't wholly a lie. For us this is the most telling effect of his journey. Going to Kurtz he finds the heart of man rooted in pre-moral savagery, figuratively speaking in "darkness". But the really important understanding for Marlow, because he is a civilized man, is that this root still retains the possibility of moral distinctions, the possibility of growing into the plant and flower of light. If the plant does blossom, moreover, we may only make sense of the light into which it flowers by reference to the blackness out of which it has grown and against which its light shines forth. In our world, moral definition grows out of ambiguous sources and realizes itself only in opposition and distinctions. Thus the crucial test of Marlow's "morality" is its capacity to transcend its status as a code in order to preserve its true nature and function - as a way of fostering the fineness and beauty of life or at least affirming those ever-changing, ever-renewing possibilities of moral distinctions (in every-changing circumstances) in which the moral life of human-being truly consists.

There is a certain ironic awareness in "Heart of Darkness", therefore, that Marlow's is a journey that cannot have an end, and a narrative that will have no conclusive finish. Conrad emphasizes his point that the growth of the plant and flower of light is a continuing mystery and wonder by denying Marlow and his audience the resolution they desire. Realizing that the things inhibiting both the growth and the perception of the flower

are apathy and complacency, he has grasped the point that his task must be to shake any stock or complacent response. In "Youth", too, Marlow was surprised by the freshness of his memories. There too he could not rest comfortably in either the past or the present, feeling both a kind of hindsight cynicism about the glamour of his youth, but also a sense of real and irreparable loss at his inability now to see the world with that feeling of excitement. "Youth" is certainly a simple tale, but the point about the mystery of personal being, which seems to be in a dark vortex where both feelings are co-present, is all the clearer for that. This becomes evident in "Youth" as Marlow's experiences prove more difficult for him to understand and more discomfiting than he expects. But the same happens, though in a more complex way, in "Heart of Darkness". The Marlow of that tale begins feeling much less assured about his experience than the Marlow at the start of "Youth". Here, the episode only threw "a kind of light" for him. But even this minimal assurance fades as Marlow becomes increasingly aware that perhaps assurance is always the result of blindness or ignorance. What seems to modify his assurance most, moreover, is the very process of becoming involved in the "telling".

In "Heart of Darkness" this is true of Conrad as well as Marlow. And because Conrad has the greater capacity in "Heart of Darkness" to commit himself to his tale, rather than to be satisfied with a more confident impersonal relationship, it is far fuller in its exploration of the nature of human lives, and shows more insight about them, than "Youth". This is why Conrad's enterprise in "Heart of Darkness" seems more valuable than that in "Youth", although the simpler tale is the more perfect of the two. "Heart of Darkness" is marred by inconsistencies in Conrad's thinking about man's moral nature, and in his notions about how moral questions can best be explored and answered. Yet for all that, the deep and developing moral understanding of "Heart of Darkness" is its really important feature, and not its moral confusions.

But of course Conrad's insights into human nature were not unique to him. His awareness, for instance, that the motif of the journey is simultaneously helpful and misleading about the nature of human life, and about how we go about understanding particular lives, is also central to Virginia Woolf's novel; To the Lighthouse. There, too, the novelist insists on the reader opening up his awareness to find that life is not as he is used to seeing it.

CHAPTER 2

TO THE LIGHTHOUSE: PATTERN IN OPPOSITIONS

My account of Virginia Woolf's novel is not intended as a full discussion of all its aspects. Nor do I have any new account of the novel's central images and themes to add to the very full treatment these have received from scores of critics. Rather, what I am concerned with here is to show, in its pattern of light/darkness imagery, a similarity between Virginia Woolf's concerns and those of Joseph Conrad, a similarity that is not at all accidental. It is not a matter of influence, however, nor is it an obvious similarity; after all, the sombre, not to say heavy, moral and metaphysical implications of "Heart of Darkness", not to mention its concern with socio-historical issues, is very far from Virginia Woolf's focus on English middle-class domestic life, on individual sensibility, and on the "lyrical" aspects of experience. But there is a deeper similarity in their explorations of personality, personal experience, similar questioning of the wavering boundaries between individual experience and the social and the natural, similar scepticism about the conventional certainties of the conventional view of personal character, personal life, inner and outer.

In To the Lighthouse, the lighthouse is itself the central symbol, of course. But, as many critics have pointed out, to say this is not to suggest that the lighthouse has any clear-cut, pre-established meaning. The novel opens with a passage that begins exploring the difference between inner experience and outer "reality", and the subtly related, subtly differentiated meaning that an individual life presents to itself and to others. Woolf defines James Ramsay as the individual for whom a joyful feeling about the lighthouse becomes an enduring moment:

To her son these words conveyed an extraordinary joy, as if it were settled the expedition were bound to take place, and the wonder to which he had looked forward, for years and years it seemed, was, after a night's darkness and a day's sail, within touch. Since he belonged, even at the age of six, to that great clan which cannot keep this feeling separate from that, but must let future prospects, with their joys and sorrows, cloud what is actually at hand, since to such people even in earliest childhood any turn in the wheel of sensation has the power to crystallise and transfix the moment upon which its gloom or radiance rests, James Ramsay, sitting on the floor cutting out pictures from the illustrated catalogue of the Army and Navy Stores, endowed the picture of a refrigerator as his mother spoke with heavenly bliss. It was fringed with joy.¹

Yet the voyage does not take place as he expects. It is delayed for years. More subtly though, there is something in his feeling about the lighthouse that is incompatible with the very concept of voyaging. His incapacity to separate one feeling from another, and his loss of the sense of time duration suggest stasis rather than the movement of journeying. This is the first of such moments when - as with the dinner-party later on, for example - the novel suggests that moments in which the outward world is apprehended without any sense of time and space also become intense sparks of light in inward experience, transcending time and space in subjective life as well. But it is also true that the novel ends with James' arrival at the lighthouse, and then we are given an idea of experience as something that develops and changes. He is able to compare his present views of it with his childhood impression:

The Lighthouse was then silvery, misty-looking tower with a yellow eye that opened suddenly and softly in the evening. Now -

James looked at the Lighthouse. He could see the white-washed rocks; the tower, stark and straight; he could see that it was barred with black and white;

¹ Virginia Woolf, To the Lighthouse (London, 1930), p. 11.

he could see windows in it; he could even see washing spread on the rocks to dry. So that was the Lighthouse, was it?

No, the other was also the Lighthouse. For nothing was simply one thing. The other was the Lighthouse too.
(p. 286)

James does not find his original impression false because he has now apprehended the lighthouse in another way. Virginia Woolf's point is that the real "journey" he has made enables him to recognize that both of these things are the lighthouse. His fullest response to it acknowledges the differences between the lighthouse of his childhood, seen from a distance, and the lighthouse he is close by now, but keeps both views of it in mind. Woolf explores this insight through Lily Briscoe's different perception of the same experience as James has. In Lily Briscoe's terms, the terms of her art, one must "achieve that razor edge of balance between opposite forces" (p. 296). In fact, Woolf emphasizes the importance of her insight by giving James Ramsay and Lily Briscoe the same revelation separately but simultaneously. At the moment James sees this truth about the lighthouse, Lily Briscoe sees the truth that has been eluding her about her painting. Her problem, too, has been to bring together the ordinary vision and the extraordinary:

One wanted, she thought, dipping her brush deliberately, to be on a level with ordinary experience, to feel simply that's a chair, that's a table, and yet at the same time, It's a miracle, it's an ecstasy. The problem might be solved after all. (pp. 309-10)

Finally, in a moment of intensity, she has her vision and is able to draw the line in the centre of the painting, making the connection. She throws off the consciousness of her own insignificance and the insignificance of her painting to do this:

There it was - her picture. Yes, with all its green and blues, its lines running up and across, its attempt at something. It would be hung in the attics,

she thought; it would be destroyed. But what did it matter? she asked herself, taking up her brush again. She looked at the steps; they were empty; she looked at her canvas; it was blurred. With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision.
(pp. 319-20)

This moment of seeing truly, seeing the real, and so getting beyond the limitations of an intrusive "personality" or "character" is climactic. The novel closes on a note of triumph, but not because Woolf claims that Lily Briscoe's vision will last more than an instant, or, indeed that it is any more important than the other similar luminous moments recorded in the novel. Rather, the ending successfully affirms Woolf's point because it is so much in key with the nature of the mystery that has impelled the whole narrative. As in "Heart of Darkness" and in "Youth", the final point of the characters' journeys to greater understanding is not in consciousness of knowing something, but in a consciousness that becomes actually identical in form with what, in its moment of special "vision", it is conscious of, the reality that is at once its own and also beyond it. The climax of all these stories occurs when the principal characters are in a state that might be described better in terms of being than in terms of consciousness. For an instant they attain the perfect simplicity of the flower itself.

But there is certainly much about the flower that seems difficult and complicated to comprehend. The tale of "Youth" resulted from Marlow's awareness that the plant has its flowering but also its decay in time. Marlow is interested and disturbed by this episode through his very consciousness of time, and so his reflections are nostalgic and regretful. The Marlow of "Heart of Darkness" is much more deeply disturbed, just because he doubts and affirms Kurtz's "greatness" with

the whole of his being. His being emerges into his consciousness as morality - though in the largest possible sense of the term: he is entirely engaged in realizing Kurtz's greatness as well as his evil. He therefore needs a much more complex way of grasping Kurtz's life as a flower growing from some obscure depth of human life, a way of grasping, describing and explaining its nature. "Lightness" and "darkness" are perhaps the main terms that mediate his feelings, his understanding, and his moral response, the "concepts" in which he has to explain the perception of the flower. As Marlow feels the flower of evil to be distinct from the flower of good - Kurtz from the Intended, say - he needs terms implying absolute opposition; and as he feels that he may only understand his encounter with the girl by reference to his knowledge of Kurtz, he turns to the polarities of blackness and whiteness, light and dark, which are only meaningful by reference to, and in their distinctness from, each other. In To the Lighthouse this imagery of light and dark recurs, and it does so precisely because Virginia Woolf also tries to locate both the most basic source and the substance of man's conscious being. For Conrad, these consist in his moral sense; for Woolf, in his sense of pattern and rhythm.¹ In her novel, however, the implications of "light" and "dark" are more complicated. Because she thinks in terms of patterns and rhythm, she has a strong sense of the "necessity" of "light" and "darkness" to each other. The "luminous" moments of this novel occur against a background of the ordinary and fragmentary parts of life. The epiphanic

¹ A.D. Moody, in what is generally a very perceptive account of Virginia Woolf's novels, argues that this concentration on pattern and rhythm is the greatest limitation of To the Lighthouse because he regards it - wrongly, in my view - as a concentration on the merely "aesthetic" element of human perception: see his Virginia Woolf (Edinburgh & London, 1963), pp. 29-43.

moment "shows forth" by contrast with the rest of life - with the darkness surrounding and therefore defining both the shape and the separateness of the flower of light. Human perception needs the hours of dullness to make the luminous second of "vision" possible.

The most conscious explorer of "light" and "dark" in the novel, the mind most sensitive to the possibilities they express of pattern (in apprehension of the world) and meaning (in comprehension of the world) is Lily Briscoe; but the question she asks herself explicitly is no less important for all the other characters too:

What is the meaning of life? That was all - a simple question; one that tended to close in on one with years. The great revelation had never come. The great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark; here was one. This, that, and the other; herself and Charles Tansley and the breaking wave; Mrs. Ramsay bringing them together; Mrs. Ramsay saying "Life stand still here"; Mrs. Ramsay making of the moment something permanent (as in another sphere Lily herself tried to make of the moment something permanent) - this was of the nature of a revelation. In the midst of chaos there was shape; this eternal passing and flowing (she looked at the clouds going and the leaves shaking) was struck into stability. Life stand still here, Mrs. Ramsay said. "Mrs. Ramsay! Mrs. Ramsay!" she repeated. She owed this revelation to her. (pp. 249-50)

There is no doubt in Lily's mind that when she seeks to perceive or to comprehend the meaning of life she must focus on Mrs Ramsay. And yet this impulse is very ambivalent. Asking a question about meaning, she fixes on a woman who would herself never articulate such a question. Lily Briscoe is in the business of expression, but the life she seeks to express is Mrs Ramsay's, and Mrs Ramsay believes that things are spoilt by saying them. Mrs Ramsay creates pattern and meaning spontaneously and instinctively, but Lily finds her own kind of creation harrowing and requiring conscious integrity. There is also the difficulty that, while Lily maintains that Mrs Ramsay is a "flower"

whose light transcends its own particular temporal existence, she does have an acute sense of Mrs Ramsay's absence.

This paradox is an inevitable result of the way the plant and flower of light is perceived. As Marlow found in telling "Youth", we gain understanding with the passing of time but lose the freshness of our apprehension. At a distance from the flower, we need consciousness of the distinctness of light and dark to see it properly, but to the flower these matters have no relevance. This accounts for some of the apparent contradictions in Conrad's and Woolf's imagery of light and dark. Marlow's journey is to the "heart of darkness", but he claims that his experience has thrown a "kind of light" over everything. Similarly, in Woolf's novel, the journey is to the "Lighthouse", which also signifies the darkness of death. Or, put another way, the central journey in the novel is Lily Briscoe's attempt to understand Mrs Ramsay, who is identified with the long stroke of the lighthouse beam but is also the "wedge of darkness" (p. 100). One reason for this seeming paradox, of course, is that conceiving and comprehension always need distance, while perceiving, feeling, and apprehension need closeness to, perhaps even oneness with, the object.

In To the Lighthouse, Lily Briscoe's journey toward pattern and "vision" is embodied partly in her acute yearning for this kind of closeness, and the way Virginia Woolf puts it makes it clear that she thinks of this kind of closeness as a kind of love. The search for "light" and "vision" has moral implications for Virginia Woolf as well as for Conrad, though it is a different morality - or at least a morality focused on different issues and aspects of experience:

... did [Mrs Ramsay] lock up within her some secret which certainly Lily Briscoe believed people must have for the world to go on at all? Every one could not be as helter skelter, hand to mouth as she was. But if they knew, could they tell one what they knew? Sitting on the floor

with her arms round Mrs. Ramsay's knees, close as she could get, smiling to think that Mrs. Ramsay would never know the reason of that pressure, she imagined how in the chambers of the mind and heart of that woman who was, physically, touching her, were stood, like the treasures in the tombs of kings, tablets bearing sacred inscriptions, which if one could spell them out would teach one everything, but they would never be offered openly, never made public. What art was there, known to love or cunning, by which one pressed through into those secret chambers? What device for becoming, like waters poured into one jar, inextricably the same, one with the object one adored? Could the body achieve it, or the mind, subtly mingling in the intricate passages of the brain? or the heart? Could loving, as people called it, make her and Mrs. Ramsay one? for it was not knowledge but unity that she desired, not inscriptions on tablets, nothing that could be written in any language known to men, but intimacy itself, which is knowledge, she had thought, leaning her head on Mrs. Ramsay's knee. (pp. 82-3)

Significantly, though, nothing happens. For Virginia Woolf, the mystery of personal being cannot be revealed as Lily Briscoe wants it to be, but at best only felt and explored. There is no "art" for achieving oneness, and the separateness of being from seeing is irreducible. On the contrary, it is only when Lily Briscoe acknowledges her distance from Mrs Ramsay, whom she loves and who is the subject of her painting, just as much as from Mr Ramsay, who terrifies her and prevents her from painting, that she can complete her work of art. Indeed, the form of the novel itself insists on the same kind of separation. The first section deals with "the flower of light" itself, centring on Mrs Ramsay's perceptions - her immediate, but inarticulate encounter with the world. Then, after the short section "Time Passes", centring on the impersonal existence of time and space, the destructive forces of "darkness", the third part looks at Mrs Ramsay from a distance, as she is seen after her death, in the living "light" of Lily Briscoe's memory of the "vision" she (Lily) tries to express in her painting.

As Virginia Woolf presents all this, however, there is no doubt that unity is preferable to fragmentation, love to strife, and being to

knowing. In the "Time Passes" section, the impersonal narrative expresses this with an insistent, even over-strained, rhetoric:

It seemed now as if, touched by human penitence and all its toil, divine goodness had parted the curtain and displayed behind it, single, distinct, the hare erect; the wave falling, the boat rocking, which, did we deserve them, should be ours always. But alas, divine goodness, twitching the cord, draws the curtain; it does not please him; he covers his treasures in a drench of hail, and so breaks them, so confuses them that it seems impossible that their calm should ever return or that we should ever compose from their fragments a perfect whole or read in the littered pieces the clear words of truth. For our penitence deserves a glimpse only; our toil respite only. (pp. 198-9)

Yet while this is certainly right about the human wish for the single and distinct, that is not the actual burden of the novel as a whole. For what the novel also shows is the human incapacity, despite this wish, to tolerate too much unity. The novel insists on the reality and force of, say, Lily Briscoe's feeling that:

Beauty had this penalty - it came too readily, came too completely. It stilled life - froze it. One forgot the little agitations; the flush, the pallor, some queer distortion, some light or shadow, which made the face unrecognizable for a moment and yet added a quality one saw for ever after. (p. 273)

As Lily is made to see, human life is possible only in these lapses from unity, and it is enriched by them. Perfection, the very heart of "light", although desirable, although sought, is also frightening because it tastes too much of an eternity that takes no account of the individual life.

If human life requires this necessary alternation between pattern and chaos, the light moment and the dark background, between unity and multiplicity, then the understanding of life becomes a matter of seeing and acknowledging the pattern of alternation. While (as Woolf puts it) "divine knowledge" of the hare may be in a continuous moment of erectness, and divine recognition of the wave through its fall, the moment

which defines its total being, this is not the human way. We recognize the hare by its motion as well as by its brief moment of stillness, although the fact that a hare can be momentarily still is the surprising detail that may provide the key to our total sense of the animal. Similarly, we know the wave by the whole trajectory of its motion, from heaping together to crashing and disintegrating. Similarly with knowing another human-being: we must feel the alternation. This is the point of Woolf's image of Lily "looking up, looking down". As we perceive Lily, so she perceives others:

Lily Briscoe went on putting away her brushes, looking up, looking down. Looking up, there he was - Mr. Ramsay - advancing towards them, swinging, careless, oblivious, remote. A bit of a hypocrite? she repeated. Oh no - the most sincere of men, the truest (here he was), the best; but, looking down, she thought, he is absorbed in himself, he is tyrannical, he is unjust; and kept looking down, purposely, for only so could she keep steady, staying with the Ramsays. Directly one looked up and saw them, what she called "being in love" flooded them.
(pp. 75-6)

The distinct activities of looking up and looking down show Lily distinct aspects of Mr Ramsay's character. The motion of seeing reproduces the motion of his being. Yet there is one person doing the looking up and the looking down, as there is one person possessing the separate characteristics of tyranny and sincerity. We can grasp life accurately only by seeing the separate facets and maintaining a sense of their distinctness while seeking the larger unity they comprise.

Thus Lily must look up in order to see her subject - be overwhelmed by "love" - but then she must look down from life to her canvas, cut herself off from it to sense its deeper unity and so be able to paint it. And this is precisely how Virginia Woolf portrays Lily herself to us. Indeed, it was precisely this alternation between movement toward the separate sparks of "light" (or "fire") that life presents to the mind, and away from them towards the "darkness" of comprehension, that she saw

as the essential process of the artist:

To survive, each sentence must have, at its heart, a little spark of fire, and this, whatever the risk, the novelist must pluck with his own hands from the blaze. His state then is a precarious one. He must expose himself to life; he must risk the danger of being led away and tricked by her deceitfulness; he must seize her treasure from her and let her trash run to waste. But at a certain moment he must leave the company and withdraw, alone, to that mysterious room where his body is hardened and fashioned into permanence by processes which, if they elude the critic, hold for him so profound a fascination.¹

What To the Lighthouse suggests, however, is that these alternating activities of the artist are necessary, not just because of the nature of art, but because they follow the motion, the "rhythm" as Virginia Woolf called it, inherent in life. This rhythm flows through everything. It is clear enough in the process of Lily Briscoe's painting: she steps back from her canvas to get her picture into perspective, then moves forward to immerse herself in it and in the feeling that she expresses through it. So, too, are her brush strokes separated by pauses:

With a curious physical sensation, as if she were urged forward and at the same time must hold herself back, she made her first quick decisive stroke. The brush descended. It flickered brown over the white canvas; it left a running mark. A second time she did it - a third time. And so pausing and so flickering, she attained a dancing rhythmical movement, as if the pauses were one part of the rhythm and the strokes another, and all were related. (p. 244).

The only way a work of art may be successful is if it catches the shape and rhythm of the original feeling, since these are essential to the very way we experience. As Virginia Woolf put it in a letter to Vita Sackville-West (19 March, 1926), there is no difference between the patterns and rhythm that characterize our impression of the world and

¹ Virginia Woolf, A Change of Perspective: The Letters of Virginia Woolf, 1923-28, III, (London, 1977).

the rhythm and pattern that must inhere in our expression of that impression:

As for the mot juste, you are quite wrong. Style is a very simple matter; it is all rhythm. Once you get that, you can't use the wrong words. But on the other hand here I am sitting after half the morning, crammed with ideas, and visions, and so on, and can't dislodge them, for lack of the right rhythm. Now this is very profound, what rhythm is, and goes far deeper than words. A sight, an emotion, creates this wave in the mind, long before it makes words to fit it; and in writing (such is my present belief) one has to recapture this, and set this working (which has nothing apparently to do with words) and then, as it breaks and tumbles in the mind, it makes words to fit it.¹

The follow-through of impression to expression should be immediate; indeed, when the art is flowing naturally there is no sense of its being appended to life. It is part of the one wave of our vital experience and activity.

As the case of Lily Briscoe suggests most clearly in To the Lighthouse, though the same thing is true with all the characters in the novel, it is not possible to catch the wave of experience at just any point. There will be moments, the spaces of dullness between the instants of revelation, when creation (whether in art, or in philosophical thought, or in poetry, or in personal relations, or even in one's inner sense of the world) is impossible. But this must be accepted, as Lily Briscoe, Mrs Ramsay and Mr Bankes accept it, and as other characters notably do not. With her integrity to her original vision, and her refusal deliberately to construct emotion (as Mr Ramsay does, by reciting poetry aloud) or to take the easy course of making the merely beautiful, Lily Briscoe has to acknowledge that failure is a necessary part of her total attempt to paint:

But what she wished to get hold of was that very jar on the nerves, the thing itself before it has been made anything. Get that and start afresh; get that

¹ Virginia Woolf, A Change of Perspective: The Letters of Virginia Woolf, 1923-28, III, ed. Nigel Nicolson (London, 1977).

and start afresh; she said desperately, pitching herself firmly again before her easel. It was a miserable machine, an inefficient machine, she thought, the human apparatus for painting or for feeling; it always broke down at the critical moment; heroically, one must force it on. She stared, frowning. There was the hedge, sure enough. But one got nothing by soliciting urgently. One got only a glare in the eye from looking at the line of the wall, or from thinking - she wore a grey hat. She was astonishingly beautiful. Let it come, she thought, if it will come. For there are moments when one can neither think nor feel. And if one can neither think nor feel, she thought, where is one? (p. 297)

Lily's frustration here is the necessary corollary of her sense of triumph at the end of the novel. Both are essential sections of the complete wave of human experience of the world. The "thing itself" that she seeks to express is such as to prompt just this doubleness - that indeed, is why it is a "jar on the nerves". Lily's recognition that nothing is properly seen or comprehended through urgent solicitation is obviously set against Mr Ramsay's way of consciously seeking meaning. Against her "negative capability", as we might say, is his characteristic tendency to think that true vision is a goal to be reached by progressing by efforts of the will and stages of conscious rationality. What the novel shows us is Mr Ramsay's failure - in fact, the novel is perhaps too insistent on it. But while it is clear that the epiphanic moment cannot be called up at will, and the flowering of "light" - the flowing of life into pattern and meaning - is something spontaneous, or, rather, the manifestation of some inexplicable inner necessity, some rhythm at the inner, dark root of life itself, it is possible to act so as to make a glimpse of that "flower" more likely. Although Lily Briscoe's attitude is "let it come ... if it will come", for example, she also realizes that "her mood was coming back to her. One must keep looking without for a second relaxing the intensity of emotion, the determination not to be put off, not to be bamboozled. One must hold the scene - so - in a vice and let nothing come in and spoil it" (p. 309). Urgent solicitation

will not bring the vision of pattern and meaning, but neither will mere passivity. The "flower of light", the inner rhythm of life, can only be understood by someone who realizes in himself a similar vital energy, a rhythmic energy springing out of the "darkness" but engaging in the consciousness and being directed to the nature of the object of consciousness. This is why it is not only the similarity between Mrs Ramsay's creative energy and Lily's that is important, but also the necessity of that likeness for Lily's art. As A.D. Moody has put it:

For the most part [Lily] is engaged in recalling and celebrating Mrs Ramsay; and her thinking about her amounts to a re-enactment of her life, which brings a clearer understanding of her achievements. But what emerges most clearly is that Mrs Ramsay is not simply the object of her contemplation, but is in the fullest sense her inspiration. And the force of her inspiration for Lily's vision is what her active influence had been in life.¹

To put it another way, just as the "flower" is not simply a state of consciousness, so, ultimately, will any true vision of it not be produced by, or be reducible to, simply a state of consciousness. It is a state of being - a rhythm, a mode of life answering to the life it "sees". But it is possible for a person to put himself in the way of achieving this "vision" and this state by alerting the consciousness and the will in the right way.

The novel clearly suggests that the "right way" is Lily's. Lily is alert to the natural rhythm of her own being, which answers to the rhythm of the life that she observes. Mr Ramsay, on the other hand, clearly imposes a false rhythm into life. He will never achieve his ultimate vision of "Z" ("if thought ran like an alphabet from A to Z" pp. 184-5). His idea that meaning is revealed in logical stages is precisely what the novel is concerned to question, indeed to deny. As

¹ A.D. Moody, op. cit., p. 39.

it apprehends and comprehends life in its subtle, alternating, looping and relooping, vital rhythms, it shows again and again, how Mr Ramsay can never get past the block of his own clamorous ego and the letter "R" (signifying Ramsay). He cannot reach beyond the limitations of his consciousness precisely because his consciousness is determined by a root of emptiness and fear in him, so that his special gift is always being prevented from flowering into full light by intruding worries about his fame and by the superfluity of his self-consciousness. For him, the search for meaning is a "journey", but it is "journeying" that the novel wishes to redefine. And what it suggests is that, yes, the mystery of meaning must be concentrated on, one must be alert to Mrs Ramsay or to the lighthouse in order to have hope of discovering anything about it - but not as Mr Ramsay concentrates on it. It cannot be a journey in the sense of a deliberate, mapped-out progress towards a pre-determined goal. It is a light, a beacon, that will prompt the seeker to the excitement and persistence of a kind of journey, but its shape will be more like a mysteriously organic, spontaneous "flowing" than an organized navigation governed by weather-reports, books and route-maps, by a self-consciously "brave" and "noble" navigator. Interestingly enough, Mr Ramsay's vision, like Lily's, is described in terms of the "looking up, looking down" metaphor. But he only looks up to find confirmation of his own preconceived idea of life:

He stopped to light his pipe, looked once at his wife and son in the window, and as one raises one's eyes from a page in an express train and sees a farm, a tree, a cluster of cottages as an illustration, a confirmation of something on the printed page to which one returns, fortified, and satisfied, so without his distinguishing either his son or his wife, the sight of them fortified and consecrated his effort to arrive at a perfectly clear understanding of the problem which now engaged the energies of his splendid mind.
(p. 56)

The qualification "without distinguishing either his son or his wife", invalidates this way of looking. Ramsay will never experience that "very

jar on the nerves" that alerts a seeker to the fact and rhythms of his own aliveness as well as to the life of the thing he observes. For the contradictions in life give it its energy, its inner shape and motion. Certainly, man's perpetual wish is to find "some crystal of intensity ... single, hard, bright, like a diamond in the sand, which would render the possessor secure" (p. 205); but what the novel suggests again and again is that such unity cannot be achieved by being blind to things that might disconfirm it. Distinctions must not be slurred over; the question is not how to see one part of the life as confirming another, but how to bring together its disparate parts (p. 228). Lily, we notice, sees in life an alternation of giving and taking. In her painting she feels the need of a shadow there because there is light here - one requires the other (p. 85). And this, of course, is precisely the method of the novel itself: the alternation and balance it sees in the world it renders artistically:

the evening air which already thinner was taking the substance from leaves and hedges but, as if in return, restoring to roses and pinks a lustre which they had not had by day. (p. 55)

Unlike Mr Ramsay, it includes that doubt in its own construction of life that is the necessary acknowledgement of the otherness as well as of the kinship between art and the world it both springs from (like a flower) and represents (like a painting).

The novel's attitude to Mr Ramsay is more subtle than all this may suggest, of course. He is not merely criticized or derided. The novel equally insists on his common human need to be assured of his own life by the response of other lives to his. He takes the nourishment of praise from Mrs Ramsay, metaphorically plunging his beak "into this delicious fecundity, this fountain and spray of life: he must have sympathy. He must be assured that he too lived in the heart of life; was needed; not here only, but all over the world" (p. 62). William

Bankes, too, reveals this need when thinking over his friendships, "[feeling] some satisfaction when he thought that after all he knew both the Mannings and the Ramsays. He had not drifted apart.... But perhaps he was rather unusual, he thought, in this; he never let himself get into a groove. He had friends in all circles" (pp. 137-8). The "heart of life", however, is never still, and this shows Ramsay's very "Victorian" wish to find solace and smooth away cares, to be very mistaken. As the novel continually emphasizes, the real proof of being at the heart of life is a willingness to have one's vision of the world perpetually broken and remade. Both William Bankes and Lily Briscoe have this capacity - a vulnerability that is resilient, tough, persistent in flowing against the destructive elements of the world. Lily can never fix her vision of Mrs Ramsay, even after her death. Time's passing may bring greater knowledge, but to anyone capable of Lily's sensitive responsiveness and her deep, persistent integrity, it does not bring assurance, solace, or any final comprehension:

The sight, the phrase, had its power to console. Wherever she happened to be, painting, here, in the country or in London, the vision would come to her, and her eyes, half closing, sought something to base her vision on. She looked down the railway carriage, the omnibus; took a line from shoulder or cheek; looked at the windows opposite; at Piccadilly, lamp-strung in the evening. All had been part of the fields of death. But always something - it might be a face, a voice, a paper boy crying Standard, News - thrust through, snubbed her, waked her, required and got in the end an effort of attention, so that the vision must be perpetually remade. (p. 279)

Mr Bankes is a similar case. He too is responsive to the subtle, mysterious rhythms into which life flows, unfolding some meaning to the receptive "vision", and he is also capable of accepting the fragility of any such meaning or even the discomfiture it might bring. A passage early in the novel makes the point very sharply:

He was anxious for the sake of this friendship and perhaps too in order to clear himself in his own mind

from the imputation of having dried and shrunk - for Ramsay lived in a welter of children, whereas Bankes was childless and a widower - he was anxious that Lily Briscoe should not disparage Ramsay ... yet should understand how things stood between them. Begun long years ago, their friendship had petered out on a Westmorland road, where the hen spread her wings before her chicks; after which Ramsay had married, and their paths lying different ways, there had been some tendency, when they met, to repeat.

Yes, That was it. He finished. He turned from the view. And, turning to walk back the other way, up the drive, Mr. Bankes was alive to things which would not have struck him had not those sandhills revealed to him the body of his friendship lying with the red on its lips laid up in peat - for instance, Cam, the little girl, Ramsay's youngest daughter. She was picking Sweet Alice on the bank. She was wild and fierce. She would not "give a flower to a gentleman" as the nursemaid told her. No! no! no! she would not! She clenched her fist. She stamped. And Mr. Bankes felt aged and saddened and somehow put into the wrong by her about his friendship. He must have dried and shrunk. (pp. 38-9)

If he finds in the image of Ramsay with the hen some explanation of the rhythm of their friendship, and if he can communicate this to Lily Briscoe, then this certainty gives Mr Bankes relief. But what is far more important, it also enables him to move on to something beyond it. He is now "alive to things which would not have struck him"; he is also open to the things that destroy relief and comfort, even the relief of explanatory images.¹

This seems to me one of the most important similarities between Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" and To the Lighthouse. For all the obvious differences in the ways they see the world and explore human-beings,

¹ Irene Simon, in her article "Some Aspects of Virginia Woolf's Imagery", interestingly and I think rightly points out that the "sea" is important as the novel's central image of interdependent destructiveness and creativity, disintegration and integration. She notices that each of the characters Woolf presents as truly creative needs sometimes to submit to, and be engulfed by the ungovernable forces in life identified with the sea. Simon's article is reprinted in Jacqueline E. Latham (ed.), Critics on Virginia Woolf (London, 1970), pp. 79-81.

they both turn on the same key insight: that the capacity to be disturbed, even shattered, not only in one's sense (or vision) of life, but in one's essential being - in the basic, unconscious impulse to see life in that way, the heart of darkness in oneself - is itself the very heart of life.¹ It is this capacity which is the condition of any other genuine capacity of the self. In Conrad's story, Marlow is only capable of the morally ambiguous but therefore morally vital "lie" to the Intended because he has already been able to encounter and really acknowledge Kurtz. Only because he could complete that journey can he be affected by the girl, and sacrifice his moral code in an act of moral life. Although on a much greater scale, it is the same process as William Bankes goes through here.

For both Conrad and Woolf, in other words, it is the fact that Marlow, or William Bankes, or Lily Briscoe can have their considered images of life shattered which testifies that they are at its heart. Marlow's most important discovery of the moral significance of a great "heart" comes in his meeting with the girl. He finds out then (instinctively rather than consciously) the difference between a "heart" and a "centre". Up till this moment he has conflated the two (as he has also - I have argued - conflated the ideas of right conduct with greatness of life). He must acknowledge their distinctness before he can move towards any greater understanding of Kurtz. All along, Marlow's

¹ This, I think, is a necessary qualification to the point Eric Auerbach makes about To the Lighthouse: that it expresses the human need to feel life as a coherent, if very complex, whole - the need that makes moment of "epiphany" so important to the modern writer. See Mimesis: The Representation of Reality (Princeton, 1953), pp. 525-53.

voyage towards Kurtz and the "heart of darkness" was accompanied by images of the centre. He feels that going to the Congo is like going "to the centre of the earth"; then, when he gets to Africa itself, he does not find Kurtz on the coast but at the centre of that continent. Moreover, Kurtz has to be extracted from the centre of the earth where he seems to be buried (like his "fossil" ivory). He is carried on a stretcher from his house: "Suddenly round the corner of the house a group of men appeared, as though they had come up from the ground" (p. 133). But Marlow finds out, when he meets the girl, that the heart of life is not synonymous with its centre. Images of the "centre" have irresistibly slid towards being images of death and the grave; yet the heart of his moral experience is not death. He goes away from the centre, away from Africa, from Kurtz and from his own near-death, to the real heart - with the girl and the affirmative act of his moral life in the lie. At the heart of life, in both Conrad (where the focus is on moral being), and Woolf (where the focus is on meaning and "vision"), lies both shattering and renewal.

But the similarity goes further. It is significant that both works link the heart of life with another human capacity: the capacity to witness and articulate. Both Conrad and Woolf often feel the universe to be inimical to man, a chaos that threatens to disintegrate his attempts to establish meaning, moral value, even identity. But both also see a saving power in words or art. These can stabilize the luminous moment, save meaning, or at least the possibility of meaning, from the destructive flux. Marlow's story, in which Kurtz's voice is given its significance, or Lily's painting, can catch and hold both the "light" and the "darkness" of life, and so take into themselves the qualities of a "plant and flower of light". Thus the fiction extends to explore the effect of art. The success of Marlow's story or Lily

Briscoe's painting is judged by its audience. In so far as Marlow can provoke feeling from his passive audience, he has seen the true flower of light in Kurtz: the validity of his vision will be confirmed by his audience's attention, just as it was apparent to him that life was great in Kurtz because so many people were aware of him despite his obscurity. Similarly, as Mrs Ramsay's life is proven genuinely luminous by the number of people who independently see or feel it as that, so Lily Briscoe's vision is confirmed inasmuch as William Bankes also shares it when he looks at her painting:

But it had been seen; it had been taken from her. This man had shared with her something profoundly intimate. And, thanking Mr. Ramsay for it and Mrs. Ramsay for it and the hour and place, crediting the world with a power which she had not suspected, that one could walk away down that long gallery not alone any more but arm in arm with somebody - the strangest feeling in the world, and the most exhilarating - she nicked the catch of her paint-box to, more firmly than was necessary, and the nick seemed to surround in a circle for ever the paint-box, the lawn, Mr. Bankes, and that wild villain, Cam, dashing past. (pp. 86-7)

Hence the immense satisfaction in completing the story or painting that both Conrad and Woolf portray in their surrogates. The completed process of telling or painting defines the trajectory of the character's vital being (in so far as the work is concerned to represent it), in the same way as Mrs Ramsay's death or Kurtz's death completes the shape of the "flower" which is their being. In making the art, "one of those globed compacted things" (p. 296), the double experience - the life which is the subject of the story or painting, and the life which consists in responding to that and catching its meaning - is complete. James Ramsay tries to retell himself the story of his childhood:

Turning back among the many leaves which the past had folded in him, peering into the heart of that forest where light and shade so chequer each other that all shape is distorted, and one blunders, now with the sun in one's eyes, now with a dark shadow, he sought an image to cool and detach and round off his feeling in a concrete shape. (p. 284)

The same image of pushing back the leaves of a flowering tree had also come to Mrs Ramsay when she read the sonnet: "she felt that she was climbing backwards, upwards, shoving her way up under petals that curved over her, so that she only knew this is white, or this is red. She did not know at first what the words meant at all" (p. 184). But when she has pushed her way to the top she suddenly, like James, has the immense satisfaction of seeing the flower of the moment - in this instance, the feeling of the day - complete: "All the odds and ends of the day stuck to this magnet; her mind felt swept, felt clean. And then there it was, suddenly entire shaped in her hands, beautiful and reasonable, clear and complete, the essence sucked out of life and held rounded here - the sonnet" (pp. 186-7).

The sense of climbing up the tree, however, is as important as the seeing the essence entire. The point is that the meaning does not come to us entire; rather, it is achieved through motion, through a "rhythm". Mrs Ramsay had come to the poem instinctively, feeling the need to complete something as yet unfinished about her day:

she felt again, sinking deeper, as she had felt in the hall when the others were talking. There is something I want - something I have come to get, and she fell deeper and deeper without knowing quite what it was, with her eyes closed. And she waited a little, knitting, wondering, and slowly those words they had said at dinner, "the China rose is all abloom and buzzing with the honey bee," began washing from side to side of her mind rhythmically, and as they washed, words, like little shaded lights, one red, one blue, one yellow, lit up in the dark of her mind, and seemed leaving their perches up there to fly across and across, or to cry out and to be echoed; so she turned and felt on the table beside her for a book. (p. 183)

One rhythm will build on another, and eventually something whole, some meaning, can emerge. When Lily tries to bring Mrs Ramsay to mind so that she can do her painting, she thinks in terms of starting the "tune" of Mrs Ramsay (p. 80), and she begins to paint as the rhythm of her own mind begins to fit the one dictated to her by her memory of Mrs Ramsay:

Then, as if some juice necessary for the lubrication of her faculties were spontaneously squirted, she began precariously dipping among the blues and umbers, moving her brush hither and thither, but it was now heavier and went slower, as if it had fallen in with some rhythm which was dictated to her (she kept looking at the hedge, at the canvas) by what she saw, so that while her hand quivered with life, this rhythm was strong enough to bear her along with it on its current. (p. 246)

But the connection between Mrs Ramsay's activity and Lily's here is crucially important. Neither Conrad nor Woolf thinks of "art" as wholly separate from "life". For Conrad, Marlow's story, with its subtle indirections and rhythms of discovery, is virtually identical with the novelist's own art. There is a more obvious gap between Mrs Ramsay and Lily in To the Lighthouse, of course; Virginia Woolf is more sharply aware of the fluidity of the one as against the fixity of the other. Nevertheless, for her too, the human need and activity and satisfaction in finding meaning in ordinary experience are continuous with those in making art.

Thus when Lily Briscoe attempts to make sense of her impressions of Mrs Ramsay, of the Rayleys, of Mr Carmichael, Virginia Woolf shows this as the interplay of life (as it presents itself to the mind) and life (as it searches and ponders what is "given" to it). The "flower" takes on "light" as its own light is reflected from the person capable of truly responding to it. In pondering the life of the Rayleys, Lily takes phrases that stick in her mind - Paul's comment that he "played chess in coffee houses" (p. 267), for example - and extrapolates from them. The point is that so little can be seen of a life, which is both a mysterious and an extensive thing, that any knowledge of it has to be sought in the rhythms that characterize its total pattern. Lily builds "a whole structure of imagination on that saying" (p. 267), but she is convinced that the structure is an illusion. And in a novel where so

many stories are told to oneself as well as to others, that distinction is a key issue. Telling herself the story of the Ramsay's for example, Lily Briscoe is made to face it:

She was not inventing; she was only trying to smooth out something she had been given years ago folded up; something she had seen. For in the rough and tumble of daily life, with all those children about, all those visitors, one had constantly a sense of repetition - of one thing falling where another had fallen, and so setting up an echo which chimed in the air and made it full of vibrations. (p. 305)

The importance of this to the structure and texture of the novel itself can hardly be missed; and Virginia Woolf underlines it again and again. Thus Mrs Ramsay feels this same sense of meaningful repetition in her day, and when she sits quietly in the evening she has the same impulse to articulate that half-glimpsed "rhythm". There is certainly some difference in the means each one finds to achieve that articulation. By contrast with Mrs Ramsay, Lily has a notion of "the ineffectiveness of action, the supremacy of thought" (p. 301). Accordingly, she makes a story for herself out of her experience, and, later, a painting. Mrs Ramsay finds someone else to articulate her sense of the day. She finds her completion in the Shakespearian sonnet. In each case, this is the "flower" glimpsed through a stilled moment - the hare erect.

But the novel also underlines the limitations of any such glimpse. For one thing, it may catch only the outline, not the details that could disrupt or dismay. For another, the reality of the world is always more complex than any one glimpse, even the most satisfactory "vision", can encompass. Apprehension is never comprehension. Once again, Lily is used to express the point. Feeling the inadequacy of her notion of Mrs Ramsay, she says to herself that "fifty pairs of eyes were not enough to get round that one woman with" (p. 303). The very form of the novel insists on the same point. Lily's view of Mrs Ramsay, though certainly the most important one in the novel, is not the only one. Alone, neither

Lily's, nor Mr Ramsay's, nor William Bankes's, nor even Mrs Ramsay's view of herself, is adequate. The heart of the flower's "light" can only be seen through refraction, through the varied colours of the spectrum. Yet each view is itself the ray of another "light". Thus when William Bankes and Lily Briscoe look separately, and yet together, at Mrs Ramsay, Lily's "ray passed level with Mr. Bankes's ray straight to Mrs. Ramsay sitting there" (pp. 83-4).

But as with Kurtz, so with Mrs Ramsay. What lies at the meeting-point of the various "rays" that catch the various colours of the "light" they observe still remains a darkness, unknowable even to itself, as well as a "flower" with an elusive but at least perceptible shape and colour. No less than Conrad, Virginia Woolf is aware of this heart of darkness in human-beings, and probably the most explicit expression of it in the novel is when Mrs Ramsay seems to sink to the floor of the ocean where there is no defining wave movement, gathering an identity where there is only limitless, formless potentiality:

now she need not think about anybody. She could be herself, by herself. And that was what she often felt the need of - to think; well not even to think. To be silent; to be alone. All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated; and one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others.... When life sank down for a moment, the range of experience seemed limitless. And to everybody there was always this sense of unlimited resources, she supposed; one after another, she, Lily, Augustus Carmichael, must feel, our apparitions, the things you know us by, are simply childish. Beneath it is all dark, it is all spreading, it is unfathomably deep; but now and again we rise to the surface and that is what you see us by.... This core of darkness could go anywhere, for no one saw it. They could not stop it, she thought, exulting. There was freedom, there was peace, there was, most welcome of all, a summoning together, a resting on a platform of stability. Not as oneself did one find rest ever, in her experience, ... but as a wedge of darkness. Losing personality, one lost the fret, the hurry, the stir; and there rose to her lips always some exclamation of triumph over life when things came together in this peace, this rest, this eternity. (pp. 99-100)

Like Marlow's "centre", this stillness is certainly also the quietude of death. And all through the novel sees this as the ultimate darkness from which and against which life/light flowers momentarily into the particular shape and colours of personal being. For Virginia Woolf as for Conrad, a vital sense of death, as one might say, is a necessary condition of any true sense of life. Only from its roots in darkness can the plant and flower of light grow, and only against the background of darkness can it be seen. And equally, of course, only by the living light of the flower can the darkness be seen as darkness.

To put it as summarily as that, however, is clearly to distort both "Heart of Darkness" and To the Lighthouse. Neither work is quite so conscious, as explicit, about itself as I have suggested. On the contrary, each is much more evocative, much more exploratory; both are dominated not by clear statements about life or about individual lives, but rather by a sense of life and of personal being as a mystery, something real, perhaps ultimately simple, and yet as inexplicable and inaccessible. Both convey that sense very acutely in their different ways, though with a degree of success in each case that obviously calls for the kind of critical judgement that I shall have to leave aside here. What is more relevant to my purposes are the further problems of artistic integrity that this sense of human life presented to each novelist. For in each case, the stress falls on the sheer apprehension of that mystery; both insist that comprehension is not really possible. And yet that could hardly satisfy the need to comprehend, which both see as necessary to the life of their characters and of their own art. How, then, to present this central mystery of personal being so as to preserve the sense of it as a mystery, while yet pressing the exploration and expression of it a stage further, toward a fuller comprehension? In Lord Jim and The Waves, I think we can see an example of each novelist attempting just that.

SECTION B

Lord Jim & The Waves

CHAPTER 3

LORD JIM: THE PROBLEM OF "INTEGRITY"

Lord Jim and The Waves, like "Youth", "Heart of Darkness" and To the Lighthouse, also explore the nature and implications of individual human life as a compelling but finally unresolvable enigma. But, clearly, these two novels grasp the problem more deliberately. Here there is none of the nostalgia of "Youth" or the bitterness of "Heart of Darkness". Instead, a feeling of tolerance and acceptance dominates these novels which focus, not on the mystery at the core of a human life or of all humanity, but on the ways that individual selves find their distinctive shape, their specific "integrity" or one-ness or wholeness - the particular "selving" of human-beings. This is something more accessible to narrative.

Unlike "Youth", "Heart of Darkness" or To the Lighthouse, then, these novels do not conduct any frustrated search for something that remains finally inaccessible. In Lord Jim, Conrad is more interested to show the ways Jim both failed and succeeded in achieving a full integrity - what Marlow in that novel calls "mastering his fate" - and thereby became both obscure and clear to another individual's understanding, such as Marlow's. He is, in other words, more interested in the relationship of the whole potentiality of a life to its delimited being in the world. So, too, in The Waves: Virginia Woolf shows how a human-being takes on identity, selfhood, becomes a particular colour, rather than an infinite (but also indeterminate) darkness. She perceives that a life is, in one sense, necessarily individualized when it is seen by, and sees itself in, the eyes of others. Thus Bernard most obviously becomes himself, Bernard the teller of stories, the phrase-maker, when he is seen by others or forced to act in the same world and moment he shares with them. Yet, paradoxically, the very variety of those who see him as that individual person and thus seem to constrict his wholeness also offers him the closest approximation

possible in the outer world to his inner sense (a sense we share with him) of a different, unconstricted wholeness of being. To express this in Virginia Woolf's own metaphor, her concern is with the way the infinite song of human "being" becomes a particular song in the world, yet may recover something like its full music when many separate and individual songs are sung together, as in a polyphonic chorus.

Although these two novels focus on different aspects of the same general questions about the full potentiality and "integrity" of individual selves, they both use the same device as in the earlier three novels - the central witnessing character - as a way of exploring those questions. Bernard and Marlow in these novels, like the Marlows of "Youth" and "Heart of Darkness" and like Lily Briscoe in To the Lighthouse, try to make articulate sense of something essentially inarticulate and elusive. In the earlier novels, however, the relationship between a central observer and the life observed was a way of acknowledging that the essence and significance of a human life are finally inaccessible - certainly to purely sequential narrative understanding. In The Waves and Lord Jim, the general shift in tone from the frustration of the former three works goes hand-in-hand with a different use of the central witnessing character. The earlier works make the witness and the characters witnessed very distinct, emphasizing the separation of the active mind and the contemplated objectivity of human life. Kurtz is as independent of Marlow as Mrs Ramsay is of Lily Briscoe. Bernard and the Marlow of Lord Jim, on the other hand, are actively involved with the individuals to whose particular existence and problematical identity they bear witness; indeed, they actually help these individuals to become themselves. And the way these two novels use their key witnessing characters indicates something absolutely crucial about Conrad's and Woolf's thinking in them. Both novelists share the basic insight that an individual's selfhood is never a given quantity, and that it is only

half-determined by its own specific nature, and only half by constricting circumstance (or, seen the other way, by empowering opportunity). Moreover, both novelists see that an individual's selfhood can be fully realized only through witness - by being witnessed by others (and thereby becoming completed as objects of understanding), and by witnessing others (and thereby by actively engaging with other lives). Thus both Bernard and Marlow somehow "realize" or complete others' lives by seeing them as they do, by acknowledging their reality and trying to comprehend it; but, more than this, they also realize essential potentialities of their own selves by witnessing. This means that in The Waves and Lord Jim the central witnessing characters have far more important roles than in "Heart of Darkness" or To the Lighthouse. No longer are they merely means by which the inner core and the outer shape of a life becomes accessible; they are necessary to the very structure of that life as the particular life it is, necessary, that is, if that other life is to find its realization in the world at all.

As a result of this insight, both writers become very self-conscious about their medium, words. There was a similar kind of self-consciousness in "Heart of Darkness" and To the Lighthouse as well of course, but there with a different effect. In those novels, the capacities of narrative were seen as being at odds with the spontaneous, dark, trans-temporal lives which the narrative sought to express, and the very tension between the means of articulation and its object was used to heighten the reader's awareness of the central mystery at the heart of life. In The Waves and Lord Jim, however, we find none of that nervous insistence on the "inexplicable" quality of the experience most characteristic of "Heart of Darkness"; words are not being required to represent an essentially non-verbal encounter. Virginia Woolf acknowledged the problem in To the Lighthouse by making her central observer a painter. Significantly, the corresponding character in The Waves, Bernard, is a phrase-maker, a

story-teller - in other words, he expresses his apprehension of the world in the same way as Woolf herself does. This implies a much deeper acceptance of language and the way it can express "felt life". Indeed, in both The Waves the Lord Jim Virginia Woolf and Joseph Conrad share the insight that an approach such as narrative offers is the only way they may respond to their subject. The individual self is accessible as it comes into being - that is, as it is in the world, in action, in time, and in relation to others - and words, also mediating between the inner and the outer world, can catch that selfhood as it surfaces.

Both writers are very deliberate, too, in their choice of the central structural motif of these two novels. Woolf uses the motif of polyphonically arranged "stories", and Conrad that of the judicial "Inquiry" to underline just how difficult it is to tell a fully valid story about an individual or to comprehend fully the reasons why he behaves as he does, yet also to affirm the human need to make such stories and to conduct such inquiries. The relative complexity of each novel's structure is thus essential to, and a reflection of, its sense of the complexity of the individual self and of its wholeness and integrity. In The Waves, the structural motif identifies the search in what we might call the plot of that novel with the novel itself. Bernard's search for identity is expressed in terms of a search for biography. The "realization" of his identity is seen explicitly, therefore, as being the novel itself - which means that looking at the problems of individual being in The Waves involves looking at what the novel is saying about itself, too. This is certainly not true of Lord Jim, where, as the structural motif of the "Inquiry" suggests, Conrad concentrates on the problem of human integrity without regarding his novel itself as a further ramification of that problem. This makes its procedures and exploration simpler, or at least clearer, than those of The Waves, and similarly its conceptions of selfhood and integrity. For that reason, I shall deal with it first.

Criticism of Lord Jim is interesting in both its similarities with criticism of "Heart of Darkness" and its differences. There are, I think significantly, more good critical accounts of Lord Jim than there were of "Heart of Darkness". But the same key issues arise in criticism of both novels. Thus Douglas Hewitt voices a commonly-felt question about Lord Jim when he says:

We may reasonably wonder whether the feeling which brought "Heart of Darkness" to birth may not be the chief cause why Lord Jim developed from a simple short story into a complex novel, for there are many resemblances between the relationship of Marlow and Kurtz and that of Marlow and Jim.¹

And critics who find the length of Lord Jim too great for its substance ("expanded, besides", as Marvin Mudrick puts it, "by Marlow's more than customarily confused and high-flown ruminations") have referred to "Heart of Darkness" to explain better this fault in Lord Jim.² And, as with the earlier tale, critics again talk about Marlow's confusion, his failure to judge the central figure firmly and consistently, and have debated whether this points to a basic ambiguity in Conrad's conception.³

Yet the greater coherency and penetration of Lord Jim is reflected, I think, in the quality and cogency of much of the criticism. Different critics have, of course, found different aspects of Conrad's enterprise here the most interesting, and have come to different conclusions about the main thrust of the novel's meaning. When we look at these different

¹ Douglas Hewitt, Conrad: A Reassessment (Cambridge, 1952), p. 34.

² Marvin Mudrick, Introduction to Conrad: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1966), p. 10; and F.R. Leavis, who similarly argues that the romance in Patusan section of the novel, "though plausibly offered as a continued exhibition of Jim's case, has no inevitability as that; nor does it develop or enrich the central interest, which consequently, eked out to provide the substance of the novel, comes to seem decidedly thin". The Great Tradition (Harmondsworth, 1962), p. 209.

³ Douglas Hewitt provides a convenient example: op. cit., p. 38.

accounts together, however, they do not (on the whole) conflict with each other as did differing accounts of "Heart of Darkness" (on the whole). Indeed, the most helpfully suggestive accounts of the novel seem to me those of three critics with very different orientations.

Dorothy Van Ghent understands Lord Jim as Conrad's exploration of various ways an individual's "character" or "fate" is realized. She suggests that Jim's case illustrates a general point about "selves", by making us conceive of "a man's destiny both as being carried within him, and, in effect - since his acts externalize his destiny - as confronting him from without"¹:

Conrad's supreme mastery is in his ability to make the circumstance of "plot" the inevitable point of discharge of the potentiality of "character". The accident that happens to the Patna is not merely a parallel and a metaphor of what happens to Jim at the time, but it is the objective circumstance that discovers Jim to himself. (p. 380)

J.I.M. Stewart, on the other hand, thinks of the novel as primarily concerned with the various moral judgements that can be made about Jim's case. Thus he concentrates on the way Jim sees himself (or fails to see himself), the way Marlow sees Jim's case, the way Conrad sees and judges it, and the way we do. Stewart responds to the urgency with which the novel presses us to judge Jim morally; yet by his unwillingness to make any indictment or vindication, Stewart also responds to the novel's own subtle moral generosity.²

H.M. Daleski responds to something else again. He reminds us that in Lord Jim there is real point to Marlow's "obscure allusiveness": it forces us to understand why Marlow is uncertain about Jim. Similarly, Daleski argues, with Conrad's notion of "the test", which in Jim's case

¹ Dorothy Van Ghent, from The English Novel: Form and Function (N.Y., 1953), rpt. in Thomas Moser (ed.), Lord Jim (N.Y., 1968), pp. 380-1.

² J.I.M. Stewart, Joseph Conrad (London, 1968), pp. 95-123.

might seem merely to show the purposeless malice of the universe. In fact, it is Conrad's way of drawing attention "to the existence of what is hidden".¹ Daleski sees that Lord Jim differs from "Heart of Darkness" in the way Conrad here realizes the need to penetrate the hidden, not to rest content with its obscurity.

But the limitations of Daleski's account of Lord Jim provide a useful starting-point for considering the novel itself, I think. In his view, it is the hidden truths to which Conrad penetrates that form the key to the novel:

Since the soft spot, the point at which the self must give, is both innate and universal, true self-possession, it is clear, must be based on an acknowledgement of its existence, for this is a prerequisite for coming to terms with it. This is something that Jim is never able to do; and if we are to see Conrad as exploring a single situation in the novel (as he claimed in the letter to Blackwood), it is the repeated, if varied, manifestation of such a spot in Jim. (p. 87)

This clear assertion of the novel's meaning is strikingly at odds with the inquiring, never satisfied, exploratory impulse of Lord Jim itself; and the same kind of discrepancy becomes visible in Dorothy Van Ghent's account of the novel too:

Marlow's last view of Jim, on the coast of Patusan, is of a white figure "at the heart of a vast enigma". Jim himself is not enigmatic. The wonder and doubt that he stirs, both in Marlow and in us, are not wonder and doubt as to what he is: he is as recognizable as we are to ourselves; he is "one of us". Furthermore, he is not a very complex character, and he is examined by his creator with the most exhaustive conscientiousness; he is placed in every possible perspective that might help to define him. The enigma then, is not what Jim is but what we are, and not only what we are, but "how to be" what we are.²

Jim is certainly not most interesting to Conrad as an enigma; on this point, Daleski and Van Ghent are right. But it does not follow that the main thrust of the novel is to discover or suggest enigmas in human nature, or to resolve them, to reveal hidden facts or truths about ourselves.

¹ H.M. Daleski, Joseph Conrad: The Way of Dispossession (London, 1977), p. 80.

² Van Ghent, op. cit., p. 376.

It seems to me more accurate to say, rather, that the novel is most interested in an ongoing and unresolvable problem of human life - a problem that is somewhat different in kind from mysteries or enigmas, which have (at least in theory) a definite solution. How could we ever solve the problem, for example, of whether or not Jim manages to be true to himself, whether he lives his life and dies with integrity? For of course the difficulty, as Marlow and Conrad see it, is that even "simple" Jim has (as it were) various "selves" - various and sometimes incompatible needs, beliefs, commitments to himself and commitments to others - and the problem is how these are related in the complex but single, integral being that Jim is. This problem, I think, explains the length of Lord Jim. The point of it is partly the one Edward Crankshaw makes, that "Conrad is not concerned with driving home a clear-cut issue, but with rendering a complete personality in relation to his environment - a borderline position if ever there was one."¹ But even more important than that, Conrad is exploring a problem which involves many inseparably intertwined issues, many inseparably connected aspects, and a multiplicity of causes and consequences, and which can only be worked through (though never finally resolved) over the whole range of a life in time.

Although Marlow initially suggests in Lord Jim that an "inquiry" into Jim's case is not possible, the very grounds on which he condemns the sort of investigation of human motivation represented by the official Inquiry also make him see the necessity for some inquiry. Once it is recognized that the "case" in hand is not a matter of an isolated action, but of a particular human life as a whole, then the obvious verdict of

¹ Edward Crankshaw, Joseph Conrad: Some Aspects of the Art of the Novel (London, 1976), p. 53.

"guilty" directed to Jim's actions as mate of the "Patna" cannot possibly be enough in itself. Marlow explains the general dissatisfaction with the judicial Inquiry:

"There was no incertitude as to facts - as to the one material fact, I mean.... Yet, as I've told you, all the sailors in the port attended, and the waterside business was fully represented. Whether they knew it or not, the interest that drew them there was purely psychological - the expectation of some essential disclosure as to the strength, the power, the horror, of human emotions. Naturally nothing of the kind could be disclosed. The examination of the only man able and willing to face it was beating futilely round the well-known fact and the play of questions upon it was as instructive as the tapping with a hammer on an iron box, were the object to find out what's inside. However, an official inquiry could not be any other thing. Its object was not the fundamental why, but the superficial how, of this affair." (Lord Jim, p. 56¹)

Conrad's point, however, is rather less assured and more subtle than Marlow's. Although the "facts" themselves explain nothing, they are material to the compelling question of Jim's integrity. Marlow himself later often sets them before Jim, making him acknowledge his responsibility for them. Similarly, though it is true that the really interesting thing is the "fundamental why", Conrad sees that this can only be approached through the "superficial hows", through the external aspect of Jim's actions. Thus Jim's actions cannot be dismissed, for they suggest what may happen to any self, no matter how "noble" its ideals, when put to the test of an "inexorable physical necessity".² This is what is so compelling to many men in the "Patna" episode, and causes it to recur in conversations long after and in far-flung places.

Conrad suggests both the importance and the inadequacy of looking at the "facts" of Jim's case by the story of Captain Brierly. Brierly's response to Jim is far clearer than Marlow's because he only considers Jim's action, acknowledging no other evidence for the nature and quality

¹ Joseph Conrad, Lord Jim (London, 1946).

² "Heart of Darkness", p. 105.

of Jim's self or of the unity of will and ideal that Brierly conceives a man's integrity to consist in. It is significant that, as Conrad humorously insists, Brierly is really oblivious to any individuals other than himself. His view of others leaves out any sense of their distinctive inwardness. What Brierly finds at once crucial and intolerable about Jim, therefore, is simply the external aspect of the matter - the way it exposes a failure to observe the seaman's ideal code of conduct. Brierly's response is important, not because he responds to anything deeply true in Jim, but because he responds with something deeply true of himself. This is the case with all the men drawn to witness Jim: they express their own selves in the very act of seeing or pondering his. Like Stein, like the French lieutenant and, of course, like Marlow himself, Brierly answers to Jim's reality from the nature of his own being and therefore his own sense of human integrity. "Thus", says Marlow, "apropos of Jim, I had a glimpse of the real Brierly" (p. 68). But Brierly's identity, like his sense of integrity, is relatively superficial in the sense that it leaves out of account everything in a man except his principles or code, his will in relation to these principles, and his consequent outward conduct. There seems little else with which he could meet the implications of Jim's case. And yet, it is Brierly who finds the implications of Jim's case most intolerable - and then answers to this with his own kind of integrity: by performing an outward action, suiciding by jumping off his ship. Conrad has Marlow comment on this in a way that indicates that, ironically, Brierly's action echoes Jim's. The two cases underline the same basic point: the need to acknowledge both a man's inner being and his outward actions, and, most of all, the inter-relations between the two:

"He was probably holding silent inquiry into his own case. The verdict must have been of unmitigated guilt, and he took the secret of his evidence with him in that leap into the sea. If I understand anything of men, the matter was no doubt of the gravest import, one of those trifles that awaken ideas - start into life some thought with which a man unused to such a companionship finds it impossible to live." (pp. 58-9)

This idea that the inter-relations of inner and outward life are deeply disturbing is reiterated many times in Lord Jim. Conrad alters the very form of his narrative to emphasize the point. The narrative actually begins with an omniscient observer who grasps the important points he wishes to make with certainty and clarity. For example, the reader is left in no doubt about what to think of the episode aboard the training ship which, we realize in retrospect, is the first of many similar occasions when Jim's self fails to meet an outer necessity with that noble integrity of will and "high" ideal that he desires for himself and believes is his real being. The rather flimsy, conventional ideal collapses, of course; but Jim needs to re-establish his sense of self, his sense of integral wholeness, by fantasies of knowledge and will:

The tumult and the menace of wind and sea now appeared very contemptible to Jim, increasing the regret of his awe at their inefficient menace. Now he knew what to think of it. It seemed to him he cared nothing for the gale. He could affront greater perils.... He felt angry with the brutal tumult of earth and sky for taking him unawares and checking unfairly a generous readiness for narrow escapes.... When all men flinched, then - he felt sure - he alone would know how to deal with the spurious menace of wind and seas. He knew what to think of it. Seen dispassionately, it seemed contemptible. He could detect no trace of emotion in himself, and the final effect of a staggering event was that, unnoticed and apart from the noisy crowd of boys, he exulted with fresh certitude in his avidity for adventure, and in a sense of many-sided courage. (pp. 8-9)

Strongest condemnation is signalled by the repetition of "he knew what to think of it". Jim's certainty comes from disregard of the facts, not confrontation of them; it is one way of avoiding the "fact" of his own self. The narrator implies that "dispassionate" sight is not valid: that Jim is only able to keep up his assurance in detachment from the incident and from his fellows. But in one way the narrative method is at odds with its meaning. Jim's assurance is criticized in a mocking tone that implies a similar detachment and certainty in the narrator. Although the narrator suggests that Jim is at fault for not confronting his dreams with his actions, for not feeling the full "passion" of that

conflict, the method of narration does not enforce this point. An omniscient narrator cannot be disturbed by what he sees in Jim: indeed, that type of narrative is unsuited to conveying the uncertainty Conrad suggests will be the mark of any genuine moral encounter with the world.

When Marlow enters, however, the whole case of Jim's nature and integrity is opened up again. Conrad, in his Preface to Lord Jim, made a rather nervous defence of his novel against charges he says reviewers laid against it: "that the work starting as a short story had got beyond the writer's control" (p. vii). Certainly, the first three chapters which are based on drafts for the original, much shorter tale are vastly more definite in their judgement of Jim; but when the narrative becomes Marlow's, the whole problem of moral judgement is laid bare. For if Marlow at his most confident echoes the caustic humour of the first narrator, this is far from being his constant tone; and we find another dimension to Conrad's deep-seated belief that to be fully and responsively human, to possess an authentic moral integrity, one must be able to be shattered by life, to have one's conscious and deliberated integrity put at risk. Conrad's own needs when writing Lord Jim seem to have been to lay himself, through the device of Marlow, open to doubt about Jim. Conrad, like Marlow, is well aware of the "facts" of the case, but, by choosing to develop his story through Marlow's witnessing of it, rather than through omniscient narrative, Conrad puts his own moral attitudes at risk, at least in the sense of avoiding any easy choice of attitude. With Marlow, then, Conrad is able to feel the paradox of Jim's "evident but obscure intention" (p. 131). It seems that Conrad senses and mistrusts his own tendency to a deliberated view of the world - a view either hopeless or sceptical, of the sort illustrated in one of his letter to Arthur Symons (August 29, 1908):

The earth is a temple where there is going on a mystery play, childish and poignant, ridiculous and awful enough, in all conscience. One in I've tried to behave decently. I have not degraded any quasi-religious sentiment by tears and groans; and if I have been amused or indignant, I've neither grinned or gnashed my teeth. In other words, I've tried to write with dignity, not out of regard for myself, but for the sake of the spectacle, the play with an obscure beginning and an unfathomable denouement.¹

Conrad was rather given to that kind of integrating judgement. On the other hand, as he must have realized, there were also other, opposing tendencies in his self, of the kind expressed in his praise of Daudet:

Neither did he affect a passive attitude before the spectacle of life, an attitude which in gods - and in a rare mortal here and there - may appear godlike, but assumed by some men, causes one ... to think of the melancholy quietude of an ape.... He does not sit on a pedestal in the hieratic and imbecile pose of some cheap god whose greatness consists of being too stupid to care.²

The full-length novel Lord Jim only became possible, but equally became necessary, when Conrad gave scope to both these tendencies within himself. The "inquiry" represented by the novel as a whole could not have been conducted by the first, omniscient narrator whose attitude to life was singly that of Conrad's "detached spectator".

In choosing to make his inquiry of Jim's "case" through Marlow, Conrad's impulse is one that he recognized as the only basis of artistic integrity. As he put it in a letter to the New York Times Saturday Review (August 24, 1901):

The only legitimate basis of creative work lies in the courageous recognition of all the irreconcilable antagonisms that make our life so enigmatic, so burdensome, so fascinating, so dangerous - so full of hope.³

¹ Cited in Joseph Conrad on Fiction, ed. Walter F. Wright (Lincoln, 1964), p. 32.

² "Alphonse Daudet" (1898), in Joseph Conrad, Notes on Life and Letters (London, 1949), pp. 21, 23.

³ Cites in Elsa Nettels, James and Conrad (Athens, 1977), p. 195.

The most interesting word in this is "courageous". Conrad's more obvious meaning is that it takes courage to recognize that life is antagonistic, that it contains these disturbing and absolutely contrary forces. Yet the meaning of "courageous" that is most important for Conrad, and gives his final affirmation "so full of hope" its ring of conviction, comes from feeling the full sense in which those antagonistic forces are "irreconcilable", so that genuine artistic integrity must be a wholeness, a one-ness that contains them as irreconcilable. Conrad at his best makes his reader live in a world which is both farcical and tragic, which we are made to see distinctly and then to feel acutely - a world where contrary sensations are felt almost simultaneously but are not resolved. But the point is that we only feel the full force of the contrary sensation, and only require "courage" to recognize that the antagonisms of life are irreconcilable, if we acknowledge, too, a fundamental impulse to reconcile. Certainly, this need is not for any simple reconciliation of differences, but rather to be able to feel that the opposition has been understood, that it has been netted into some kind of loose unity by that understanding. Conrad demonstrates exactly this need when he makes his final comment "so full of hope", where the triumph of his "hope" is that it includes the recognition of all those other kinds of response which are not only possible, but necessary.

His more ordinary response, the deliberated "integrity" of a final scepticism, he no doubt also felt to be the result of having considered all the facts and possibilities of life. Nevertheless, that kind of integrity actually serves as a way of protecting his fullest self against disillusion. Although he believes that he can maintain this attitude longest without its being broken by experience, its real function is to prevent any such experience from impinging on the self in its full reality. There are times when Conrad saw this, and could recognize the insufficiency, the narrowness and narrowing effect on himself, of his sceptical stance.

He acknowledges then that his need to be most responsive, most open to the possibilities of life, may only be answered by allowing his optimism play against his scepticism; but he also acknowledges his need by allowing himself that sensitive instrument with which he explores his wish for "reconciliation" - the centring witness of the moral world, Marlow. Marlow, then, represents both these needs, to be comprehensive and yet to feel differences; and he represents them, not only in the way Conrad draws his character (where his qualities of compassion and yet discrimination, his typical attitude of scrutiny and sensitivity, make him very like Conrad himself), but also in the way he is used in the narrative scheme of Lord Jim. In the sense that Marlow does narrate the story of Jim, Conrad implies that he has "realized" Jim's distinctive oneness, has attained that measure of understanding and intuition that enables him to acknowledge, too, the parts of that identity that he cannot fathom. But Conrad also poses Marlow as Jim's complement, in a sense his "irreconcilable antagonism". In having Marlow narrate, then, Conrad gives his story of Jim the essential quality of Jim's personal "life". Jim has "identity" - his story may be told by pointing to his response to "opportunity", his friendships, his love - but he is also a shifting, indefinitely potential moral being which defies complete definition.

Clearly, the sense in which Jim is an indefinite, complex subjective self is what interests Conrad most about him. Like Kurtz in "Heart of Darkness", he is presented as being almost totally isolated in his inward self-sufficiency. Marlow perceives that "the point ... is that of all mankind Jim had no dealings but with himself" (p. 339), and Conrad certainly implies that this is the source of Jim's attraction for Marlow. Conrad's point is that inner, subjective existence calls for, and actually calls forth, an answering life beyond itself. Thus Jim draws Marlow to witness him, causes Marlow to affirm his reality by watching.

Jim's inner being can only be "realized" by something that is other than it, and Marlow's articulateness, his maturer experience, and his position in the ranks of seamen, make him Jim's necessary counterpart. Yet Conrad's portrayal of Jim is different from his characterization of Kurtz. It is true that he intends both figures to represent the inaccessible root of human life, its infinitely potential heart, which suggests, to Conrad, the sources of a despair in life as well as a persisting hope in it. But a crucial aspect of his interest in Jim is signified in the way Jim does need Marlow to "realize" him. Inward, subjective being - especially a man's sense of his self and of the integrity of that self - cannot be maintained without some answering confirmation, indeed replenishment, from outside. This is a key perception in Lord Jim. The opposite notion, that the outer life must be fed by an inner source, is far more commonplace, and only requires brief exposition in this novel, as we have seen, through the case of Captain Brierly. What really interests Conrad, then, is not the inner life nor the outer one - neither Jim nor Marlow become very interesting characters individually - but the tenuous link between them, the need that brings Jim to Marlow and draws Marlow to Jim.

This explains Conrad's persistence with the notion of the "inquiry". Although he does need to emphasize how mistaken are our common ideas about the obviousness or accessibility of a man's real self, he can suggest the disjunction of inner life and outer appearance fairly simply. The mark of his assurance on this point is his sardonic humour - always suggestive of a completed thought in Conrad. Thus the Inquiry beats "futilely round the well-known fact, and the play of questions upon it was as instructive as the tapping with a hammer on an iron box, were the object to find out what's inside" (p. 56). The more difficult thing to convey, however, is how and why the investigation is necessary. Jim himself, in his inarticulate way, feels the necessity of it. Clearly, he

sees it as a way of defending himself, of insisting that the outward appearance of the episode does not suggest its real truth. He wishes to disassociate himself from his actions - not by disclaiming responsibility, but by disclaiming guilt. He also wishes to make it clear that he is not like the others - the German captain, the engineer and the second engineer. But this attitude is no use to him, bringing him none of the desired purgation:

He spoke slowly; he remembered swiftly and with extreme vividness; he could have reproduced like an echo the moaning of the engineer for the better information of these men who wanted facts. After his first feeling of revolt he had come round to the view that only a meticulous precision of statement would bring out the true horror behind the appalling face of things. The facts those men were so eager to know had been visible, tangible, open to the senses, occupying their place in space and time, requiring for their existence a fourteen-hundred-ton steamer and twenty-seven minutes by the watch; they made a whole that had features, shades of expression, a complicated aspect that could be remembered by the eye, and something else besides, something invisible, a directing spirit of perdition that dwelt within, like a malevolent soul in a detestable body. He was anxious to make this clear. This had not been a common affair, everything in it had been of the utmost importance, and fortunately he remembered everything. He wanted to go on talking for truth's sake, perhaps for his own sake also; and while his utterance was deliberate, his mind positively flew round and round the serried circle of facts that had surged up all about him to cut him off from the rest of his kind: it was like a creature that, finding itself imprisoned within an enclosure of high stakes, dashes round and round, distracted in the night, trying to find a weak spot, a crevice, a place to scale, some opening through which it may squeeze itself and escape. This awful activity of mind made him hesitate at times in his speech (pp. 30-1)

Although it is true that Jim goes to the Inquiry to disassociate himself from the rest of the crew and to show that his behaviour does not reflect his fundamental and continuing integrity, he could only prove this disjunction by invoking the connections of one man to another, and of the outward aspect of the world to its inner, "directing spirit". This means that Jim hopes (as, indeed, does Marlow) that the official Inquiry will give him the opportunity both to defend himself against the charges of

those who do not believe in his integrity and to confess himself to those who do. When the official Inquiry fails to do these things, largely because Jim can find no form of speech to articulate and defend his innocent "real" self, he turns to outward action to express his integrity publicly and to inspire the belief of other men in him, while Marlow turns to speech to affirm his own belief in Jim and to inspire the belief of others.

Jim's inability to express his inner sense of integrity leaves him feeling trapped in his inner self. The image of him as a trapped animal recurs all through the novel. The description of him as "like a creature that, finding itself imprisoned within an enclosure of high stakes, dashes round and round, distracted in the night, trying to find a weak spot, a crevice, a place to scale, some opening through which it may squeeze itself and escape" anticipates the scene of Jim's imprisonment in the Rajah's courtyard at Patusan. It also suggests, by reverse, his entrance into Patusan, and his assault on Sherif Ali's mountain stronghold. Activities that seem like escapes from self may in fact be ways of entering into it. This complexity is the source of Marlow's persisting uncertainty about Jim's actions: "what I could never make up my mind about was whether his line of conduct amounted to shirking his ghost or to facing him out" (p. 197). Speech is the other avenue through which the inner self may find its realization; and Conrad pictures the unrealized Jim as mute or else with the imperfect primitive articulation of an animal. Jim describes his feeling when adrift from the "Patna" in the longboat in just these terms:

"I said nothing. There are no words for the sort of things I wanted to say. If I had opened my lips just then I would have simply howled like an animal. I was asking myself when I would wake up." (p. 124)

But Conrad also sees speech as having a close relationship with action, as being, in fact, a part of action. Jim will only find words when he has

admitted his actions. More importantly, Conrad obviously intends that Marlow should be felt as being very active, and he emphasizes his point that Marlow's activity lies in his speech, in his energetic testimony of Jim, by stressing his physical somnolence:

with the very first word uttered Marlow's body, extended at rest in the seat, would become very still, as though his spirit had winged its way back into the lapse of time and were speaking through his lips from the past. (p 33)

Even so, it is typical of Conrad that, even while he sees the close connection between speech and action, he maintains an acute sense of their distinctness as well. In the final episode of his life (to take the most striking example), Jim frames his "message to the impeccable world" (p. 339) in the action of going mutely to Doramin after he has failed to articulate it in the letter.

The most important example of Conrad's capacity to see two things as distinct and as coalesced, of course, is the relationship between Marlow and Jim. Very often Marlow is described as the means of bringing Jim's inner being into the outer world. It is Marlow who provides the opportunity which "like the Eastern bride had come veiled" (p. 146) to Jim's side; and the consummation of the marriage of Jim's potential with Marlow's answering capacities is seen as necessary to the realization of Jim's real identity. Marlow rejects Jim's thanks for the opportunity of Patusan and Jim's promises that he will show himself worthy of this confidence in him:

"'Do not misapprehend,' I interrupted. 'It is not in your power to make me regret anything.' There would be no regrets; but if there were, it would be altogether my own affair: on the other hand, I wished him to understand clearly that this arrangement, this - this - experiment, was his own doing; he was responsible for it and no one else. 'Why? Why?,' he stammered, 'this is the very thing that I ...' I begged him not to be dense, and he looked more puzzled than ever. He was in a fair way to make life intolerable to himself.... It was impossible to be angry with him: I could not help a smile, and told him that in the old days people who went on like this were on the way of becoming hermits in a wilderness.... He had shown a desire, I continued inflexibly, to go out and shut the door after him." (p. 231)

Marlow insists that Jim is responsible for the ways he finds to "be" in the world. This is, of course, the very same insistence behind Marlow's criticism that Jim has not felt the guilt as well as the responsibility for his jump from the "Patna". Conrad often portrays his characters in terms that "place" them, critically, on a scale ranging from utter detachment and scepticism to blithe ignorance of the truths of existence - including their own. Thus he implies condemnation of the attitude (which he is inclined to share) taken by his sceptics, such as Axel Heyst in Victory or Decoud in Nostramo, as well as the attitude (which he is inclined to despise and yet envy) of his innocents, like the harlequin Russian in "Heart of Darkness" or Natalia Haldin in Under Western Eyes. In the Marlows of "Heart of Darkness" and Lord Jim, however, Conrad creates characters who represent his more complex integrity, who see the world as inimical, even indifferent, to man and yet for that very reason as offering, too, the conditions for moral heroism and greatness. In her book Conrad and James, Elsa Nettels points to this distinguishing quality of Marlow:

Of Conrad's characters Marlow is the most accessible to sudden glimpses into infernal regions, to sudden visions of a universe drained of light and bereft of order. It is of the essence of Marlow's character, however, that he will not lose himself in "the chaos of dark thoughts", and such visions last only a moment.¹

The most important implication of this, however, is the need Conrad felt for this double capacity: to see things as dark as they are, and yet to appreciate that the very darkness of the world is also the medium in which human-beings can (and must) achieve selfhood and discover the fullest integrity of which the self is capable. This is why Marlow insists that Jim see the opportunity of going to Patusan as his own responsibility. The fate he most fears for Jim, whose potentialities for moral feeling and

¹ Elsa Nettels, op. cit., p. 183.

whose impulse to moral integrity he values so highly, is a moral inanition: "It was ten to one that I had saved him from starvation - of that peculiar sort invariably associated with drink" (p. 184). In his attempt to prevent Jim from shutting himself off from the world, Marlow proposes the opportunity as only something which meets Jim's own inner need. In the sense, too, that Marlow is Jim's "opportunity", Marlow also denies any real separateness from him. He explains his sense of being bonded to Jim by pointing to the common setting of their moral identities within the wider life of seamen and the still wider life of humanity:

"In no other kind of life is the illusion more wide of reality - in no other is the beginning all illusion - the disenchantment more swift - the subjugation more complete. Hadn't we all commenced with the same desire, ended with the same knowledge, carried the memory of the same cherished glamour through the sordid days of imprecation? What wonder that when some heavy prod gets home the bond is found to be close; that besides the fellowship of the craft there is felt the strength of wider feeling - the feeling that binds a man to a child." (p. 129)

Sometimes Marlow sees his relationship to Jim as a still closer one: as a kind of readiness in the outer world to elicit, extend, and confirm Jim's selfhood. Marlow professes "readiness to believe implicitly anything he thought fit to tell me" (p. 127), echoing in this the idea expressed in the epigraph of the novel: "It is certain any conviction gains infinitely the moment another soul will believe in it". The full reality of Jim's self is brought into being - to realization in the world of action and in Marlow's own story of him - by Marlow's belief in its existence. It is a belief in Jim's essential identity, a distinctive being that shows itself only imperfectly in externals. While the meaning of those externals, the "language of facts", as Marlow calls them (p. 340), is enigmatic, and will be construed differently by each person who reads them, there is a common fundamental response evoked in all of the men who find the enigma of Jim compelling: for them, Jim has a "real" existence in the way that he does not for others.

This point is enforced for us because it is Stein who articulates it, rather than Marlow:

"'Gewiss', he said, and stood still holding up the candelabrum, but without looking at me. 'Evident! What is it that by inward pain makes him know himself? What is it that for you and me makes him - exist?'

At that moment it was difficult to believe in Jim's existence - starting from a country parsonage, blurred by crowds of men as by clouds of dust, silenced by the clashing claims of life and death in a material world - but his imperishable reality came to me with a convincing, with an irresistible force!" (p. 216)

Marlow goes to Stein, feeling himself too close to Jim to be entirely sure of his own sense of him. For Marlow, Stein is especially qualified to "diagnose" (p. 212) Jim's case. He has the same kind of intelligent sympathy that attracts confidence as Marlow himself; though, indeed, he is now so detached from the life he observes - that of men as well as butterflies and beetles - that he can see it even more clearly perhaps than Marlow himself. Moreover, the first part of Stein's life was full of the heroic adventure that Jim dreams of. Marlow explains that this is partly why he considered Stein "an eminently suitable person to receive my confidences about Jim's difficulties as well as my own" (p. 203).

But Stein is also qualified to speak because his life has included more than this. Stein has gone past the early adventurous and "dreamlike" part of his existence. He has found a way to realize as well his capacities to be a trader, an authority on entomology, and a self-sufficient but not misanthropic solitary. And yet his solitude, which is a kind of darkness beside the light of the "real" world, enables him to understand and value the romantic ideal by which Jim meant to shape his life. For Stein, it has the spontaneity and the dark certainty of a dream. He would have Jim embrace that idealistic "dream" of himself as totally as possible: it is, Stein sees, the real substance of human life; the rest is merely existence:

"Yes! Very funny this terrible thing is. A man that is born falls into a dream like a man who falls into the sea. If he tries to climb out into the air as inexperienced people endeavour to do, he drowns - nicht war? ... No! I tell you! The way is to the destructive element submit yourself, and with the exertions of your hands and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you up. So if you ask me - how to be? ... That was the way. To follow the dream, and again to follow the dream - and so - ewig - usque ad finem ... '" (pp. 214-5)¹

Because man is "not a masterpiece" (p. 208) his life is complicated by the gap between his needs and his capacities, between his wishes and his opportunities. Thus only by pursuing the path of ideal self-realization, in the deepest sense of the word, a path that may well involve self-destruction in the ordinary sense of the word, can he attain something like the perfection of the butterfly in whose "frail wings, in the white tracings, in the gorgeous markings he could see other things, an image of something as perishable and defying destruction as these delicate and lifeless tissues displaying a splendour unmarred by death" (p. 207). The largeness of Stein's self, his capacity to understand and accept the cost as well as the greatness of this capacity in man, gives his response to Jim's case a weight of authority in the novel out of all proportion to his minor role in the plot.

Both Stein and Marlow, even though they observe Jim from a distance great enough to doubt their judgement of him, understand him at least well enough to know one thing he needs. They can give him a new opportunity: going to Patusan. On the other hand, they certainly cannot

¹ It is surprising how often this famous remark is misinterpreted by Conrad's critics and readers. Stein is not asserting that life is a "dream" only for idealists and romantics, though this is how some critics have understood his remark (e.g. Roger Penn Warren's introduction to the 1951 Modern Library edition of Nostromo, and H.M. Daleski, op. cit., p. 96). It is the "dream" which is really life, as Stein sees it, the "dream" of our moral aspirations and ideals; and it is only in and through the medium of these, rather than in the "air" of mere physical survival, that the individual "realizes" what is both deepest in all human life and most distinctive in his individuality.

be sure what he will make of the opportunity. That is a matter of his own "fate" - the shape that the needs and capacities of his self will make of his life.

For us, however, the relationship between Jim and Marlow is sometimes presented with the stress, not on the way Marlow "realizes" Jim, but on the way Jim may be said to realize Marlow. Jim represents capacities in Marlow, who defends Jim with such energy because he feels Jim's actions and needs as potential in himself. His wish to understand him is seen as a need to understand the things he does not know about himself - to realize the dark recesses of his own identity not in action but by becoming aware of them:

"it seemed to me that the less I understood the more I was bound to him in the name of that doubt which is the inseparable part of our knowledge. I did not know so much more about myself." (p. 221)

Sometimes, Jim signifies capacities in Marlow that the latter has known but has forgotten. He feels his impulse to witness Jim as a need to be convinced of a moral fulness in his own nature, of something in his self which may be extinguished if not rekindled by moral sympathy with another self:

"He was a youngster of the sort you like to see about you; of the sort you like to imagine yourself to have been; of the sort whose appearance claims the fellowship of these illusions you had thought gone out, extinct, cold, and which, as if rekindled at the approach of another flame, give a flutter deep, deep down somewhere, give a flutter of light ..."
(p. 128)

This inner need of Marlow's moral being helps explain his attitude to his own narrative. Jim's life provides the opportune outward circumstances in which Marlow may realize - recognize and establish - the moral imperatives of his own nature. Hence his great concern to express the story thoughtfully, his sense of the responsibility of speaking, and his need to offer the story to another - which is a need to seek the confirmation of his own moral identity and integrity.

Clearly, the fact that Jim's identity is in a sense realized in Marlow and Marlow's in Jim is important to Conrad. These relationships suggest a necessary fundamental reciprocity between individuals - a kind of moral symbiosis that human-beings cannot escape. They also suggest a common ground of humanness - a shared potentiality for failing to meet opportunity with integrity, as well as for success in mastering the fate of one's distinctive nature and circumstances with moral integrity. Conrad always admires the approximation to this inner kinship in the outer world - the binding "fellowship of the craft". But his other crucial insight, that an individual needs to define himself against a background of shared humanity, against other individuals, gives weight and meaning to this insight, that one human-being is defined in and through others.

By itself, Conrad's point that the self needs to be resisted, that resistance to individuality implies recognition of it, can be made simply. Conrad does so through a quite simple and direct mode of narrative exposition - in the character-vignette of Gentleman Brown. Brown's defining quality is a "fierce, aggressive disdain" (p. 354) for the world he bullies. But he is only able to be himself when he is resisted by the people he would exploit. Marlow describes Brown's incursion into Patusan in these terms:

"A tumult of war-cries, the vibrating clang of gongs, the deep snoring of drums, yells of rage, crashes of volley-firing, made an awful din, in which Brown sat confounded but steady at the tiller, working himself into a fury of hate and rage against those people who dared to defend themselves." (p. 359)

The force of this description depends on the absolute opposition of Brown's outgoing aggression and the people's purely self-protective defence, between his inexplicable animosity and their very understandable resistance. Brown thrives on this resistance, and so his worst moment comes, not when he has immense odds against him, but when he meets Jim who

does not even acknowledge him as a threat:

"'I could see directly I set my eyes on him what sort of a fool he was,' gasped the dying Brown. 'He a man! Hell! He was a hollow sham. As if he couldn't have said straight out, 'Hands off my plunder!' blast him! That would have been like a man! Rot his superior soul! He had me there - but he hadn't devil enough in him to make an end of me. - No he! A thing like that letting me off as if I wasn't worth a kick!'" (p. 344)

In his most subtle explorations of moral selfhood or integrity, however, Conrad sees not only the need for definition "against" but also the need for definition "through". Thus, as I have pointed out, Jim confronts the Inquiry partly hoping for some purgation by defying a common judgement against him, by defining his separateness from the rest of the officers of the "Patna", and, most importantly, by fighting Marlow himself. But Jim also goes before the Inquiry intending to confess to the men there and to draw from them such absolution as he may find through their understanding.

Another example of the way Jim defines himself both through and against comes long after the Inquiry, in his triumphant sense of himself in Patusan. Earlier he had needed the reassurance of Marlow's fundamental and enduring belief in him. In Patusan, however, he looks about him at the success of his efforts to build and control a whole community, and feels that his real self can be best seen as a defiant disproof of Marlow's judgement that he is not strong enough to be a seaman. Indeed, Conrad's double insight into the ways individuality is realized considerably complicates the questions of "belief" he explores in this novel. Marlow believes in Jim, and makes that "solemn declaration of [his] readiness to believe implicitly anything he thought fit to tell me" (p. 127); but this is not an undertaking to believe in the absolute validity of Jim's own view of himself. For Marlow, there is no question of Jim's "integrity" in that limited sense of not telling lies. On the other hand, he believes "in" Jim as a man of a more complex kind of integrity than Jim himself

thinks he possesses. A similar paradox arises when Jewel cannot believe Jim's quite truthful statement, that he cannot live in the larger world outside Patusan because he is not good enough, and cannot believe it because she believes in his real self as it has been revealed in all his actions in Patusan. For her, Jim's integrity is of that deeper kind which might allow a man actually to lie about his own merits. For us, of course, Jim is defined both through and against his actions, through and against the belief in and about him that he inspires.

At the moment when Jim and Marlow feel closest to each other, feel the bond of their common humanness most profoundly, they speak in terms which acknowledge both their difference and their complementarity:

"while the yards swung creaking and the heavy boom came surging over, Jim and I, alone as it were, to leeward of the mainsail, clasped each other's hands and exchanged the last hurried words.... On that occasion the sort of formality that had always been present in our intercourse vanished from our speech; I believe I called him 'dear boy,' and he tacked on the words 'old man' to some half-uttered expression of gratitude, as though his risk set off against my years had made us more equal in age and in feeling. There was a moment of real and profound intimacy, unexpected and short-lived like a glimpse of some everlasting, of some saving truth." (pp. 240-1)

Conrad typically finds his creative impetus in just such perceptions of the complementarity of opposites. A small but characteristic example is his sketch of the German captain and the chief engineer of the "Patna":

"Outwardly they were badly matched: one dull-eyed, malevolent, and of soft fleshy curves; the other lean, all hollows, with a head long and bony like the head of an old horse." (p. 23)

If Conrad presents these two as caricatures, there is a subtle verisimilitude in the portrayal. For it makes us feel, not that we might easily meet individuals like these, but that we do need to see the world in this way. And yet, of course, seeing it in that way is dangerous. Our understanding does very often lie in seeing polarities and contrasts, and yet the polarities and contrasts we see may be merely caricatures of

reality which flatter our sense that we comprehend it. Even in the case of the captain and engineer of the "Patna", there may be more to them than we can know. Behind the caricature there is, perhaps, an enigma. In the case of Jim, there certainly is an enigma behind the apparently easily-comprehended surface - and it is just this discrepancy, or rather this complementarity between opposing aspects of Jim's moral being, that makes him enduringly important to Marlow:

"I can't explain to you who haven't seen him and who hear his words only at second hand the mixed nature of my feelings. It seemed to me I was being made to comprehend the Inconceivable - and I know of nothing to compare with the discomfort of such a sensation. I was made to look at the convention that lurks in all truth and on the essential sincerity of falsehood. He appealed to all sides at once - to the side turned perpetually to the light of day, and to that side of us which, like the other hemisphere of the moon, exists stealthily in perpetual darkness, with only a fearful ashy light falling at times on the edge. He swayed me. I own to it, I own up. The occasion was obscure, insignificant - what you will: a lost youngster, one in a million - but then he was one of us; an incident as completely devoid of importance as the flooding of an ant-heap, and yet the mystery of his attitude got hold of me as though he had been an individual in the forefront of his kind, as if the obscure truth involved were momentous enough to affect mankind's conception of itself...." (p. 93)

Conrad always tended to see the world in terms of such absolute and yet complementary oppositions as these. His creative integrity lay in discovering and acknowledging them as the substance of his experience - that is to say, the substance both of the outer material reality of the world as he saw it, and of the inner moral reality of his self as it sought to realize itself. By seeing this polarity in the world, he gives his sense of it definition: by recognizing both his worst fears and his greatest hopes he feels that he has made a valid response to the world, one that will not be destroyed by it. Conrad feels that by naming the opposite poles is a total way of responding because it draws a circle around all the possibilities ranging between the two, but also because he may thus suggest whatever is "other". The things outside the circle are

also given definition by its drawing. This feeling is very evident in his typical choice of the setting for his character's confrontation, isolated in the middle of nowhere - frequently on board that microcosmic world, the ship. As in the passage cited above where Marlow and Jim part, calling each other "old man" and "dear boy", the circle drawn around them by their oppositeness, the defining line of their humanity represented by the ship itself, also defines the universe beyond it as "other", and thereby allows the human drama to have form (whether in tragedy or farce) in defiance of the careless chaos of that universe.

As Lord Jim draws to its close, Conrad confronts his own need to feel that he has responded to the compelling enigma of Jim's case as acutely as he can, and, moreover, that has made his novel as suggestive as possible of the range and difficulty of his response. He does this in a way that is already familiar to us. In "Heart of Darkness", as in Lord Jim, Conrad finally presents what he feels to be the key aspects of his response very starkly. In "Heart of Darkness", he has Marlow confront the necessity of the "lie", thus stripping Marlow's moral being down to its essential imperatives. It becomes, for Marlow in that novel, a matter of maintaining his integrity by the very action which is most hateful to him, and which would seem to be most destructive of that integrity. Lord Jim, too, ends with a similar stark confrontation of the three major aspects of Conrad's awareness in that novel. Finally, Marlow is most essentially the witness to and articulation of Jim's self, is his least assured about, but most "believing" in Jim. Similarly, Jim becomes most definitely himself - an inarticulate man "overwhelmed", as Marlow describes him, "by his own personality - the gift of that destiny which he had done his best to master" (p. 341). So, too, has Marlow's audience - the reader of his letter - now only the most essential qualities required of an audience.

Marlow becomes increasingly aware of the distance between what he is doing - narrating stories - and the particular life he wants to comprehend. At first, however, his self-scrutiny shows him as well what narrative may do. While he suggests, for instance, the inadequacy of his account by naming it the "story" of Jim's love, he does insist, too, that his story will not be what the ordinary notion of a "love-story" implies:

"I suppose you think it is a story that you can imagine for yourselves. We have heard so many such stories, and the majority of us don't believe them to be stories of love at all. For the most part we look upon them as stories of opportunities: episodes of passion at best, or perhaps only of youth and temptation, doomed to forgetfulness in the end, even if they pass through the reality of tenderness and regret. This view mostly is right, and perhaps in this case, too.... Yet I don't know. To tell this story is by no means so easy as it should be - were the ordinary standpoint adequate. Apparently it is a story very much like the others: for me, however, there is visible in its background the melancholy figure of a woman

Thus whether the shadow is of my imagination or not, I can at all events point out the significant fact of an unforgotten grave. When I tell you besides that Jim with his own hands had worked at the rustic fence, you will perceive directly the difference, the individual side of the story. There is in his espousal of memory and affection belonging to another human being something characteristic of his seriousness." (pp. 275-6)

Here Marlow is still able to appreciate the way a story may realize the distinctive, integral selfhood of an individual. A story that can capture some truth of that self in its particulars will become convincing and have some disturbing effect as the actual life has. The detail that Jim has built the fence himself convinces us of a general truth about his nature - of his fundamental capacity to answer to the call of another human-being, to opportunity, or to the imperatives of his own moral ideals. The particulars of Jim's "case", those glimpses of him as if seen through a shifting fog, convince Marlow of the possibility of moral heroism in the world, the possibility that a man can confront his fate with integrity, even if not "master" it in the conventional sense. Marlow is finally able to affirm that, by not thwarting the integrating

moral impulse of his nature, Jim finds a way of bringing to realization the "heroics of his fancy" (p. 151). Moreover, in the story of Jim's success, Marlow can affirm a general human capacity for such moral heroism; indeed, Marlow expects that once the general truth of Jim's "seriousness" is realized, once Jim's constancy to his ideal of conduct is seen, then that general truth will be evident in every particular. (Note, once again, this meaning in Marlow's assurance that it is not in Jim's power to make him "regret" anything.)

Asking himself the question so close to his own heart, "May a story realize the innermost truth of an individual life?", Marlow answers here with an affirmative. He implies a similar answer, too, in the case of his "love-story" of Jim and Jewel. Stories of love, like stories of heroism and tragedy - finally, like any story of a self realizing its deepest needs with uncompromising moral integrity, and discovering (and accepting) its "fate" in doing so - are only revealed to someone standing at some distance. Indeed, Conrad suggests, these experiences are not identifiable at all as love, tragedy, or self-realization, to the people directly involved. Thus Marlow makes Jim's integrity and his love accessible to our comprehension by witnessing them only indirectly:

"He told me further that he didn't know what made him hang on - but of course we may guess. He sympathised deeply with the defenceless girl, at the mercy of that 'mean, cowardly scoundrel.'" (p. 288)

Similarly, Jim's own consistency, the ⁱⁿcontinuous web of his particular identity, is only evident to someone outside him, someone who, like Marlow, is interested and yet other:

"He was weary of these attempts upon his life. He had had his fill of these alarms. He was sick of them. He assured me he was angry with the girl for deceiving him. He had followed her under the impression that it was she who wanted his help, and how he had half a mind to turn on his heel and go back in disgust. 'Do you know,' he commented, profoundly, 'I rather think I was not quite myself for whole weeks on end about that time.' 'Oh yes. You were though,' I couldn't help contradicting." (p. 298)

Just as we may recognize that Marlow's first insight - that the particulars of a story may realize its general truth for us, which, in turn, reveals that truth as inherent in each particular - is confirmed in the way Jim and his life are made real to us in Lord Jim, so, too, does the success of Conrad's novel depend on Marlow's second insight being right. If Jim depends on Marlow to realize the truth of his confessions, Marlow depends on his audience to realize more about his tale than he can. Because Marlow is participant as well as observer, someone beyond him will be able to see the tale more clearly, seeing Marlow and accounting for the influence on his narrative of the need that has drawn him to Jim:

"I am telling you so much about my own instinctive feelings and bemused reflections because there remains so little to be told of him. He existed for me, and after all it is only through me that he exists for you. I've led him out by the hand; I have paraded him before you. Were my commonplace fears unjust? I won't say - not even now. You may be able to tell better, since the proverb has it that the onlookers see most of the game." (p. 224)

Although, as Conrad implies, the way we respond to the story of Lord Jim will be as much influenced by our own needs as was Marlow's response to Jim, we may compensate for the limitations of our point of view by acknowledging many others. Conrad certainly favours a dramatic presentation of the world in his novels, which gives no one agent's view ultimate authority, and which requires the reader to try to piece together a complete sense of the world evoked by the novel without giving him any grounds for ultimately believing that he has succeeded.

We are made increasingly aware of the insufficiency of any single account of the world - whether it be the account of any one narrator, or the single stance of scepticism or optimism - as the novel draws to its close. Our awareness of this is prompted, however, by Marlow's increasing distance from Jim and his more explicit acknowledgement of his narrative role. Now we see the other side to Conrad's argument that greater distance from the individual brings greater understanding. Greater

distance from Jim also brings falsification of the real story. Ideally, Marlow hints, one would have Jim tell his own story, thereby partly realizing his self (rather than Marlow's for instance) in the very mode of his narration:

"I put it down here for you as though I had been an eyewitness. My information was fragmentary, but I've fitted the pieces together, and there is enough of them to make an intelligible picture. I wonder how he would have related it himself. He has confided so much in me that at times it seems as though he must come in presently and tell the story in his own words, in his careless and yet feeling voice, with his offhand manner, a little puzzled, a little bothered, a little hurt, but now and then by a word or phrase giving one of these glimpses of his very own self that were never any good for purposes of orientation." (p. 343)

Thus, to emphasize their fragmentariness and the insufficiency of their multiple attempts to capture the entirety of Jim's being, his real integrity, Marlow names each story that comes to him as a story. So, there are stories of romance, stories of adventure, "harrowing and desperate" stories (p. 356). Marlow's critical awareness becomes so acute that when he comes to speak of the way he has put all these stories together to arrive at his present narrative, he does this in a way that suggests he feels this a desperate necessity rather than a narrative triumph. Of all Marlow's sources, Brown seems the most unlikely. As Conrad intends, we find him more of an adventure-story caricature than any of the other major witnesses Marlow consults, and find Marlow's chancing upon him improbably fortuitous:

"Till I discovered the fellow my information was incomplete, but most unexpectedly I did come upon him a few hours before he gave up his arrogant ghost. Fortunately he was willing and able to talk between the choking fits of asthma." (p. 344)

Nevertheless, this episode serves to emphasize Marlow's narrative capacity. Stories (or, described another way, "unwanted confidences") do all "come to" Marlow. His self reaches out for a more varied and perhaps more comprehensive vision that is answered to by opportunity. By the end of the novel, Marlow is shown stripped down to the essential quality of his

moral nature: to his need to witness with his own kind of moral integrity.

Jim is similarly reduced to the fate of his integrity. At first, his capacity for faithfulness is evident in the trust given him by the people of Patusan. His people's great belief in him calls an equally great sense of responsibility from Jim:

"all his conquests, the trust, the fame, the friendships, the love - all these things that made him master had made him a captive. He looked with an owner's eye at the peace of the evening, at the river, at the houses, at the everlasting life of the forests, at the life of the old mankind, at the secrets of the land, at the pride of his own heart: but it was they that possessed him and made him their own to the innermost thought, to the slightest stir of blood, to his last breath." (pp. 247-8)

When he confronts Brown, however, it is apart from the people, and he argues for Brown's release - for the first time, against their wishes. He still believes himself to be acting for their good, but he carries out the confrontation on their behalf not on the public stage (as with the fight against Sherif Ali), but in private - what he really faces is himself. Finally he goes to Doramin completely alone, not allowing Jewel to accompany him in the last encounter, abandoning his earthly bride to "celebrate his pitiless wedding with a shadowy ideal of conduct" (p. 416). But, although at the last Jim's actions seem to demonstrate the truth of Marlow's insight that "of all mankind Jim had no dealings but with himself" (p. 339), Jim does make two rather surprising affirmations of his continuing faithfulness to others. He implies that he is being true to Jewel by leaving her: "'Enough, poor girl,' he said. 'I should not be worth having.'" Similarly, he says to Doramin that in wishing to let Brown go he has "no thought but for the people's good" (p. 389). Certainly, all this can be read as evidence of Jim's characteristic tendency to abandon others out of idealistic self-delusion, and it often is read that way. But it is also true, I think, that the novel finally leaves us with a greater conviction of a deeper faithfulness, of a genuinely moral

integrity, in Jim, than of a self intent to the last on pursuing an empty as well as destructive egotistic dream.

Our conviction here does not come from accepting Marlow's judgement. Indeed, he narrates the story of Jim's last adventure with almost no comment, and in the prefacing and closing remarks to that narrative he shows only uncertainty:

"... the question is whether at the last he had not confessed to a faith mightier than the laws of order and progress.

I affirm nothing. Perhaps you may pronounce - after you've read. There is much truth - after all - in the common expression 'under a cloud.' It is impossible to see him clearly - especially as it is through the eyes of others that we take our last look at him." (p. 339)

Neither do we feel that any sympathy for Jim's final action is likely to come from Marlow's "reader" in the novel, who affirms that an individual must act with a strong sense of responsibility to his fellows. This last member of Marlow's original audience represents the essential quality of a listener or a reader, just as Marlow is now the essential witness and story-teller, and Jim the absolutely lone moral being. The listener has a necessary interest in Jim, but interest does not necessitate any greater sympathy with Jim's behaviour:

"... I don't suppose you've forgotten," went on [Marlow's] letter. "You alone have showed an interest in him 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 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, you maintained that we must fight in the ranks or our lives don't count ..." (pp. 338-9)

Conrad seems to endorse both Marlow's and this reader's point of view. We do acknowledge that, as Marlow implies, it is not possible to come to any certain judgement of Jim. We also acknowledge the rightness of the "reader's" argument that an individual must feel his largest human responsibility in order to realize his own moral integrity fully. All the same, because the apparent disparity between Jim's protestations of moral faithfulness and his actions do not leave us condemning him, we succeed in "realizing" his moral being in what Conrad implies is the most profound way possible. We have to acknowledge our own faith in the uncertain, the ambiguous unknown; the very fact of our indistinct vision may be proof of having got hold of something real. Thus we "realize" Jim's selfhood most fully by seeing that we may not understand him. Conrad's most difficult and crucial understanding in Lord Jim is just this. He shows us that being able to ultimately acknowledge persisting doubt about an individual, realizing we cannot make any assured condemnation of or feel any certain hope in his moral being, and facing that doubt and that risk with the utmost integrity, is the greatest affirmation we may make of the value of human life.

CHAPTER 4

THE WAVES: FROM "VISION" TO RHYTHM"

As I have suggested, The Waves is far more conscious and confident about its own exploration of life than To the Lighthouse had been. Now Woolf sees that, if she is to present her "vision" as truthfully as possible, she must present it in a more complex way. She sees that the most searching exploration she can make in her novel is one which recognizes the conditions of that exploration. So she makes this novel self-reflexively aware of the constraints and possibilities of narrative, while, for her own part, she acknowledges her own involvement as author of, and participant in, the rhythms of personal life she presents in The Waves.

Woolf's new enterprise requires different narrative handling from her earlier novels, different presentation of character, and a different conception of plot - features which most critics of The Waves comment on at length. The three critical accounts I find most interesting all do so. Maria Di Battista discusses the novel's authorial anonymity and characterization, arguing that Woolf's authorial anonymity is, paradoxically, closely linked with her desire for self-definition, and that this paradox lies at the heart of the novel's distinctive vision of human character and human life as a whole.¹ A.D. Moody usefully clarifies various issues that critics have often muddled, insisting (and his own account is based on this belief) that we must focus on the meaning of Woolf's technique, not on the technicalities themselves.² And M.C. Bradbrook usefully clarifies a central critical question when

¹ Maria Di Battista, Virginia Woolf's Major Novels: The Fables of Anon (New Haven & London, 1980).

² A.D. Moody, Virginia Woolf (Edinburgh & London, 1963).

she attacks The Waves for having

no solid characters, no clearly defined situations, and no structure of feelings: merely sensations in the void. Without any connections of a vital sort between them, with no plot in the Aristotelian sense, the sensations are not interesting. Emotions are reduced to a description of their physical accompaniments: the attention is wholly peripheral.¹

To meet this criticism - and I think it must be met - is possible only by concentrating on what, if anything, is morally serious in the novel rather than on its technical virtuosity in itself or even on the "meaning" of its techniques. For what is most serious about the novel is not expressed in its ^{consciously conceived} technical or formal aspects, I believe, nor in the way Bradbrook expects it to be, but in the spirit and integrity of Woolf's whole enterprise in the work.

The complex, self-reflexive exploration of The Waves, I suggest, presents a much more complex understanding of the nature and conditions of personal life than that of To the Lighthouse. At the end of To the Lighthouse, for example, Lily Briscoe finished her painting, having finally comprehended her vision of the outward world and her sense of her own identity:

There it was - her picture. Yes, with all its green and blues, its lines running up and across, its attempt at something. It would be hung in the attics, she thought; it would be destroyed. But what did that matter? she asked herself, taking up her brush again. She looked at the steps; they were empty; she looked at her canvas; it was blurred. With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision. (To the Lighthouse, pp. 319-20)

By this stage of the novel Virginia Woolf speaks directly through Lily, and Lily's need to complete her vision as she does is very much Woolf's own need. Art triumphs momentarily over the endless flux of time; something

¹ M.C. Bradbrook, "Notes on the Style of Mrs. Woolf", Scrutiny, I,

is made by human effort in the midst of the impersonal world which is chaotic, flowing, always coming into being, but (unlike humans) doing so effortlessly; and in a triumph that was critical for Woolf personally, art, order and comprehension discipline the recurring and debilitating visions of those loved and lost. At the end of The Waves, however, where Bernard's need to "sum up" his whole life is just as representative of Woolf's own need to round off the life of her novel so as to bring it to a close, there is no such split between art and life, or, to put it another way, between a patterned comprehension of the world and a chaotic apprehension of it. To see why this split does not occur at the ending of The Waves is to understand the very much greater maturity of Woolf's vision and her art in this novel.

Far from using his art, the constructing of "stories", to defend himself against the forces of the outward world that would destroy him, Bernard apparently discards everything to do with his art before he makes his ultimate "statement" of self. His imaginary biographer, who would have made a story of his entire life, has disappeared; Bernard has completely lost faith himself in finding or making "the true story, the one story to which all these phrases refer"¹; indeed, he has even discarded his book of phrases, feeling "how much better is silence" (p. 210). It is with the fundamental pattern of his identity, therefore, rather than with those more superficial patterns of self-expression in art, that Bernard does battle with his enemy - as he names it: "satiety and doom; the sense of what is inescapable in our lot; death; the knowledge of limitations; how life is more obdurate than one had thought it." Certainly we are meant to see that Bernard's life is at its lowest ebb as he goes into his last battle. He has entirely lost his capacity to be many-sided, with various selves that are called forth as he meets different people. Whereas, in the past, he had regarded the unknown world beyond his own life as something to be explored, and had felt that, by exploring it, he could

¹ Virginia Woolf, The Waves (London, 1943), p. 133.

somehow encompass its identity within his own, now he clearly regards death as an adversary he must do full battle with - and in a fight that, in one crucial sense, he cannot possibly win. He fights out of an instinctive need to preserve his self, narrowed as it now is, from complete destruction. And yet, this reduction of Bernard's identity is clearly not a dissipation. He confronts this last enemy, this last unknown, with his essential identity - the concentrated form of everything he has known or felt himself to be. In fact Woolf implies that Death is the only appropriate adversary for Bernard, whose entire life is now presented in its purest, most fundamental form. More fundamental than his need to make stories is his need to be articulate, so Bernard's last battle is fought as his attempt to "sum up" his life to a listener. But more fundamental than his need to form any whole articulation of his life is his need to be that life. So what is most convincing about Bernard's summing up is his need to attempt it, and what convinces us of the integrity of that attempt is the fact that he cannot finish it. Throughout his life he had found it impossible to complete his stories because some new awareness of the life beyond these stories interrupted him, and this same susceptibility prevents him from consciously concluding his summary. He is prevented by a more fundamental susceptibility to the continuing force of life in himself, by something beyond what he knows of himself, from ending as he thought he might have to, with "a kind of sigh? a last ripple of the wave?" (p. 189).

Certainly Lily Briscoe, like Woolf, achieved a triumph of art and pattern over chaotic feelings and the ceaseless flux of nature. A large price had to be paid for this triumph, however, because, as she defeated the debilitating sense of chaos, she also lost her sense of the mystery which had compelled her to paint in the first place. Most obviously, she had to understand her elusive feelings of "love" for the Ramsays before she could complete her painting. But she also lost touch with a sense of a mystery far more difficult to contend with. She lost her sense of

living in the present moment, of being continually susceptible to what is to come while being uncertain of what is happening here and now. When she completes her painting, therefore, she puts into the past both the mystery of the life she has witnessed - in particular, the enigma of Mrs Ramsay's very different identity -and the mystery of the very activity of witnessing, whereby her own life had seemed continuous with the lives of the people she saw. In completing her painting she fills up the empty space at its centre, which, like the empty space on the drawing-room steps where Mrs Ramsay had sat, signifies the mystery at the heart of human life. She had always been disturbed by that space, and while at best she felt it to be "awkward" (p.132), when she was least confident she saw it as "glaring, hideously difficult" (p.246). Yet, whatever her feeling of the moment about the space, she always found it utterly compelling. The problem of how to cross it, how to relate the two halves of her painting signifying the two halves of her life - her sense of herself and her feelings for Mrs Ramsay - pesters her for most of her life. Being continually compelled and disturbed by the space, Lily puts all her energy into trying to resolve her problem. But Woolf's point is that Lily could only connect the two halves of her painting with an act of deepest integrity, and the moments when such integrity is possible are very rare.

Clearly Bernard finally achieves an integrity very like Lily's. And yet at the end of The Waves the sense of a mystery at the heart of human life persists, and Bernard continues to fight a battle of the present, and feels the invigorating challenge of a continuing space:

"And in me too the wave rises. It swells; it arches its back. I am aware once more of a new desire, something rising beneath me like the proud horse whose rider first spurs and then pulls him back. What enemy do we now perceive advancing against us, you whom I ride now, as we stand pawing this stretch of pavement? It is death. Death is the enemy. It is death against whom I ride with my spear couched and my hair flying back like a young man's, like Percival's, when he galloped in India. I strike spurs into my horse. Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death!" (p.211)

As Woolf now sees, the greatest mystery of Bernard's life is really a mystery of the movement of his life. And the fascinating thing about this movement is that while its general shape can be readily described, for example by analogy with the pattern of a wave's motion, it is never predictable from moment to moment. Thus it was only in one sense predictable that Bernard's penultimate wish, his wholehearted desire to remain inactive ("I would willingly give all my money that you should not disturb me but let me sit on and on, silent, alone" [p.210]) would be succeeded by the new gathering-together of the wave of life, and that he would begin to be active again. In another sense, Bernard's capacity to rise again, despite the extreme exhaustion evident in the very rhythms of his speech now, is as wonderful to us as it is totally unforeseen by Bernard himself. It is a revealing comment on the subtle drama of Bernard's summing up that Woolf herself had a much simpler conscious notion of the way she would end her novel. As she wrote her way towards Bernard's final speech, she recorded in her diary her determination "to show that the theme effort, effort, dominates: not the waves: and personality: and defiance".¹ But what really convinces us of the value of Bernard's defiant effort is that we have been made to see how very nearly he did not rise in defiance. We still taste the sense of his previous lassitude. Similarly, it is our recent sense of Bernard's state of non-identity, when he is "a man without a self....A heavy body leaning on a gate. A dead man" (p.202), which makes us appreciate that Bernard's ride against death signifies a re-assertion of what we recognise as his identity. In short, the success of this conclusion is that it achieves so much more than Woolf could have consciously planned. For, as well as making us see the pattern of Bernard's life, it makes us feel with Bernard what it is like to live within that pattern.

¹ Entry for 22 December, 1930. A Writer's Diary, ed. Leonard Woolf (London, 1954), p. 162.

Much has been said about the more consciously experimental aspects of Virginia Woolf's art. Her acute awareness of patterns and rhythms of life, like her perpetual search for a satisfactory way to present an anonymous narrative voice, is the result of her capacity to witness life from a distance. Yet as she matured and came to a better understanding of herself and her need to write, she saw that her novels could also provide the means for an ongoing self-exploration. She discovered the disadvantages as well as the advantages of presenting herself so immediately in a novel when she used Lily Briscoe. She certainly lanced the wound of her own debilitating love for her parents through Lily, but ended up having to exert a more superficial type of control over her feelings by making Lily triumph, as she was doing herself, with her art. The superficiality of this "control", however, was demonstrated by Woolf's inability to maintain dramatic distance from Lily in the last section of To the Lighthouse. Obviously The Waves is a very different novel; far more highly patterned and consciously conceived than To the Lighthouse, and written with much greater control. Bernard's voice never becomes identical with Woolf's, even though his life-enterprise, storytelling, is much more explicitly Woolf's own than Lily's had been. But to recognize this is to see in part the greatest, and apparently most paradoxical achievement of The Waves. This novel is at once highly dramatic and intensely personal. And yet, most crucially, it is not dramatic despite its personal exploration, nor does Woolf present her exploration dramatically to protect herself from the chaos of her inward self. Her most critical insight in this novel was that her inward self emerged into the outward world as a drama of various selves.

While The Waves is clearly about the six dramatic characters we recognise as Jinny, Louis, Rhoda, Neville, Susan and Bernard, it is also a story of Woolf's own various selves. She directly admitted to this in a letter to G.L. Dickinson, saying:

Many people say that it [The Waves] is hopelessly sad - but I didn't mean that. I did want somehow to make out if only for my own satisfaction a reason for things. That of course is putting it more definitely than I have a right to, for my reasons are only general conceptions, that strike me as I walk about London and then I try to fit my little figures in. But I did mean that in some vague way we are the same person, and not separate people. The six characters were supposed to be one. I'm getting old myself - I shall be fifty next year; and I come to feel more and more how difficult it is to collect myself into one Virginia; even though the special Virginia is whose body I live for the moment is violently susceptible to all sorts of separate feelings. Therefore I wanted to give the sense of continuity, instead of which most people say, no you've given the sense of flowing and passing away and that nothing matters. Yet I feel things matter quite immensely. What the significance is, heaven knows I can't guess; but there is significance - that I feel overwhelmingly.¹

Yet it was her capacity to admit in the novel the extent of her self-involvement that makes The Waves so remarkable a work. Clearly, in one sense, its exploration of the conditions of personal life is far more complex as a result of Woolf's acknowledgement that it was her own life that she was exploring. She implies as much when she suggests in this letter that it is only she who perceives herself to be so various and complex; the rest of the world assumes her to be a single person, the "one Virginia". But she presents the truth of this much more powerfully and subtly through the drama of her novel. All of the characters at some point voice a belief that while they know themselves to be complex and multiple, other people possess a single, whole self. As Louis puts it: "I smoothed my hair when I came in, hoping to look like the rest of you. But I cannot, for I am not single and entire as you are. I have lived a thousand lives already" (p. 91). Bernard, typically, is more able to

¹ Letter dated 27 October, 1931. Rpt. in A Reflection of the Other Person: The Letters of Virginia Woolf, 1929-31, IV, ed. Nigel Nicolson (London, 1978), pp. 397-8. Cf. also Woolf's letter to R.C. Trevalyan (20 April, 1934) advising him to make an experiment with novel form which obviously closely resembles the experiment she had just made herself in The Waves:

I'm always wanting you ... to break through into a less formed, more natural medium. I wish you could dismiss the dead, who inevitably silence so much and deal with Monday and Tuesday - I mean the thing that is actually in your eyes at the moment. A dialogue between the different parts of yourself perhaps, now, at the moment.

Rpt. in The Sickly Side of the Moon: The Letters of Virginia Woolf, 1932-35, V, ed. Nigel Nicolson (London, 1979).

analyse this - able, that is, to witness his own feeling more objectively: "...For I am more selves than Neville thinks. We are not simple as our friends would have us to meet their needs" (pp.64- 5). Even though Bernard can see this, however, he has the same need to see the rest of the world in more simple terms. He still must tell his stories of other people for example, even though he has an acute sense of the inadequacy of these stories. But, as Bernard also sees, this need to feel that other people have integrated, whole identities is only one aspect of a more fundamental human need: the need to see one's own life, one's own being, as having some kind of coherence or at least unity. It is this need that leads us to see it so readily in others' lives. Thus there is an element of necessary illusion about the way a person perceives the whole outward world, other people included. Bernard comments:

"Let us pretend that life is a solid substance, shaped like a globe, which we turn about in our fingers. Let us pretend that we can make out a plain and logical story, so that when one matter is dispatched - love for instance - we go on, in an orderly manner, to the next." (p.178)

The element of necessary "pretence" in the way human beings perceive the outward world obviously prevents any one person's perception of it from encompassing the whole truth. Woolf makes this point very strongly in The Waves, presenting it in the only way she could validly present such a point, that is, dramatically. We understand, for example, her insight that one person will always believe his own life various but the lives of others single, by seeing that all six characters assume this. Obviously, if they all feel themselves multiple and the others entire and integrated, then none of them is right. Yet it proves the point about how general a human need it is to see others as possessing a unity of being not available to oneself. Of course, Woolf's capacity to see this truth, to see that the only way she could present it was dramatically, and to succeed in presenting it dramatically without intruding any authorial comment, all points to the fact that her own vision was greater

than that of any of her characters - even Bernard. Yet she needed a character with all of Bernard's immediately involved self-awareness and alertness to the life beyond his own if she was to present her greatest insight successfully. This insight followed from her understanding of the ambivalent human need to feel oneself whole and cohesive, yet also various and many-faceted. If the only time a person has a really acute sense of the complex variousness of life is when he is aware of his own life, and if the only time he is integrated is when he is able to completely affirm and rejoice in the "otherness" of another's life or even the hidden roots of his own life, then, as Woolf saw, it follows that a person will be most fully called into being when he is compelled by a sense of the mystery of his own self. At these times he fulfils both of his fundamental needs. Because he uses his consciousness in his attempts to understand himself, he becomes aware of the patterns and rhythms of his life. But because he is involuntarily compelled by something he cannot understand at the very centre of his life, he becomes completely at one with himself, and the rhythms of his perception bear direct witness to the rhythms of his being. As Woolf saw in The Waves, it is in those moments of extreme yet involuntary self-awareness that a person's self becomes as complete as possible, when the entire "world" of his identity is brought into play.

As she saw, it is in this state that a person's life most fully answers to the life of the outward world and mirrors its integrity and its variousness - all the more so because the person is not intending to describe it. This is why Woolf makes Bernard's final soliloquy take the form of a "summing up" of his own life rather than that complete "story" of the world which Bernard had always conceived to be the ultimate goal of his life. And yet Woolf certainly wants us to see that this summing up of his own self is really the fullest possible story Bernard could tell of the world. The most obvious proof that the external world is manifest

in Bernard's individual life is in his need to tell the "stories" of other people in order to talk about himself:

"...Our friends, how seldom visited, how little known - it is true; and yet, when I meet an unknown person, and try to break off, here at this table, what I call 'my life,' it is not one life that I look back upon; I am not one person; I am many people; I do not altogether know who I am - Jinny, Susan, Neville, Rhoda, or Louis; or how to distinguish my life from theirs." (p.196)

Bernard at least senses his need to speak of the lives of other people even if he does not understand why he has this need. That understanding - that Bernard's own life answers to the life of the outward world, and in answering to it, takes on something of its identity - is Woolf's understanding and our own. But we also see that the outward world inheres in the "world" of Bernard's self in ways that Bernard is entirely unconscious of. Eventually he speaks of those things of the impersonal world - the birds, the sun, the waves and the house - which hitherto had been presented in separate impersonal "lyrical" sections in the novel, and so had been established as distinct from the life of the personal world. Clearly, however, the rhythms of his description of the impersonal world are his own, and have nothing of the lyricism characteristic of the italicized passages. This becomes very evident if we compare his sense of the dawning day with the impersonal "lyrical" passage which describes the same thing. In the lyrical account:

Gradually the dark bar on the horizon became clear as if the sediment in an old wine-bottle had sunk and left the glass green. Behind it, too, the sky cleared as if the white sediment there had sunk, or as if the arm of a woman couched beneath the horizon had raised a lamp and flat bars of white, green and yellow spread across the sky like the blades of a fan. Then she raised her lamp higher and the air seemed to become fibrous and to tear away from the green surface flickering and flaming in red and yellow fibres like the smoky fire that roars from a bonfire. Gradually the fibres of the burning bonfire were fused into one haze, one incandescence which lifted the weight of the woollen grey sky on top of it and turned it to a million atoms of soft blue. The surface of the sea slowly became transparent and lay rippling and sparkling until the dark stripes were almost rubbed out. Slowly the arm that held the lamp raised it higher and then higher until a broad flame became visible;

an arc of fire burnt on the rim of the horizon, and all round it the sea blazed gold.

The light struck upon the trees in the garden, making one leaf transparent and then another. One bird chirped high up; there was a pause; another chirped lower down. The sun sharpened the walls of the house, and rested like the tip of a fan upon a white blind and made a blue finger-print of shadow under the leaf by the bedroom window. The blind stirred slightly, but all within was dim and unsubstantial. The birds sang their blank melody outside. (pp.5-6)

Bernard's own description markedly lacks this flowing ease, and this relishing of sensation, the capacity to evoke sensation in words, and this fuller self-awareness:

"The sky is dark as polished whalebone. But there is a kindling in the sky whether of lamplight or of dawn. There is a stir of some sort - sparrows on plane trees somewhere chirping. There is a sense of the break of day. I will not call it dawn. What is dawn in the city to an elderly man standing in the street looking up rather dizzily at the sky? Dawn is some sort of whitening of the sky; some sort of renewal. Another day; another Friday; another twentieth of March, January, or September. Another general awakening. The stars draw back and are extinguished. The bars deepen themselves between the waves. The film of mist thickens on the fields. A redness gathers on the roses, even on the pale rose that hangs by the bedroom window. A bird chirps. Cottagers light their early candles. Yes, this is the eternal renewal, the incessant rise and fall and fall and rise again."(pp.210-11)

But if Bernard's account seems simpler it is because he is speaking from within the pattern of life he describes. When Woolf presents her narrative of the impersonal world with such flowing ease and lyricism this is one way of admitting that it is she, the author of the novel and supreme perceiver of the pattern of its life, who narrates it. Although Woolf had always been aware of having to guard against her own tendency to give rein to her fluency, it was a mark of her maturity in this novel that she could be so clear-sighted about the fact that her lyrical fluency was a result of her own distance from the life of her novel. It was only from this distance, for example, that she could make the more obvious joke about herself as the author of the life of the novel, seeing herself in the female creative genius of the lyrical sections, the girl who raises the lamp of the sun, illuminating identity in the world. And yet Woolf's

crucial insight in The Waves, the understanding that most distinguishes this novel from To the Lighthouse, is that the most significant vision does not necessarily come with distance. She sees that Bernard's soliloquy can sum up the entire life of her novel better than a lyrical comment on its patterns and rhythms.

Thus Bernard finally has some awareness, though it is imperfect compared with the novel's, of even the largest and apparently most impersonal rhythms of life. But his identity is fused with these rhythms, and so he speaks of the sunrise in the simple sentences that reflect his own present state. Or, to put it another way, his state bears witness to the dawn he witnesses: his simplicity is itself an example of the unformed life of the next day whose dawn he records. Obviously, however, Bernard only achieves this unity of his own life with the life of the world because he is not aware that this is happening. When Neville, for example, tried to find his own particular oneness with life he failed because he became conscious of the significance of what he attempted, and his life split off from the life he observed:

"In a world which contains the present moment," said Neville, "why discriminate? Nothing should be named lest by so doing we change it. Let it exist, this bank, this beauty, and I, for one instant, steeped in pleasure. The sun is hot. I see the river. I see trees specked and burnt in the autumn sunlight. Boats float past, through the red, through the green. Far away a bell tolls, but not for death. There are bells that ring for life. A leaf falls, from joy. Oh, I am in love with life! Look how the willow shoots its fine sprays into the air! Look how through them a boat passes, filled with indolent, with unconscious, with powerful young men.... They, too, have passed under the bridge through 'the fountains of the pendant trees,' through its fine strokes of yellow and plum colour. The breeze stirs; the curtain quivers; I see behind the leaves the grave, yet eternally joyous buildings, which seem porous, not gravid; light, though set so immemorially on the ancient turf. Now begins to rise in me the familiar rhythm; words that have lain dormant now lift, now toss their crests, and fall and rise, and fall and rise again. I am a poet, yes. Surely I am a great poet. Boats and youth passing and distant trees, 'the falling fountains of the pendant trees.' I see it all. I feel it all. I am inspired. My eyes fill with tears. Yet even as I feel this, I lash my frenzy higher and higher. It foams. It becomes artificial, insincere. Words

and words and words, how they gallop - how they lash their long manes and tails, but for some fault in me I cannot give myself to their backs; I cannot fly with them, scattering women and string bags. There is some flaw in me - some fatal hesitancy..." (pp.59-60)

To see the "fault" particular to Neville, however, it is necessary to see how much of the rhythm of being he describes is really the general rhythm of all human life. Clearly Woolf intends us to see that the movement of Neville's states of consciousness represents, in a concentrated form, the rhythms and patterns traced by the entire novel. In these few moments Neville goes through a development of consciousness such as any person experiences as he grows from childhood to maturity. At first a person has a simple, spontaneous existence, and a clearly defined relationship with the world. The Waves had begun with the six children perceiving the world in that simple way Neville echoes at first here. They too used simple words and sentences to describe straightforward acts of perception: "I see" "I hear" "I feel" (pp.6-7). Later, however, comes an awareness of self, which complicates the relationship with the world one perceives: "Oh, I am in love with life!" says Neville. It then becomes necessary to go to others to seek confirmation of what one sees, which really amounts to a confirmation of one's own selfhood. There is a small example of this in Neville's directions: "Look how the willow shoots its fine sprays into the air! Look how through them a boat passes." Of course one of the things this more complex relationship with life makes possible is poetry. Words begin to be able to flow and have the variety of rhythms which the self now has.

On the other hand, what is very visible here is that if a person traces everything he sees back to himself, however, he becomes as Neville is at last here. Neville is incapable of writing because the onward flow of his life has stopped. Because he feels himself in control of all he perceives, that everything inheres in his feeling - "I see it all. I feel it all" - he has closed the circuit of his life. Obviously we are

meant to see a significant difference between Neville's type of life and Bernard's, for example. Bernard is able to give himself to the "backs" of words, as indeed in his last ride against Death, he is finally able to give himself to the back of the horse of life. But this evidently is not any mere question of being unaware of himself or spontaneous. He goes through the same developments of consciousness that Neville experiences in this episode. In fact so do all the six characters of The Waves. Their common capacity to experience the more complex developments of consciousness is what makes them interesting to Woolf. It is obvious, by contrast, how little interest Percival himself holds for her. His simpler life is only important to the novel as it is refracted through the more complex lives of the six. Woolf is very clear about this, boldly placing his unselfconscious, spontaneous life at the centre of the novel, but as a space and silence. He is centrally important to the exploration of personal life in this novel because his life signifies that oneness with, that closeness to the very rhythms of life which all human beings strive for. But Woolf does not give him any voice, because she sees that he would have nothing of interest or relevance to say. She is only interested in discovering how that closeness to life can be achieved after a person has become conscious of his own life.

Neville is well aware of his difficulty. He envies Percival his unreflective spontaneity, and loves him for his single purity of being. But he knows far better than to think he can achieve an integrity like Percival's by imitating him. Once self-awareness has come, there's no pretending it hasn't happened. In any case there are many aspects of Percival's simple life that Neville, like the other five who also love Percival, despises. They must all find some other way to that spontaneous, unchecked kind of life. Neville, however, feels his life stick at the point where he becomes constrictively self-consciousness. After this he cannot go on. He attributes his failure to a "fatal hesitancy", and all

of the characters in The Waves experience this very strong wish to remain in the state they have reached. They instinctively feel that the state of fullest life will be static, held in a single infinite moment. Susan, for example, reaches the point where she lives exactly the life she had always desired for herself, and in the fulness of her identity she can say "I possess all I see" (p.135). But as with Jim in Conrad's novel, Susan finds that possession involves a reciprocal relationship. She too is possessed by the things she possesses: "I am fenced in, planted here like one of my own trees" (p.135). And, as in Jim's case, once this exchange has been perfected it is rather static, and Susan feels a certain discontent with her life, sensing that she has been guilty of something like Neville's "fatal hesitancy":

"I hold scissors and snip off hollyhocks, who went to Elvedon and trod on rotten oak-apples, and saw the lady writing and the gardeners with their great brooms. We ran back panting lest we should be shot and nailed like stoats to the wall. Now I measure, I preserve." (p.137)

Every one of the characters in The Waves recognises that his or her identity is limited. For each of them there is some "immitigable tree which we cannot pass" (p.18), as Neville describes this sense of the outer boundary of identity, or, as Rhoda sees the same thing, a puddle which one cannot cross (p.46). No matter how wide and shifting each of the characters feels his inward self to be, he recognizes that there is some point at which his life sticks. Of course it is possible to try to ignore the fact of that obstacle, the limitations of individual identity. This is obviously what Neville had tried to do in "lashing" his frenzy "higher and higher". But he realizes that he has lost his integrity, having falsified so. The point of "fatal hesitancy" in every person's identity cannot be ignored. To do so, Woolf sees, could be just as misguided and fruitless as pretending that one had not become conscious.

With this insight Woolf becomes very suspicious of all those things that indicate that a person has lost his capacity to feel himself a part

of what he sees. She mistrusts, for instance, those who pass judgement on the lives of others. Neville expresses a part of her feeling when he says:

"After all, we are not responsible. We are not judges. We are not called upon to torture our fellows with thumbscrews and irons; we are not called upon to mount pulpits and lecture them on pale Sunday afternoons. It is better to look at a rose, or to read Shakespeare as I read him here in Shaftesbury Avenue. Here's the fool, here's the villain, here in a car comes Cleopatra, burning on her barge. Here are figures of the damned too, noseless men by the police-court wall, standing with their feet in fire, howling. This is poetry if we do not write it. They act their parts infallibly, and almost before they open their lips I know what they are going to say, and wait the divine moment when they speak the word that must have been written. If it were only for the sake of the play, I could walk Shaftesbury Avenue for ever." (p.140)

It was for similar reasons that Woolf wrote The Waves as a "playpoem" (to use her own name for its form), presenting the pattern of the life she had witnessed as the set of dramatic soliloquies emerging from her own self. It was "play" insofar as she acknowledged that she did not know from moment to moment what the individual movement would be, but it is "poem" in that it presents a fundamental, repeated rhythm and pattern in human life. So in making her exploration take this form Woolf realized her insight that, while her own life exhibited this human pattern and rhythm, she had to avoid "creating" that pattern in her material (as she had tended to do in To the Lighthouse), but rather allow it to exhibit itself there. Hence the sense in which The Waves seems successfully to master that form of an "unwritten novel" which Woolf had long sought.

Clearly, however, she does "judge" Neville's comment here, though through the subtle judgement of the "play" of his point of view against those of the other characters. She gives Bernard, for example, a more mature understanding of the complexities of the question about whether to "judge" or not. For a start, his opinion carries more weight for us than Neville's because Bernard is speaking about himself. He has not, in other words, split consideration of his own case off in considering the

general issue:

"I am very tolerant. I am not a moralist. I have too great a sense of the shortness of life and its temptations to rule red lines. Yet I am not so indiscriminate as you think, judging me - as you judge me - from my fluency. I have a little dagger of contempt and severity hidden up my sleeve." (p.154)

Certainly one of the things that most makes Bernard's view of life so significant for Woolf and persuasive to us is the fact that he combines "severity" with his compassion. He is not infinitely open. He does "judge", but his judgement is much more valuable because he recognizes that he does judge. In fact, Neville "judges" just as much as Bernard, but his incapacity to see it makes him think that the solution to the crucial problem of how to come close to life is not to speak ("nothing should be named lest by so doing we change it"), and not to write ("this is poetry if we do not write it"). Bernard, however, does speak, and Woolf intends us to see that there is a certain bravery and a certain affirmation of life in speaking as he does finally.

As we have seen in the passage where Neville found himself stuck at the point of self-consciousness - "Surely I am a great poet" - Woolf sees words as being the most conscious of the various articulations of a self. And, as I have suggested, she believes that the capacity to make poetry is an index of the fullness of a person's life. But the question is, what is one to do with this full articulation of self? As Rhoda speaks it in anguish: "To whom shall I give all that now flows through me, from my warm, my porous body? I will gather my flowers and present them - Oh! to whom?" (p.41). Rhoda's solution, however, is clearly no better than Neville's, and in some respects her failure is like his. Both are unable to move beyond that articulation of their identity. After Neville had written the poem exposing the secret of his life, for example, he threw it to Bernard and immediately left the room (p.64). Rhoda, too, eventually throws the flowers she has gathered to Percival, who at this point signifies absence and death:

"Now I will relinquish; now I will let loose. Now I will at last free the checked, the jerked-back desire to be spent, to be consumed. We will gallop together over desert hills where the swallow dips her wings in dark pools and the pillars stand entire. Into the wave that dashes upon the shore, into the wave that flings its white foam to the uttermost corners of the earth, I throw my violets, my offering to Percival." (p. 117)

As Woolf sees it, Bernard's last attempt to sum up actually involves something less sentimental than this and far more difficult, though obviously less dramatic than Neville's summary - making a single poem and then flinging out of the room - and obviously less catastrophic than Rhoda's suicide. It is significant that Bernard is very aware of a listener, and aware of needing to put his own sense of his life into the most communicable form. It is not merely a summing up: it is also a handing over of self, releasing it into the world. This is, as Woolf sees, far more difficult than releasing oneself, as Rhoda did, into the "death" of self-indulgent "feeling". In life there is movement, a perpetual breaking and changing of identity. And this is what Bernard lays himself open to when he hands over his life, not in the finished, rounded-off form of a story or a poem, but in the summing up that directly presents the immediate motion of his life as he narrates - something that would be better described as a "song" of self. In other words, Bernard finally finds a way of articulating his life that does not put him at a distance from what he speaks: his summing up does not stand in some merely metaphorical relationship to the life he describes. Woolf had made Rhoda voice her own deep dissatisfaction with metaphorical descriptions that seemed not to strike directly at the true nature of what was seen or felt:

"'Like' and 'like' and 'like' - but what is the thing that lies beneath the semblance of the thing? Now that lightning has gashed the tree and the flowering branch has fallen and Percival, by his death, has made me this gift, let me see the thing. There is a square; there is an oblong. The players take the square and place it upon the oblong. They place it very accurately; they make a perfect dwelling-place. Very little is left outside. The structure is now visible; what is inchoate is here stated; we are not so various or so mean; we have made oblongs and stood them upon squares. This is our triumph; this is our consolation." (p. 116)

But we qualify Rhoda's remarks, as we did Neville's comment about judgement, when we see them as a comment on her own case. Although it is true that a metaphorical description of life involves some falsification of its true nature, making some compromise between its inward reality and its outward appearance, Woolf also sees that something valuable can be achieved by this compromise. The question is more complex than Rhoda sees, for a person may resort to metaphor because he wishes to make outwardly visible something he inwardly feels to be significant. So, while Rhoda is clearly right about the triumph and the consolation - and, as she later adds, the protective power - of the human capacity actively to make life, the thing she made demonstrates her typical failure to confront life with her own self. Because it has little meaning in the world - no other person, for example, would see the meaning of her image - its protective power for Rhoda is very short-lived.

In fact, as Woolf sees it, Rhoda's incapacity here to put her insight into some communicable form is the failure of her entire identity. Unlike the others, she feels she has "no face", no outwardly visible self. All six characters in The Waves feel their outwardly visible selves as very inadequately representative of their true, widely potential inner selves. They feel their own "characters", the images by which other people know them as "Bernard", "Susan", or "Jinny", contract and fix their true, varied and moving lives. And yet they all recognize great compensations for suffering this "fixing" of identity. As a child, Louis, for example, had felt the full anguish of having to acknowledge that, while to himself he seemed a tree "rooted to the middle of the earth", seeing all time with the "lidless eyes of a stone figure in a desert by the Nile", to the others he was merely a "boy in grey flannels with a belt fastened by a brass snake" (pp.8-9). Significantly, though, he only became anguished by his sense of his outward identity, and only began to feel it as a limitation when Jinny found him and kissed him. The gesture signifying love and companionship,

human compensations for having outward identity, has the power to "shatter" his own sense of himself. Woolf sees this as the central paradox of human life in the world. In order for there to be any widening of the individual self - in one person's love of another, for example - there must be some restriction. So, too, will any creation involve some destruction.

Feeling acutely that they will be limited but also possibly widened by their contact with one another, the six individuals come together on two occasions to compare what they have made separately of their lives, and to see what they can make together. Very different moods pervade each meeting. On the first occasion, when they meet as young adults to farewell Percival, they have immense confidence and faith in their own creative power. They come with a strong sense that each has now a particular song of identity to sing:

"...We who have been separated [said Bernard] by our youth (the oldest is not yet twenty-five), who have sung like eager birds each his own song and tapped with the remorseless and savage egotism of the young our own snail-shell till it cracked (I am engaged), or perched solitary outside some bedroom window and sang of love, of fame and other single experiences so dear to the callow bird with a yellow tuft on its beak, now come nearer... - sitting together here we love each other and believe in our own endurance."

"Now let us issue from the darkness of solitude," said Louis.

"Now let us say, brutally and directly, what is in our minds," said Neville. "Our isolation, our preparation, is over. The furtive days of secrecy and hiding, the revelations on staircases, moments of terror and ecstasy."
(pp. 88-9)

In order to be able to speak their identities, each must acknowledge that it is finite, and so can be comprehended and passed on with words. But acknowledging the finiteness of his individual self is the necessary first step towards a person's realization of his human self. Once he recognizes that his identity is restricted to a particular showing in a particular moment of time, he sees how he can use this particularity to make something

that is not specific to one person or one moment:

"But here and now we are together," said Bernard. "We have come together, at a particular time, to this particular spot. We are drawn into this communion by some deep, some common emotion. Shall we call it, conveniently, 'love'? Shall we say 'love of Percival' because Percival is going to India?"

"No, that is too small, too particular a name. We cannot attach the width and spread of our feelings to so small a mark. We have come together (from the North, from the South, from Susan's farm, from Louis' house of business) to make one thing, not enduring - for what endures? - but seen by many eyes simultaneously. There is a red carnation in that vase. A single flower as we sat here waiting, but now a seven-sided flower, many-petalled, red, puce, purple-shaded, stiff with silver-tinted leaves - a whole flower to which every eye brings its own contribution." (pp.90-1)

It is significant that Bernard has to reach beyond the description of their common emotion as "love", or even "love of Percival". Although "love" does suggest the totally absorbing, unselfconscious quality of this emotion, and "love of Percival" does confirm that the love which draws the six together is a love of somebody undeniably "other" than themselves, Bernard implies that these descriptions are "too small, too particular" because they are still too narrowly personal. On the other hand, the red carnation in the vase is unarguably an objective reality. Yet because the six people, loving each other, look at this flower together, it takes on a more dense, many faceted identity. Their personal love for each other gives the impersonal world a greater, more vibrant reality.

It is also true, however, that if sharing their experience of the flower makes its life fuller and more rounded, as "every eye brings its own contribution", this awareness of a richness in the outward world also enriches their personal selves. That is, the six feel that this singing together in a polyphonic chorus is the way they can achieve a unity of self, a closeness to life such as Percival has. The integrity he has found unconsciously they may make through their consciousness of themselves, and their awareness of lives beyond their own.

Yet the fact is that their made unity is not the same as Percival's spontaneous and unreflective unity. For one thing, their unity can be broken by the very rhythms of life, the necessity of going away from the dinner and continuing their individual lives. Percival's unity is broken by death. Indeed, though the six were not aware of the full significance of this at the time, their acute sense of Percival's imminent departure for India, of his otherness from them, was essential to the unity they achieved at the dinner. They clustered about him, being drawn into something akin to his singleness by their single concentration on him as something unified and thus "other" to their complex selves. As Rhoda puts it:

"Unknown, with or without a secret, it does not matter, ...he is like a stone fallen into a pond round which minnows swarm. Like minnows, we who had been shooting this way, that way, all shot round him when he came. Like minnows, conscious of the presence of a great stone, we undulate and eddy contentedly." (pp.97-8)

The full extent of his otherness, however, only becomes evident to them with the physical fact of his death immediately following this dinner. Then they come to see that the fullness of their lives necessarily contains an emptiness, an absence. Percival's death occurs at midday, and signifies the central shadow and mystery of human life that persists even at the point when identity seems most fully lit and most thoroughly defined. So, even with the most creative act the six can perform at the very limit of their particular consciousnesses, their utmost realization of their particular identities, and their fullest susceptibility to each other - that is, even, as Woolf sees it, at the height of their power to make a unity, an integral form of life together - that creation contains the seeds of destruction.

By the time the six meet again for dinner at the Inn at Hampton Court, they find it almost impossible to distinguish between the destructive and the creative aspects of the unity they can make together. In a sense,

that extreme self-abandonment to the general life is a sort of death; at least the alternation between the extremes of creativity and the extremes of destructiveness seems so close that Bernard asks himself: "Was this, then, this streaming away mixed with Susan, Jinny, Neville, Rhoda, Louis, a sort of death? A new assembly of elements? Some hint of what was to come?" (p.198). Clearly, Bernard's capacity to see that their meeting may signify death or renewal is the result of his fuller understanding. Now that the pattern of life has come full circle twice he can identify it, and because he has a sense of its coherence as a whole he sees how closely the beginning of life's pattern is related to its end. And yet, significantly, his understanding of the pattern is expressed here as questions about it, rather than some statement of it. In other words, he acknowledges, much as Marlow had done in Lord Jim, a persisting, present uncertainty about the life he has witnessed in entirety. In Woolf's novel, however, the basic insight - that even when a human life has been entirely seen and has demonstrated its own nature most fully, it remains essentially unknown to itself and obscure to those who witness it, (and that, in fact, the mysterious identifying quality of a human life may be most evident in the attempt to see) - is presented much more radically than it had been in Conrad's novel.

As Woolf presents it, there is far less chance of avoiding or explaining away the mystery. For a start, there is no possibility of it being merely the result of some misunderstanding. Marlow had tried to narrate the story of Jim's separate life, and while his sense of Jim's obscurity was certainly partly due to the fact that Jim represented unrealized, and indeed unknowable, capacities in Marlow's own self, it was also due to a failure in Jim. However, because Woolf is not interested, as Conrad had been, by questions of a person's failure or success in achieving moral integrity, she concentrates far more clearly on the mystery as it is experienced and seen. Clearly, if the mystery

was to be revealed then Bernard was the character through whom it could best be realized. She gives him as great a capacity for self-understanding as she has herself. And she makes him specifically attempt to sum-up his own life. Obviously, as I have suggested, his ability to see that he is a part of the things he sees, that his view of life as a whole is influenced by the needs of his own self, makes his understanding of the world seem much more objectively valid to us. No other character in the novel, for example, has that degree of self-understanding which causes Bernard ironically to imagine his life the subject of a biographer's interest: He reveals a capacity in himself to see his own life with a clear-sightedness that is at the extreme remove from self-flattery when he evokes this biographer, who he says at one time "followed my footsteps with...flattering intensity" (p.184). Of course, we are meant to see, too, that Virginia Woolf makes a further joke herself about Bernard's "biographer". She implies that her own authorship and presentation of his life in The Waves makes her his "biographer". Thus she acknowledges that she, like Bernard, stands in the same relationship of witness to her own life, evoked in her case in a novel, in his case in a summing up. Finally, then, Bernard's enterprise as he attempts to sum up his own experience of life as something patterned and yet mysterious is an example of the very thing Woolf attempts in the whole novel. She, too, shares his discovery that no matter how thoroughly he thinks he has understood his experience he finds a new passion in telling it and a living sense of the mystery in the details he knows so well.

We can readily see why Bernard believes the moment is ripe for his summing up. He has reached the point of greatest awareness of himself and his world, when all of his life to date seems to be "globed" entire in his understanding. Bernard's consciousness, however, though it contains self-awareness, is not of that debilitating kind that Neville had experienced when all his perceptions of the world seemed to reinforce

his supreme awareness of himself. On the contrary, Bernard goes through a state of absolute non-identity, when he is "a man without self", not "Bernard" any longer, a man who treads the world seeing but unseen. It was immediately following this that Bernard felt himself able to pause and sum up his life, having now seen it as objectively as possible, and stripped to its essential form:

"But for a moment I had sat on the turf somewhere high above the flow of the sea and the sound of the woods, had seen the house, the garden, and the waves breaking. The old nurse who turns the pages of the picture-book had stopped and had said, 'Look. This is the truth.'

So I was thinking as I came along Shaftesbury Avenue to-night. I was thinking of that page in the picture-book. And when I met you in the place where one goes to hang up one's coat I said to myself, 'It does not matter whom I meet. All this little affair of "being" is over. Who this is I do not know; nor care; we will dine together.' So I hung up my coat, tapped you on the shoulder, and said, 'Sit with me.'

Now the meal is finished; we are surrounded by peelings and bread-crumbs. I have tried to break off this bunch and hand it to you; but whether there is substance or truth in it I do not know..." (p.204)

But if Bernard's attempt to hand over his life in entirety is not falsified by an all-dominating sense of self, nor does he try to make his statement entire by seeking to escape the present demands of self. Unlike Rhoda, that is, Bernard accepts the facts of his continuing life in the here and now. She had expected that the completest understanding would release her from the limitations of her individual self and its particular existence in the present moment, but Bernard discovers that the release his understanding of his own life brings him is a release into the present and into his own self. All of his experience of the past is brought to bear in the living moment of the present.

This is why Bernard's understanding seems at once full and yet open, handed on as a question rather than a statement. And yet clearly Woolf wants us to recognize that his questions are the result of an understanding greater than that understanding which would have emerged as statement or,

alternatively, as not speaking at all. Bernard now sees both the uses and the inadequacies of those stories he had always in the past tried to form. Then he had thought that the greatest thing he could aim at was linking all his sensations together sequentially; "so that instead of incoherence there is perceived a wandering thread, lightly joining one thing to another" (p.35). And, in one important respect, his summing up does represent the culmination of his attempts to join his experiences together as a comprehensible whole. But it does much more than this. He offers "stories" of his life to his listener to satisfy his and Bernard's need to comprehend: "in order to make you understand, to give you my life, I must tell you a story" (p.169). What Bernard now sees, however, is that there is a more valuable human perception beyond understanding, but one that rests on an acknowledgement of the understanding that has already been reached. So he tells his stories with an acute sense of both their necessity and their inadequacy. He makes his summing up although he is very aware now that what he really values is the new sense of movement he feels in his present self as he tells of his past selves. He describes his sense of what he is really doing when he says to his listener:

"... while we eat, let us turn over these scenes as children turn over the pages of a picture-book and the nursesays, pointing: 'That's a cow. That's a boat.' Let us turn over the pages, and I will add, for your amusement, a comment in the margin." (p.169)

Thus he uses the objects of his conscious understanding as focal points, finding that this is the best way of experiencing the most important things which lie just beyond them.

Obviously, then, it is crucial that Bernard has an audience for his summing up. Because all his conscious efforts are directed at making this man understand his life, Bernard is let into a deeper, present sense of what it is to be that life: because his consciousness is occupied elsewhere the essential rhythms of his self become clearer, and because

they are free from the short-circuiting effects of self-consciousness they have an onward flow. This for example, is why, without suspecting that he had the energy or the desire to rise in final defiance, Bernard does move with the ongoing motion of the horse of life against Death. It is critical, then, that he feel the full sense of his life as a globed entirety, accessible to summary, before he can feel the necessity of not stating, but singing his life as an infinitely varied song - sometimes solo, sometimes in harmony with the other five, sometimes in polyphony, sometimes as complexly varied, developed and interwoven as a symphony, but at other times as unformed and intensely personal as a howl or a cry. In other words, when he focuses on telling the life he has known, he actually begins to sing of the key mystery of not only his own life, but of all human life. He tells of the patterns and rhythms he has experienced himself and which he now sees as repeated patterns and rhythms in the whole of human experience, but as he tells he finds that looking at the pattern demands a new answering rhythm in his own self - the new activity involves new discoveries about the possibilities of his life, as he experiences what it is to be looking at himself.

Virginia Woolf comprehends her insights clearly enough in Bernard's final soliloquy. She makes us see that there is a new energy and mystery in life beyond the point of patterned comprehension, and that Bernard actually comes closer to the essential rhythms of life when he feels his continuing uncertainty about the meaning of his experience. So, too, do we understand that, by contrast with Rhoda, Bernard has found the true way of surviving those experiences which would seem to be destructive of a person's essential self. Woolf suggests that the only protection against life is to come so close to its rhythms that it becomes possible to ride it with an answering motion in one's own self. Bernard makes nothing so static as Rhoda's ordering vision of the square stood upon the oblong - his perceptions of pattern, as we have seen, are offered as ongoing

questions about it.

Yet for all Woolf's success in presenting this insight in Bernard's summing up, she seems to have imperfectly realized its significance in the novel as a whole. In the context of the novel that soliloquy really does only "sum up" in the simpler sense of "summary" that Bernard had eventually found insufficient. Although her greater insight showed her that she must release herself into life's breaking and forming rhythms, she does not actually release her novel in this way. Bernard's soliloquy is, from Woolf's point of view, a supremely controlled piece of writing - a consciously conceived summary of the entire life of the novel, and a suitable conclusion to its exploration. We find in Bernard's final attitude to life, for example, the solution to the crucial moral inquiry of the novel. We feel, as Woolf intends, that Bernard's ultimate ride against death signifies not only a personal triumph for one of the novel's six characters, but a human triumph of Bernard's defiant vitality over the sort of vision of life Rhoda represents. Woolf does not quite achieve that for herself as the author of the novel. Indeed, she seems at least partly aware of her own incapacity to release herself and her novel to the impersonal and therefore uncontrollable rhythms of life. The last words of The Waves are not Bernard's but the italicized comment closing the drama of the life presented in the novel: "The waves broke on the shore." Eventually, then, Woolf reasserts herself as supreme author and controller of a life which can be encompassed within the artful "bubble" of her novel. Yet Bernard's more open soliloquy had very nearly encompassed all of the controlled, conscious vision of the lyrical sections as well. By the end of writing The Waves, that is, Woolf was on the threshold of being able to give herself and her art more wholeheartedly to the conflicting rhythms of life, at once creative and destructive, that move, in and through, both horse and rider.

SECTION C

Conclusion: Chance & Between the Acts

CHAPTER 5

CHANCE: WITNESSING vs BEARING WITNESS

This thesis has pursued two inter-related themes in the work of Conrad and Woolf. The first concerns particular human lives and their significance. For both these writers some lives seem to have a coherence, a shape, that makes them seem a "destiny" - a single, integrated, patterned whole - rather than a mere collection or series of actions, events and episodes.

This shape or coherence is not obvious to everyone, and not every character in Woolf's To the Lighthouse, for example, sees Mrs Ramsay as clearly as does the painter, Lily Briscoe, nor do all the characters in Conrad's Lord Jim see Jim as clearly (but also with as deep a puzzlement) as Marlow does. Conrad and Woolf show how a person's egotism or defensiveness, his unshakable faith in codes of behaviour, or certainty that the "problems" (as he thinks them) of human existence can be deliberately investigated and their "meaning" possibly discovered, actually bar him from any deeper insight. Deeper insight, on the contrary, can only come to the witness of such lives after he has acknowledged, with the most committed acknowledgement, the irreducible "otherness" of that life to him, and certainly its inaccessibility to any systematic inquiry. For what gives Jim's life, or Kurtz's in "Heart of Darkness", or Bernard's in The Waves its particular identifying shape and rhythm, is his eventual willingness to pursue his own destiny in isolation, even perhaps in exile. Thus Jim cannot really alter the path his life must take even when the woman who has most believed in him appeals to his capacity for faithfulness. In abandoning her rather than his "ideal" (as Marlow ironically terms it) of faithfulness as that is determined for him by

the necessity of his own self, rather than by codes of conduct, Jim acts as Stein had seen he must: "'That was the way. To follow the dream, and again to follow the dream - and so - ewig - usque ad finem'" The most powerful affirmation of Jim's integrity Marlow can make, therefore, is to say that he believed in Jim, although Jim was, and continues to be, obscure to him. At a certain point, Conrad's and Woolf's characters discover, true insight into another person's life reveals a central obscurity or impenetrable "darkness".

While it is essential to recognize this irreducible otherness, it is certainly not sufficient, however, to recognize only that. E.M. Forster partly was making that objection, I take it, in his famous comment about Conrad's "central obscurity, something noble, heroic, beautiful, inspiring half-a-dozen great books, but obscure, obscure". It is not, of course, Conrad's presentation of individual identity as something mysterious that Forster objects to: he clearly acknowledges that in his own novels. What bothers him, and similarly bothers F.R. Leavis later on about Conrad, is a certain lack of integrity in Conrad's penetration and expression of the mystery. For, as both Forster and Leavis agree, the exploration of individual lives takes us further than a mere awareness of the dark and impenetrable roots of their identities, although that awareness must always inform and caution our understanding. Leavis makes the subtler differentiation, however, between those novels in which Conrad indulges a simpler sense of the obscurities, and those in which his more difficult and more powerful conception "presents itself ... as an elusively noble timbre, prompting us to analysis and consequently limiting judgements".¹

Both Conrad and Woolf come to understand that the very imperatives

¹ F.R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (Harmondsworth, 1962), p. 193.

of his outward life that limit what an individual can be, to himself as well as to others, also make his particular life most significant. What interests Marlow most about Kurtz, for instance, and what makes Kurtz's life matter to us, is the fact that he did realize, very fully and therefore very discernibly, the morally black potential of his life. Moreover, as well as realizing that in action, he also realized it in his moral understanding, and thus became eloquent to Marlow. For Marlow and for us, it is Kurtz's capacity to "speak" out with such passion the larger hidden potentialities of a human self that most compels us particularly to him. To use Leavis's terms, it is crucial that we are compelled to make those judgements of a life even while seeing that they are limiting.

As Conrad and Woolf both recognized, their novels attempt something as limited but as necessary as such judgements even though they try to make their novels "judgements" of the most open and exploratory kind. They cannot get at the "life itself" (as Virginia Woolf called it), and they express the frustration of not being able to do this through characters such as Marlow or Lily Briscoe or Bernard. Yet what the novel can do, through its own capacity to develop patterns and rhythms, is explore and trace the process of a life's realization. Moreover, it can suggest why that particular life is significant to others, because we recognize something that is true much more generally in the imperative rhythms of Bernard's self-realization, or even of Mr Ramsay's or Kurtz's. Perceived in the right way, therefore, a particular life can show us, as I have suggested, some of the obscure inter-relationships between the unknown (and perhaps finally unknowable) sources and roots of a human soul, and its actualization in the world of moral action and human affairs, its flowering into a distinctive and meaningful shape.

Alternatively, the particular shape a life takes can show (as Virginia Woolf makes it show, I have suggested, in The Waves, or as Conrad does in Lord Jim, where Jim is to Marlow at once "one of us" and "an exceptional case") some of the obscure inter-relationships between the particular substance and pattern of an individual life, and the substance and pattern it also shares with other lives. Or again it can show some of the obscure inter-relationships between the flow of an individual's unreflective, unselfconscious living, with the coherence and significance this might have, and his conscious, reflective sense of himself and of his world, with the coherence and significance that might have (for him, or for others, or both). And so on:- what I have tried to do is to explore only a few of the ways that two modern novelists, with quite different angles of approach and with very different sensibilities, both came to see this kind of human exploration as their main task, and the ways they pursued it in some of their works.

But the second theme I have tried to explore concerns this way of "seeing" human lives and of appreciating their substance and significance.

As I have tried to suggest, "seeing" is not the best word for what is involved here, since it suggests that the coherence and significance of particular lives is as readily and as universally visible as a table in a room or a triangle on a page. But as both Conrad and Woolf quite rightly insist, this kind of coherence and significance are not like facts that can be simply witnessed, nor like a pattern of external events, or a judgement of legal guilt or innocence that can be constructed simply by putting together the evidence of a number of witnesses and drawing obvious inferences from them. They are not there to be "witnessed" in that sense of the word. Conrad shows us that Marlow cannot witness Jim's whole life like that, nor, as

Woolf shows us, can Bernard witness the lives of his six friends so simply and objectively. "Seeing" requires a much more profound involvement of the person who witnesses such lives. Only insofar as he can bring his whole self to acknowledge the life of the other person will he understand its coherence. Then he will "see" its meaning, for himself and for others. But to acknowledge the reality of another's life to the extent that Marlow does, say, in "Heart of Darkness" is to doubt his own identity. That whole commitment of self is a way of exposing it to realities beyond it, and within it, that might even destroy it, as Marlow's understanding of Kurtz clearly almost destroys him, and certainly changes him. In that sense Marlow could be said to have "borne witness" to Kurtz's reality: the changes in him testify to this.

What any person can acknowledge of the reality of another, however, depends on what he can acknowledge of himself. And the more he can acknowledge of himself, the more susceptible he is to being altered or broken to the fundamentals of self by what he has seen. Many critics have pointed to these truths to explain the failure of Conrad's Chance, his last novel using Marlow although his first big popular success. J.I.M. Stewart, for example, puts the point usually made about Chance succinctly:

In "Youth" it is simply to Marlow himself that things happen. In "Heart of Darkness" and Lord Jim they happen chiefly to other people, but a large part of the interest lies in Marlow's essentially dramatic relationship to them. In Chance much of this more subtle interest is withdrawn: Marlow records and comments, but his own personality is not really involved, or felt to be at risk.¹

Most interestingly, however, most critics align this evident insufficiency in Marlow with a failure, too, in Conrad's own imaginative enterprise

¹ J.I.M. Stewart, Joseph Conrad (London, 1968), p. 71.

in this novel. As Douglas Hewitt comments, for instance, "the obvious flaws of Chance - its clichés, its defensive irony, its imprecise rhetoric - can be seen to come, I believe, from this evasion of the painful awareness of the darker side of even our good feelings".¹

Of course, criticism of both Conrad's and Woolf's novels frequently points out how extensively Conrad pictures himself in his various Marlows, or Woolf in her artist-figures, Lily Briscoe, Bernard, and, in Between the Acts, the author of the pageant, Miss La Trobe. And, in Conrad's case, there has been a fair amount of critical controversy aroused over F.R. Leavis's comments about "Heart of Darkness", which some critics have taken to imply a simple identification of Marlow with Conrad.² The significance of these witnessing characters has often, that is, been appreciated, even if it has not so often been correctly or fully understood.

What I have tried to argue is that Conrad and Woolf both acknowledged the need to commit their own selves as fully as possible if they were to present individual lives in their novels adequately. Each writer felt that he must scrutinize himself, revealing why those lives mattered to him, before his novel's exploration could satisfy him. Yet those characters had to be dramatically conceived, and not mere psychological portraits. Only when they were given full and distinct identities of their own could they properly "bear witness" to the author's own exploratory needs; only then did they signify his acceptance

¹ Douglas Hewitt, Conrad: A Reassessment (Cambridge, 1952), p. 89.

² See, for example, W.Y. Tindall, "Apology for Marlow" in R.C. Rathburn and M. Steinmann, Jr., eds., From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad (Minneapolis, 1958), pp. 274-85.

of his own need to try to understand human lives beyond his own.¹

Perhaps the best way of bringing this study to a conclusion is by examining some of the reasons why I think that Chance (1912) represents a decided retreat in his artistic development, while Between the Acts, Virginia Woolf's last completed novel, represents a decided and profound advance in hers.

I have tried to suggest that in their previous works, "Youth", "Heart of Darkness", To the Lighthouse, Lord Jim, and The Waves, Conrad and Woolf were most interested in exploring individual identities. Their novels focused on Kurtz's life, and Mrs Ramsay's, for instance, to try to understand more about what particularized certain human lives, about the essential quality which shaped them in that way. Conrad and Woolf also tried to trace various patterns and rhythms of self-realization,

¹ Christopher Gillie, in his book Character in English Literature (London, 1965) makes much the same, though larger point about character in the Modernist novel very well, through specific reference to Lawrence's Women in Love:

This critical, challenging spirit in the characters is both heightened and controlled by the fact that the leader of the central nucleus of four, Rupert Birkin, is a projection of Lawrence himself. The difference between this projection and that of Stephen Dedalus from Joyce is that Stephen's career is emancipation from false relationships, whereas Birkin's is the discovery of true ones; and linked with this is the difference that on the one hand Stephen's artistic vocation is all-important, while on the other Birkin has no vocation, his post of school inspector being merely a convenience. He heightens the relationships in the book, because his existence enables Lawrence to propound the issues directly, and he controls the relationships by representing Lawrence's own critical spirit. But he is not above the arena; he does not know all the answers and keep everyone in order. He meets with opposition and failure as well as success, and he is subjected to criticism and ridicule. The temper of the writer will decide whether an autobiographical element simplifies, sentimentalises, and dissipates the feeling in a book, or whether it does the opposite - exposes more of it, strengthens and enriches it. It is Lawrence's achievement to have accomplished, with some lapses, the second.
(pp. 191-2)

so that Jim's "case" interests Conrad in that it involves many other characters, and can only be described adequately by referring to the various ways in which they "realize" his nature, and its implications for themselves. Moreover this "realization" is reciprocal, rather than one-way. So when Conrad's Marlow narrates his story of Jim, or Woolf's Bernard tries to make a story of his own life and the lives of his friends, those other lives are realized for us through the narrator's understanding, while his own self is realized in the very ways he characterizes theirs. Yet these writers suggest that much more is involved in this inter-realization than just the understanding. Marlow gives Jim the greatest "opportunity" he can, not by understanding him or even by being sympathetic towards his failure, or even by giving him the opening to action, offering Jim the wherewithal to realize in Patusan his "dream" of his own heroic potentiality. Most crucially, Marlow gives Jim his "belief" in him. By that word Conrad means the fullest possible commitment of self, by which Marlow's self actually "belongs to" Jim's. And, though Jim's self is in some ways more limited than Marlow's, because less self-reflective, Conrad makes us see that Jim's "conviction gains infinitely the moment another soul will believe in it", to quote Lord Jim's Novalis epigraph.

Similarly in Woolf's novel, The Waves. There the individual life is shown to become its many-faceted self in the outward world by being seen and believed in by others. Partly, therefore, a person finds his identity in others' particular perceptions of him, but, concomitantly, those others gain part of their reality through him, and in that sense live in him. Bernard, for example, needs the friendship and understanding of many others to be his fullest self, but, after admitting this need, he finds he cannot distinguish their lives from anything particularly his own. The most difficult and challenging insight in The Waves,

however, is a further development from this. Granted that a person is realized in the perception, understanding, and "belief" of others, as they are realized in his, what is the effect of an individual's capacity to view, understand and believe in his own essential identity? Woolf sees that a person's self-consciousness may realize his identity in the most complex and self-altering ways.

I suggest that this is the question most sharply raised for us by Conrad's Chance and Virginia Woolf's Between the Acts. The particular explorations of each of these novels specifically demands, I think, that the author submit his whole integrity to questioning, and that he should be prepared to acknowledge the necessary limits even to his imagination, and certainly to his understanding. Furthermore, these novels demand of their authors acknowledgement of the needs that drove them to write; because without such acknowledgement the novel has no impetus, and no capacity to move beyond the restrictions those needs impose.

In a broad way, of course, some critics have already implied what it is that is absent in Chance but present in Between the Acts. Douglas Hewitt and Albert Guerard, for example, agree that Chance is imaginatively "soft" by comparison to Conrad's earlier novels, whereas A.D. Moody, for instance, characterizes "the signal distinction" of Between the Acts as being Woolf's much greater clear-sightedness and imaginative courage: "while there is an acutely discriminating intelligence at work in the prose, lucidly discovering and evaluating the varieties of human behaviour, there is beyond that, and comprehending whatever it discovers, an urbane and poised mind disposed to accept and to participate in all that makes up human life".¹ It was extremely difficult, of course, for a writer to maintain the depth of self-commitment

¹ A.D. Moody, Virginia Woolf (Edinburgh & London, 1963), pp. 85-6.

his novel required, and to keep a clear sense of what his novel implied about his own identity and about his need to write. In Chance we find that Conrad, perhaps distracted by the aims of his ordinary, everyday self - for a wide readership, for instance, or for an alertness to issues of current interest (such as feminism or financial speculation) - fails to "bear witness" with his own whole and committed self to what his novel tries to say about personal life. It is no accident that the tone of Chance is closest to the nihilist, misanthropic one we sometimes find in Conrad's letters. This is the tone of Conrad at his most detached from life, and also his most superficial, where he is not open to the self-breaking implications of his own more subtle questionings and apprehensions of life.

In Between the Acts, however, Woolf does enter into her novel completely, with a mature trust in its rhythms of imaginative exploration and discovery, rather than merely into those rhythms which she can see fully and control. This is not to suggest that she loses all consciousness of her self by such a release. Because she continues to be aware of herself, and continues to acknowledge the limits of that self, the novel combines throughout a toughness and clear-sightedness with its nakedness, its "faith" in its exploratory understandings of personal life. On the other hand, it has none of Chance's certainty and conclusiveness. Woolf is always aware both of the pattern of her existing understanding of life, and of inevitable "spaces" in that understanding. In acknowledging that her own understanding, even that her own capacity to understand is limited, she gives her self and her understanding "play" within the larger rhythms of life her novel expresses.

Critics of Chance usually point out, although with varying praise or criticism, its characteristic rather simple gallantry about its heroine, Flora de Barral, its similarly simple misogynist aspect, expressed

in Marlow's narration, and the slenderness of Conrad's essential interest in this novel for all its technical complexity. What I think has not been sufficiently examined, however, is the way Chance tries to meet certain possible objections, and more particularly, the way it envisages what those objections might be.

For it does seem to have anticipated the more obvious criticisms that might be made against it - most of which, in fact, have been made against it. For example, Marlow does seem excessively cynical, but the novel also apparently recognizes this and judges him accordingly. That is, the novel certainly does not identify Marlow with Conrad. As well as criticizing Marlow's cynicism, for example, the novel also seems to explain it. We are made to call upon our own human understanding, and even our compassion, to realize why Marlow needs to mask his human understanding behind a cynical attitude. The colleague to whom Marlow tells his story is crucial in the novel as much for his explanations of Marlow's nature as for his criticisms of it; we have to reckon with a number of comments like the following:

... I saw in his [i.e. Marlow's] eyes that slightly mocking expression with which he habitually covers up his sympathetic impulses of mirth and pity before the unreasonable complications the idealism of mankind puts into the simple but poignant problem of conduct on this earth.¹

All of this seems to suggest that the novel subjects Marlow's self to as much scrutiny as Flora's, and if his apparent understanding of life and assurance of spirit in the long run strike the reader as triumphing over Flora's more tentative and vulnerable kind of life, it is not because the novel fails to see some of the limitations of Marlow as a character.

Of course the particular criticisms Marlow's listener suggests,

¹ Joseph Conrad, Chance (London, 1949), p. 325.

either explicitly or by the counteraction of his own more chivalrous nature against Marlow's misogynous one, are not trenchant. Rather, by using him as a quite substantial dramatic presence (certainly more substantial and more vocal than any of the listeners to the other three "Marlow" narratives), the novel tries to reduce the concentration of narrative authority in Marlow. Even though this listener's interventions don't amount to much, they do make us smile to the cost of Marlow's seriousness:

"As to honour - you know - it's a very fine mediaeval inheritance which women never got hold of. It wasn't theirs. Since it may be laid as a general principle that women always get what they want, we must suppose they didn't want it. In addition they are devoid of decency. I mean masculine decency. Cautiousness too is foreign to them - the heavy reasonable cautiousness which is our glory. And if they had it they would make of it a thing of passion, so that its own mother - I mean the mother of cautiousness - wouldn't recognize it. Prudence with them is a matter of thrill like the rest of sublunary contrivances. 'Sensation at any cost,' is their secret device. All the virtues are not enough for them; they want also all the crimes for their own. And why? Because in such completeness there is power - the kind of thrill they love most"

"Do you expect me to agree with all this?" I interrupted.

"No, it isn't necessary," said Marlow feeling the check to his eloquence, but with a great effort at amiability. "You need not even understand it. I continue: with such disposition, what prevents women ..." (p. 63)

We are made thus to see Conrad's basic point, that even the very interruptions, however slight, to Marlow's single point-of-view, are welcome. Conrad makes us value the capacity of this man's simple, unreflective understanding of human nature to disrupt such a complex, though coherent and all-embracing understanding.

This is clearly the central point Conrad wishes to make about Flora. The most compelling quality of Flora's life, as the novel presents it and as we respond to her case, is something like a "negative

capability" in her. She has the capacity to listen, with a deep and responsive sensitivity, to the life within her own self and beyond it, and, together with that, a capacity both to survive several breakings of her consciously-known self and her conceptions of the world, and to make something positive of these experiences. Her self continually moves outward to find itself in the as-yet-unknown world. We see, in other words, that this is what makes the theme of "chance" interesting in the novel, for in the most crucial sense, it is not "chance" alone that determines the path her life takes. Marlow may be fascinated, for instance, by the way "chance" intervenes to stop Flora from carrying out her fixed intention to commit suicide. The novel's deeper point, however, is that those three interruptions, firstly by the inconstantly affectionate Fyne dog, then by Marlow, and then by Captain Anthony, give Flora the opportunity to realize something essential and enduring in her nature, something not "chancy" at all. This is a capacity to have her fixed will broken and re-shaped, and not simply by such outward circumstances. For it was broken here by her admission of those interruptions, by her capacity to hear, behind the breaking, an onward-flowing force of life in the world which answers to needs, impulses, capacities in her own self. Marlow, in fact, means to affirm these crucial capacities in her when, for example, he examines her claim that she did not know whether or not she loved Anthony:

"I am inclined to believe that she did not. As abundance of experience is not precisely her lot in life, a woman is seldom an expert in matters of sentiment. It is the man who can and generally does 'see himself' pretty well inside and out. Women's self-possession is an outward thing; inwardly they flutter, perhaps because they are, or they feel themselves to be, encaged. All this speaking generally. In Flora de Barral's particular case ever since Anthony had suddenly broken his way into her hopeless and cruel existence she lived like a person liberated from a condemned cell by a natural cataclysm, a tempest, an earthquake; not absolutely terrified, because nothing can be worse than the eve of execution, but stunned, bewildered - abandoning herself passively. She did not want to make a sound, move

a limb. She hadn't the strength. What was the good?
 And deep down, almost unconsciously she was seduced
 by the feeling of being supported by this violence.
 A sensation she had never experienced before in her life.
 (pp. 330-31)

The most obvious difficulty with this particular passage, however, is its inconsistency. On the one hand, Marlow implies that Flora's greatest capacity is to be able to listen to the way Anthony's love speaks to her particular self. Without ever having experienced anything like it before, she cannot "know" it in any conscious sense of the word. Indeed, we take Marlow to be saying that her strength is her openness to the crucial natural experiences of life which cannot be "known". Natural cataclysms - tempests and earthquakes - Marlow's metaphors for Flora's violent, uncomprehended experience are equally unpredictable, and their effects equally incalculable, to both women and men. Yet his explicit judgement is at odds with this. When he says that "a woman is seldom an expert in matters of sentiment", the word "expert" expresses a crucial value-judgement; and despite what he seems to claim later about Flora's more important sort of inward knowledge, his general belief, it seems, is that men are superior to women by virtue of their capacity to "see themsel[ves] pretty well inside and out".

The novel critically "places" Marlow's less clear-sighted, though more confident, approach to life very clearly in relation to Flora's. It is not so clear that Conrad is aware here of how inconsistent Marlow's judgements are, but in the wider canvas of the novel he definitely shows us that Marlow's way of realizing the nature and significance of human lives is directly opposite to Flora's, and that the two must be examined in the light of each other. In Flora's case, for instance, her conscious understanding of her self, and the willed decisions that follow that kind of understanding, are the bar to the fullest realization of that self. Conrad makes us see that her image of herself as someone

fundamentally unlovable is the most crippling thing in her life. She has to trust beyond her conscious understanding and to allow her image of herself to be broken before she discovers that her real self is not only lovable but intensely loved. The novel makes much of the fact that Marlow is not compelled by any inner personal necessity to bring to light the whole of Flora's life, the whole of his potential story. Nor is he susceptible to any forces that might break his conscious understanding and fixity of attitude. He begins with general views about human nature, and finds that he can very adequately describe all the particular, individual cases in terms of these general "truths". He even thinks that he can, rather easily, satisfactorily testify to parts of his story where information, even second- or third-hand information, is lacking. His general "knowledge", aided by his "imagination", gives him (he supposes) the key to these "dark, inscrutable spots" (p. 101). Even so, there is a fundamental problem about Chance here, because while the novel disputes some of his particular views and assumptions, and at least "breaks" his cynicism (for us at least) by playing against it other, more adequate attitudes, it does not really question his trust in conscious "understanding" and general "truths" as an adequate way of being alive to the lives of others.

The most crucial thing needing to be explained about Chance is why its inquiry seems expository rather than exploratory, given that Conrad apparently successfully embodies the novel's central insight, about the human need to press beyond the boundaries of the known if the self is to find its fullest realization, in the very presentation of the narrative.

One fairly obvious difficulty is a direct result of this system of presentation. Henry James, in his famous remarks about Chance, acknowledged something of this difficulty, even though on the whole he admired its narrative through multiple points-of-view. He commented on the way the filtering of the central story about Flora through various

witnesses' accounts involved some diminishing of its original force:

[Conrad's] genius is what is left over from the other, the compromised and compromising quantities - the Marlows and their determinant inventors and interlocutors, the Powells, the Franklins, the Fynes, the tell-tale little dogs, the successive members of a cue from one to the other of which the sense and the interest of the subject have to be passed on together, in the manner of the buckets of water for the improvised extinction of a fire, before reaching our apprehension: all with whatever result, to this apprehension, of a quantity to be allowed for as spilt by the way.¹

Add to this the point Albert Guerard, for instance, stresses, that the consciousnesses through which Flora's story is filtered for us are rather extraordinary dull,² and we can see better why Lawrence's more general objection to Conrad's "giving up" seems to make sense in regard to Chance.

Not that Chance is particularly cynical, of course. Its combination of pessimism and romanticism does not amount to that. Rather, by presenting Flora's story through many points of view and by criticizing each one as being, by itself, inadequate, Conrad tries to make his exploration particularly dramatically open and astringent. Yet he cannot have it both ways: he cannot realize Flora's identity for us adequately through characters whose selves are too limited to bear witness adequately to her. Conrad does not seem to see how narrowing Marlow's story is of Flora's life, although this fact seems implicit in some of the comments Marlow makes. It is characteristic of Chance that Conrad sees nothing amiss with Marlow's general approach to life, as distinct from the particular substance of his comment, when he has him observe that Mr Powell, the shipping-master

... was but a man, and the incapacity to achieve anything distinctly good or evil is inherent in our earthly condition.

¹ Henry James, "The New Novel" in The Art of Fiction (N.Y., 1948), p. 206.

² Albert J. Guerard, Conrad the Novelist (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1958), pp. 258-9.

Mediocrity is our mark. And perhaps it's just as well, since, for the most part, we cannot be certain of the effect of our actions. (p. 23)

If Conrad truly believes that "we cannot be certain of the effect of our actions", then why maintain beforehand that, whatever the circumstances, a man will be incapable of achieving "anything distinctly good or evil"? Yet the whole novel expresses this incoherency. Flora's "case" seems to demand the fullest possible witnessing, with a profound "negative capability", but Conrad offers only witnesses who question the facts of that life, in order to discover the "motives" determining and justifying Flora's actions, indeed the way her life can be seen to demonstrate psychological "principles" of human behaviour. Furthermore, although he shows us that Flora only finds the true shape of her life when she disbelieves the stories other people have told her about her self, and even the stories she has been inclined to tell herself about her nature and capacities, Conrad moulds Chance uncritically according to the shape of the stories Marlow collects about Flora. He expects us, for example, to be as content as Marlow is when Marlow's story, and Conrad's novel, come simultaneously to their closes.

The point is that the mysterious quality of particular individual lives cannot be expressed through large moral generalities about "Life" or "our earthly condition". Nor can the mystery be grasped and followed to its centre by someone whose mind is absorbed in uttering such generalities and not involved, along with his heart and moral sensibilities, in trying to grasp the distinctive nature and value of individual lives as they manifest themselves in the whole activity of mind and heart and moral sensibilities. Conrad had seen the point clearly enough in his earlier novels dealing with the same problems; as I have tried to argue, the only way he could bring "Heart of Darkness" and Lord Jim to any conclusion was to make Marlow finally "bear witness", in the deepest, experiential sense of the words, to the life he sought to comprehend.

That is, those "Marlows" come finally to show, in their own selves, something of the particular life they have responded to. They are totally involved with the specific case, and can only leave its general aspects and implications to others. As the Marlow of Lord Jim says: "You may be able to tell better, since the proverb has it that the onlookers see most of the game" (p. 224). They come to listen to the innermost necessity that has driven them to bear witness to this life: Marlow reflects in Lord Jim that

*I felt that when to-morrow I had left [Patusan] for ever, it would slip out of existence, to live only in my memory till I myself passed into oblivion. I have that feeling about me now; perhaps it is that feeling which had incited me to tell you the story, to try to hand over to you, as it were, its very existence, its reality - the truth disclosed in a moment of illusion." (p. 323)

In other words, we are really more aware finally of these "Marlows" as human-beings like those whose destinies they have sought to follow, lives like those their own now bears witness to; and we feel that Conrad has made a judgement about the value of the life lived directly, beyond calculation, involving the self wholly: regarding it in the long run to have greater worth than that of a merely detached witness who is capable of seeing life's larger patterns precisely because he holds his own self well back from it.

The trouble, ultimately, with Chance is that Conrad holds himself back in this way from his novel's exploration. He remains the supreme detached witness, never to be threatened or broken open by the imaginative understanding of personal life a novel can realize, because he never acknowledges his own to be the life explored. There is no passion even in his criticisms of Marlow, and the absence of Conrad's passion here implicitly condones that same deficiency in Marlow. In this novel Conrad is always the detached, "scientific" explorer - there is an echo of Conrad himself in Marlow's idea of his own narrative task as a "science"

of "putting things together" (p. 152). Indeed Conrad seems hyperconscious of the need to establish the coherence of his story and to come up with a complete picture of Flora. The links between the various aspects of his novel are carefully conceived. His concern with questions of women's liberation, for example, is connected with the matter of the convict, de Barral's imprisonment. Or to take another example, the improbable mixture of issues about writing; about the lyric poet Carleon Anthony, about his daughter's handbook for women, about the pressman at the de Barral trial, about the "tragic" and "comic" aspects of human life, and so on. These are all rather cerebrally linked by a common concern with the value of distance to accurate witnessing - yet this issue remains rather cerebrally understood in Chance.

Conrad effectively hides behind the exploratory narrative forms of his novel and its apparently dramatic presentations of personal life. I say "apparently" here, because true dramatic power in a novel is not a matter of offering various perspectives, none of which is given final authority. True dramatic power only comes after a writer has known his own closest commitment in his novel's enterprise. Most obviously Conrad had done this in his previous Marlow novels by feeling his own limitations through Marlow. It was through that self-acknowledging release of himself into his novels that they developed a particularly personal quality which Chance lacks, even though, as in those previous novels, the personal quality could emerge in a highly dramatized way. In Chance, however, Conrad does not grasp the insight he expressed quite clearly in "Heart of Darkness":

... we knew we were fated, before the ebb began to run, to hear about one of Marlow's inconclusive experiences.

"I don't want to bother you much with what happened to me personally," he began, showing in this remark the weakness of many tellers of tales who seem so often unaware of what their audience would best like to hear; "yet to understand

the effect of it on me you ought to know how I got out there, what I saw, how I went up that river ..."
(p. 51; *my italics*)

By concentrating on the mere "objective facts" of his story in Chance, Conrad misses the subtler, more crucial point he sees here about a story's fundamental coherence and the fundamental integrity of the narrative bearing witness to it. In Chance Conrad's "faith" seems almost a complacent belief from the outset that, no matter how difficult it may be for Marlow to track down the facts of Flora's story, he is capable of making an integral narrative of what he finds. Yet in "Heart of Darkness", for instance, Conrad had seen that the most valuable "integrity" Marlow's story can exhibit is not a "conclusiveness", which might be outwardly more satisfactory, but rather a more fully engaged, wholly responsive giving of himself to the inward form and pressure of its human substance. It is precisely Conrad's satisfaction with a simpler, more superficial kind of narrative integrity - that of witnessing, rather than that of bearing witness - that so drastically limits Chance, and makes it an artistic regression on Conrad's part rather than a development.

CHAPTER 6

BETWEEN THE ACTS: "THE DANCER AND THE DANCE"

Interestingly, the central question Chance implicitly raised about personal life is explicitly asked by Virginia Woolf's last novel, Between the Acts. She expresses it simply: "How to bring people together?"¹ As these two novels explore it, however, the question is shown to be far from simple. Conrad's novel, as we have seen, responds with an intricate technical virtuosity, although it fails to grasp the question and its implications adequately. In Between the Acts there is a far more elusive maturity than the one Chance had demonstrated, which does not evade the full personal and artistic commitment its undertaking demands. Yet both novels are clearly the work of mature artists, coming with a certain confidence in their art to tackle this problem which involves "bringing together" their sense of richly disparate human lives.

Most critics who value Woolf's work agree that Between the Acts represents a significant advance in her art. There is not much agreement amongst them, though, about how this advance is best described. Some stress the technical maturity of the work, which is of such proportions, asserts one critic, "that it expanded even further the possibilities of development in a form which had almost been given over as exhausted after Ulysses", and which realized formally the ambitions Woolf had spoken of elsewhere. It enabled her, James Naremore claims, to render the "'stream of broken dreams, nursery rhymes, street cries, half-finished sentences and sights' that Bernard

¹ Virginia Woolf, Between the Acts (London, 1941), pp. 187, 225.

describes in The Waves".¹ Others, however, are more concerned to justify the moral value of Woolf's enterprise. David Daiches, for example, though finding the novel's "technique ... not altogether successful", applauds the insight this insufficiency of "method" implies. For him Woolf's achievement is her capacity to see that life cannot be distilled (as she had set out to do, he thinks) into an essence: there is no "method for encompassing all experience as she finally saw it".² A.D. Moody similarly uses distinctions between "art" and "life" (distinctions Virginia Woolf herself used frequently in her critical essays and comments about her novels), and, like Daiches, he uses them to applaud the greater moral maturity of Between the Acts. Yet he differs quite considerably from him in his account of the novel's most significant exploration, which he sees as "the steady recognition and discrimination of frustration and perversion ... to cut through what is killing or dead, towards whatever sound basis may remain for a rebuilding of the personality and of personal relationships".³ Moody therefore understands the novel's "lack of aesthetic finish" differently from Daiches, believing that it signifies not an admission of the failure of art to reduce life, but rather a positive capacity to accept the disruptive and uncontrollable aspects of life into itself.

But the very variety of critical approaches to and judgements of Between the Acts demonstrates one or two important truths about the novel. If the critics differ in the terms of argument they use,

¹ Ann Y. Wilkinson, "A Principle of Unity in Between the Acts", in Claire Sprague, ed., Virginia Woolf: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1971), p. 146. James Naremore, The World Without a Self (New Haven & London, 1973), p. 224.

² David Daiches, Virginia Woolf (London, 1945), p. 120.

³ A.D. Moody, Virginia Woolf (Edinburgh & London, 1963), p. 92.

and tend to draw on Woolf's more clear-cut, if simpler, critical writings for those terms, that is because the novel itself offers no such clear-cut terms for the critic to lay hold on. Moreover, if there is a noticeable impulse in many critics to justify the novel's exploration, and particularly to show that its ending is meaningful, that is because Woolf does not suggest any justification herself, nor give her ending decisive meaning. Between the Acts is thoroughly dramatic, not expository, and this makes it a much more difficult work to grasp than it seems at first sight.

Many critics have tried to describe the enterprise of Between the Acts by reference to Woolf's previous novels, and I suspect there are important reasons for this impulse. For it is extremely difficult to talk about Between the Acts by itself. Unlike any of Conrad's novels, for example, and unlike some of Woolf's own earlier work, this novel does not explore any single problem in a concentrated way, nor try to realize as fully and coherently as possible certain human lives. Rather, its interest is in exploring much less fully articulable needs, capacities and problems of selfhood. Between the Acts is most unlike a novel such as Conrad's "Heart of Darkness", therefore. Woolf's novel gives no full sense either of the lives of its characters - the richness and complexity of their moral natures, one might say - or of the novelist's own self, revealed in such a passionate commitment as Conrad shows in that work. Yet if Between the Acts lacks this urgency, and if Woolf is not compelled to assert her moral self or to open it to so crucial a risk, it is not because she is any less fully there in her novel, or less completely engaged with the possibilities and necessities of life it explores.

The nature and achievement of this novel are perhaps best explained by reference to The Waves. There, too, Woolf had tried to

catch "selfhood" just as it emerges into the world, to explain the most fundamental identifying susceptibilities, needs and perceptions of a self, and to see how these might be realized in moral character. And there, too, her interest was not in human nature as perceived by a deeply reflective and analytic consciousness (such as Conrad's "Marlow" can be), nor even in more profoundly significant aspects of human life as perceived by a simpler reflecting consciousness (such as many of Henry James's witnessing characters are). In both The Waves and Between the Acts Woolf uses simple subjects and simple objects of human consciousness. And, by simplifying the elements of her exploration, she is able to concentrate on the point where human identity first emerges, in that first actualizing of particular inward needs, capacities and limitations.

Yet the differences between Woolf's last novel and The Waves are equally important. For even if she had been able to recognize in the earlier novel, through Bernard's example, that a person's fullest sense of the life in himself and beyond him will be a sense of it as a dynamic rhythm rather than a static pattern, her novel trusted more to its capacity to perceive and successfully present patterns. Nonetheless, the very quality of her handling of Bernard's last soliloquy in The Waves, where the insight about rhythm is most clearly grasped, suggests how close she was to being able to give herself as totally as she had made Bernard give himself, to her own novel's exploratory rhythms. She does so in Between the Acts.

Within the broad constraints of the novel's "world", dealing with a specific household on a specific day, when the yearly village pageant takes place, Woolf allows herself unrestricted "play". As many critics have observed, she includes wishes and notions she had spoken of many times before. For instance, one of the most moving passages in the

novel, the one that includes and inter-relates Isa's little son's epiphanic experience of himself, the flower he holds, and the tree beyond, expresses Woolf's old hope of grasping the world in one integrating, entire vision:

It was a pity that the man who had built Pointz Hall had pitched the house in a hollow, when beyond the flower garden and the vegetables there was this stretch of high ground. Nature had provided a site for a house; man had built his house in a hollow. Nature had provided a stretch of turf half a mile in length and level, till it suddenly dipped to the lily pool. The terrace was broad enough to take the entire shadow of one of the great trees laid flat. There you could walk up and down, up and down, under the shade of the trees. Two or three grew close together; then there were gaps. Their roots broke the turf, and among those bones were green waterfalls and cushions of grass in which violets grew in spring or in summer the wild purple orchis.

Amy was saying something about a feller when Mabel, with her hand on the pram, turned sharply, her sweet swallowed. "Leave off grubbing," she said sharply. "Come along, George."

The little boy had lagged and was grouting in the grass. Then the baby, Caro, thrust her fist out over the coverlet and the furry bear was jerked overboard. Amy had to stoop. George grubbed. The flower blazed between the angles of the roots. Membrane after membrane was torn. It blazed a soft yellow, a lambent light under a film of velvet; it filled the caverns behind the eyes with light. All that inner darkness became a hall, leaf smelling, earth smelling of yellow light. And the tree was beyond the flower; the grass, the flower and the tree were entire. Down on his knees grubbing he held the flower complete. Then there was a roar and a hot breath and a stream of coarse grey hair rushed between him and the flower. Up he leapt, toppling in his fright, and saw coming towards him a terrible peaked eyeless monster moving on legs, brandishing arms.

"Good morning, sir," a hollow voice boomed at him from a beak of paper.

The old man had sprung upon him from his hiding-place behind a tree. (pp. 15-17)

The vision is broken, of course, by the intervention of the old man who, as usual in this novel, plays the part of "separatist" (as distinct from his sister who belongs to the "unifiers"). Yet the

breaking is not the effect of some simple cynicism on Woolf's part. We see her capacity to acknowledge the boy's sense of the world as being deeply and enduringly necessary to her in the passionate spareness of her evocation. There is a beauty in this passage that is the opposite of lyrical indulgence. And there is a gentle directness in her critical placing of his epiphany, whereby the sections presenting his union with a timeless natural world are punctuated by sections evoking both a human world that is not susceptible to being included in such visions, and other aspects of the natural world, changeable (according to the seasonal rhythms) and potentially hostile.

This is typical of Woolf's integrity throughout Between the Acts. Her past needs and wishes are filtered through her present ones, the past commenting on the present, and the present on the past. She is very aware, however, of the special imperative of her present needs, one of which, of course, is to write her novel as well as she can. Such recognition is essential in her treatment of her character, Mrs Swithin. A.D. Moody rightly observes that the novel's "fine balance of acceptance and detachment" is very apparent in the treatment of Lucy Swithin. But it is not only the character's need to have faith in the coherency and ultimate harmony of everything in the world that Woolf catches so finely. Her gentle irony and humour are equally directed at her own need to have faith in her novel's coherence and integrity, beyond whatever she can see in it herself. Moreover, she uses Lucy Swithin in her novel precisely because her character gives the novel a certain stability and continuity of emotional commitment for the reader; and the fact that so much of the critical analysis and justification of the novel centre on this character testifies to Woolf's success in this.

Yet much of Between the Acts is far less completely conceived. For, as well as being clear-sightedly ironic and more indulgently sympathetic about the human needs and capacities it presents (both the needs and capacities of the characters, and also those distinctive of the author herself), the novel is also a much more tentative (in the best sense of that word) exploration within Woolf's self, listening to as-yet-unspoken needs. One such need emerges, for instance, in her continuing impulse to differentiate between certain human possibilities. The differences between Mrs Swithin's nature and her brother's, to take one very clear example, are seen to be real and irreducible. And, although Woolf sees the rightness of this, and values the complementarity of the rational and the visionary aspects each character embodies, there is also a real sense of loss and waste when she comments on the relationship of brother and sister:

"What's the origin - the origin - of that?"

"Superstition," he said.

She flushed, and the little breath too was audible that she drew in as once more he struck a blow at her faith. But, brother and sister, flesh and blood was not a barrier, but a mist. Nothing changed their affection; no argument; no fact; no truth. What she saw he didn't; what he saw she didn't - and so on, ad infinitum. (p. 33)

Despite her capacity to bring her whole sympathy for each character into play, that is, Woolf still needs to see the irreducible differences between her own feelings about each one, and admit the hurt those differences cause her. There is often a tension in the novel, therefore, when her own particular feeling or judgement conflicts with her more impersonal sympathetic capacities. The fact that the novel sometimes shows Woolf's impersonal "negative capability" conflicting with certain deep needs of her own personal self is crucial, and it suggests how fully it has realized her courageously exploratory impulse.

It is important, therefore, to notice that Woolf's self-commitment in Between the Acts has a pessimistic or tragic aspect. She does acknowledge tensions and difficulties (such as those she presents in Bart's and Lucy's relationship, or more severe ones she presents in Isa's relations with her husband, Giles) to which she cannot see any resolution, and which are therefore deeply troubling to her personally. But Woolf also releases herself into her novel's comedy, and delights in its capacities to give particular form to human lives she has to reach out of herself to imagine rather than coming more directly out of her known self. Not all the aspects of her self that Woolf brings into play in this novel are so closely personal that they are inarticulate or at odds with its impersonal exploration of life. Like Bernard in The Waves, Woolf delights in words and in making stories, and she gives full vent to this in the scenes of Miss La Trobe's pageant. For here she includes her more limited self and yet goes beyond it. When she writes the Elizabethan play in the pageant, for instance, she enters so totally into the spirit of it that her writing has none of the characteristics we think of as identifying Woolf's prose. She obviously revels in its language and form, making the response of Isa or Bart or Giles, who "catch the inflexion" of the drama in their own thoughts and speech, seem entirely appropriate. Similarly with her dramatization of character in this novel. She makes characters articulate themselves in language peculiar to each self: the entire opposite of her practice in The Waves. In fact, there is a notable lack of nervous pressure in her creation of character in this novel. The narrative is continually punctuated with the immediacy of brief snatches of dialogue, and the dialogue is far from seeming merely functional. She takes evident pleasure in making it live by allowing herself time, by creating "spaces" in the

narrative in order to explore character - even with those very minor characters in the novel, the nursemaids:

The nurses after breakfast were trundling the perambulator up and down the terrace; and as they trundled they were talking - not shaping pellets of information or handing ideas from one to another, but rolling words, like sweets on their tongues; which, as they thinned to transparency, gave off pink, green, and sweetness. This morning that sweetness was: "How cook had told 'im off about the asparagus; how when she rang I said: how it was a sweet costume with blouse to match;" and that was leading to something about a feller as they walked up and down the terrace rolling sweets, trundling the perambulator. (p. 15)

This capacity to explore character without making it very clear to the reader how that exploration contributes to the total pattern represents a substantial advance in Virginia Woolf's art. Between the Acts proves itself able to explore human life going on "behind" obviously significant human acts, as well as the "acts" themselves, which are clearly of moral or psychological importance. What lies at the heart of Between the Acts is something more, therefore, than Woolf's earlier belief in the human need and capacity to reach toward a "wholeness of being" - a coherence, an integrity, of life encompassing every aspect, every element, every relationship, of personal existence, and which seems to respond to, or at least suggest, a corresponding coherence and unity in the external world. Although there are signs in To the Lighthouse of a further step in Woolf's understanding, it is in The Waves that she comes to see that, as life is essentially a process, a sequence in time, so the coherence, the integrity, to which a human life reaches must also be a movement in time. Thus if "wholeness of being" were imaged as a coherent pattern, that pattern had also to have a temporal dimension: pattern becomes rhythm; "wholeness of being" becomes both an immersion in that rhythm and, simultaneously with that, an understanding and acceptance of it. The

self realizes its potentialities, finds its own distinctive identity, and comprehends a coherence in life, not only in responding to others and finding their place in the pattern of experience (as in To the Lighthouse), but also in finding its own experience as part of a rhythm that encompasses others' experience, others' lives, others' worlds as well. But now, in Between the Acts, Virginia Woolf reaches beyond this again; to see disruptions, gaps, breakings-apart, disunity, partiality and fragmentation, as also essential moments in the larger rhythms of human life. Of course, the novel does more than merely see this. It also sees that the most difficult, and yet most profound, human need is the capacity to accept this: to trust, that is, to a coherence that cannot ever be seen as a whole, let alone understood, since it somehow combines, by an unresolvable paradox, pattern and the disruption of pattern, rhythm and the breaking of rhythm, unity and irreducible disunity. This sort of trust requires that the human impulse to order and coherence be prepared to surrender itself, to allow what it cannot see as coherence, or cannot make coherent, to blow where it will. It is a trust that life never is nor ever will be mere chaos, even though the rhythms of its flow are endlessly opening up, dissolving, changing into other rhythms beyond any individual's perception - or even conception.

Of course, other writers had seen this too. Like Virginia Woolf, Yeats also found that he had to go past the image of personal life as a coherent pattern, or even as a flower or plant:

O chestnut-tree, great-rooted blossomer,
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?

Here, his very way of putting his question implies its answer; indeed, he puts it with an awareness of his own mature vision of the problem, and with a belief not only that the reader will see the answer, but also

that he will feel that the answer is the necessary one. Clearly, Yeats's need to put his vision of personal life as a question, even while feeling confident and conscious of the answer, is revealing. The questioning actually evokes - in the same way as Woolf's dramatic exploration of a more fully-conceived drama of human life in Between the Acts also evokes - the quality of the answer, which is also not a fixed or "conclusive" summation. In Yeats's case the answer is that, while the tree is not any one of its parts taken separately, neither is it simply an undivided whole. We cannot perceive the tree without seeing the relationship of its different parts, and, more importantly, our perception of the tree is a process, occurring in time. We move between one of its aspects and the others to establish a coherent image of it. Or, to put it another way, our perception of the tree entire is not the most important way of seeing it, nor the end to which our perception ultimately tends. Our profounder need (which Woolf recognized in Between the Acts, and so broke the boy's vision of himself and the tree as one) is to continue looking, recognizing that any perception of the tree entire is only a part of the rhythm of our vision, which also needs to see individual leaves, say, or a particular flower, or perhaps nothing at all. This is why Yeats turns from the image of a tree to the image of the dance as a metaphor of personal life, though he still puts his insight as a question:

O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance?

We cannot know them apart, of course - though they are not the same, and there is always a difference, a gap, between them. Similarly for Virginia Woolf: the dance of life necessarily includes real gaps and disruptions. She makes this point explicitly in her novel - as when Isa comes into the room where Bart Oliver is sleeping

and dreaming of the past and India:

"Am I," Isa apologized, "interrupting?"

Of course she was - destroying youth and India. It was his fault, since she had persisted in stretching his life so fine, so far. Indeed he was grateful to her, watching her as she strolled about the room, for continuing. (p. 24)

While Woolf understands very well the larger truth that such interruptions are essential to "continuing" life, she is not often able in this novel to present that truth so complacently. We see how deeply and disturbingly it involves her in passages like that of Isa's unspoken interruption to the yearly-repeated dialogue between Bart and Lucy about the pageant. Isa silently adds an image of the present, remembering the rape reported in that morning's paper, but the concentrated explosive horror here includes all of Woolf's self:

The words were like the first peal of a chime of bells. As the first peals, you hear the second; as the second peals, you hear the third. So when Isa heard Mrs. Swithin say: "I've been nailing the placard to the Barn," she knew she would say next:

"For the pageant."

And he would say:

"Today? By Jupiter! I'd forgotten!"

"If it's fine," Mrs. Swithin continued, they'll act on the terrace ..."

"And if it's wet," Bartholomew continued, "in the Barn."

"And which will it be?" Mrs. Swithin continued. "Wet or fine?"

Then, for the seventh time in succession, they both looked out of the window.

Every summer, for seven summers now, Isa had heard the same words; about the hammer and the nails; the pageant and the weather. Every year they said, would it be wet or fine; and every year it was - one or the other. The same chime followed the same chime, only this year beneath the chime she heard: "The girl screamed and hit him about the face with a hammer." (p. 29)

This capacity to perceive the rhythms of human experience while continuing to feel their disruptive and unknowable power to the fullest is characteristic of Between the Acts. The novel is a dramatic statement both of her fullest self and of her fullest conception of human life, and an ongoing inquiry into both. She allows - indeed, imaginatively ventures out in order to see and accept - real disruptions, such as the emotional one she acknowledges in the passage above. Her awareness of that rape echoes throughout the novel, never really being absorbed into its more general confident and outgoing spirit. This is why she ends her novel in so different a way to The Waves. Certainly she includes something rather similar to Bernard's summing up in Between the Acts, in Reverend Streatfield's attempt to sum up the "meaning" of Miss La Trobe's play when he gives his vote of thanks. She makes his attempt something of a joke, but it is not entirely a joke. It does, after all, bring together the various strands of her drama in a coherent, more concentrated way, and so has an important role itself in the novel. It is as satisfactory, Woolf implies, as any such summary could be. Yet it does not have to carry any more weight in terms of the novel's own enterprise than that. The novel's final word is not conclusive but introductory.

Woolf chooses to end her novel with a scene between Giles and Isa Oliver which does not at all offer any clear result to the novel's exploration of coherence and disruption in human experience. It is not even clear what the exchange between the two characters signifies in itself: whether, for instance, it is the "light" - which makes the particular characters of Giles and Isa discernable and familiar to us - or the timeless "darkness" that matters most:

The darkness increased. The breeze swept round the room. With a little shiver Mrs. Swithin drew her sequin shawl about her shoulders. She was too deep

in the story to ask for the window to be shut. "England," she was reading, "was then a swamp. Thick forests covered the land. On the top of their matted branches birds sang ..."

The great square of the open window showed only sky now. It was drained of light, severe, stone cold. Shadows fell. Shadows crept over Bartholomew's high forehead; over his great nose. He looked leafless, spectral, and his chair monumental. As a dog shudders its skin, his skin shuddered. He rose, shook himself, glared at nothing, and stalked from the room. They heard the dog's paws padding on the carpet behind him.

Lucy turned the page, quickly, guiltily, like a child who will be told to go to bed before the end of the chapter.

"Prehistoric man," she read, "half-human, half-ape, roused himself from his semi-crouching position and raised great stones."

She slipped the letter from Scarborough between the pages to mark the end of the chapter, rose, smiled, and tiptoed silently out of the room.

The old people had gone up to bed. Giles crumpled the newspaper and turned out the light. Left alone together for the first time that day, they were silent. Alone, enmity was bared; also love. Before they slept, they must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace. From that embrace another life might be born. But first they must fight, as the dog fox fights with the vixen, in the heart of darkness, in the fields of night.

Isa let her sewing drop. The great hooded chairs had become enormous. And Giles too. And Isa too against the window. The window was all sky without colour. The house had lost its shelter. It was night before roads were made, or houses. It was the night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among rocks.

Then the curtain rose. They spoke. (pp. 254-6)

Curiously, it is the darkness here that gives us hope, for the "darkness" is part of the cyclic rhythm of life, in which no human life shines out a particular, undifferentiated significance of its own. In accordance with that rhythm, Giles and Isa may fulfil the hope it offers and be reconciled with each other, and create a new light - a new kind of life or at least a new phase of life. For it also matters

very much to us that the two people concerned here are Giles and Isa, two particular, distinctive "lights", and not just any human lives. The novel has successfully made us care for them in particular, and this is why we feel hope when we see that they participate in a larger, continuing human drama. So, too, has the novel made us care about this conclusion to its search - a possible conclusion, in fact, to the human searching for meaning in life. Had Virginia Woolf been able to regard this conclusion as what she had sought in her novels, however - a conclusive answer to the question, "what is the meaning of life?" - it would not matter to us. As it is, what is valuable in this "conclusion" to Between the Acts is its statement, in a very controlled way, of the exploratory passion we have come to recognize as the whole novel's most basic feature.

The novel's final capacity to "speak out" itself, rather than to summarize, is important. And, as others have observed, it is important because its "speaking out" acknowledges that there are some realities that cannot be controlled or contained, not even within the novel's special coherency. In Between the Acts, Virginia Woolf not only presents her central questions about human lives dramatically; she does more than this. Like Yeats, she finds that her very questions inevitably come to seem questionable. "What is the meaning of life?" "How to bring people together?" - she must ask such questions, as she does about the future of Giles' and Isa's relationship at the end of the novel. But she also makes us see that the way the questions are put suggests a detachment that is finally impossible, and suggests too that any answers that we could receive would ^{not} be useful or even meaningful to us. The very terms of such questions tend to dissolve back into the very experience and the feelings that prompted them; and yet the questions go on demanding to be asked. There is no way that

human life - which includes both the asking and the dissolving - can be ^{finally reduced to right or wrong "answers", or even to any} finally meaningful questions. Even terms like "light" or "darkness", "hope" or "despair", "self" or "other" are inadequate to the intricate rhythms of experience and detachment, self-knowledge and self-exploration and discovery, that human life as it exists both within time and outside it, encompass. Only most sensitive and most honest art can reach toward catching those rhythms - not as a witness of them, but bearing witness to them. This is why I think Between the Acts is Woolf's finest work.

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