

THE SEA STORY IN THE FICTION OF ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON,  
RUDYARD KIPLING, AND JOSEPH CONRAD, 1881-1917

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### Preface and Acknowledgements

Although Robert Louis Stevenson, Rudyard Kipling, and Joseph Conrad are rarely examined as writers of sea fiction, either individually or collectively, their work written during the period 1881 to 1917 was instrumental in establishing them as the pre-eminent exponents of the form in the history of British literature. The following study assesses their ability as serious maritime authors, examines their response to the artistic problems posed by the sea story, and sets their achievement against the popular nautical fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

I am indebted to Professor A.R. Humphreys, Dr Mary Jarrett, and, in particular, Mr J.C. Hilson who have supervised my work. In addition I should like to thank Commander H. Pursey R.N. (Retd.) for advice on the state of the lower-deck in the Royal Navy of the Dreadnought era and on the life and work of Lionel Yexley; Professor Jack Simmons for his guidance on the maritime background of the period 1881 to 1917; Mr W. Smith for his expert help in confirming the nautical accuracy of Stevenson's later sea novels; and the trustees of the British Library for allowing me to study "The Rescuer" manuscript in the Ashley Collection.

## Texts and Abbreviations

The following editions are referred to:

The Collected Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad.  
24 vols. London: Dent, 1946-54.

The Pentland Edition of the Works of Robert Louis Stevenson.  
20 vols. Ed. Edmund Gosse. Edinburgh: Cassell, 1906-97.

The Uniform Edition of the Works of Rudyard Kipling.  
24 vols. London: Macmillan, 1899-1938.

The following abbreviations are used:

### PART I

PE Pentland Edition (as above)

### PART II

CC Captains Courageous

DW The Day's Work

MI Many Inventions

SOM Something of Myself

TD Traffics and Discoveries

### PART III

LE Last Essays

MOS The Mirror of the Sea

NLL Notes on Life and Letters

NN The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'

SL The Shadow Line

T Typhoon

TLS 'Twixt Land and Sea

TR The Rescue

WT Within the Tides

Y Youth



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## INTRODUCTION

### I

The subject of this thesis is the sea story in the fiction of Robert Louis Stevenson, Rudyard Kipling, and Joseph Conrad during the years 1881 to 1917, that is, between the publication of Stevenson's first sea story, Treasure Island,<sup>1</sup> and the appearance of The Shadow Line, which effectively brings to a close a period that saw remarkable developments in British sea fiction. It is arguably the case that Kipling and Conrad (Stevenson died in 1894) had made their most significant contribution to the sea story by the end of the Great War. After 1917 Conrad would publish only two more sea novels, The Rescue (1920)<sup>2</sup> and The Rover (1923). Kipling, who did not write an adult sea novel, and specialised in the maritime short story, published two sea stories after 1917, "The Manner of Men" (1930) and "A Naval Mutiny" (1931).

As far as this thesis is concerned the definition of the sea story is: a fiction set at sea. Of course some narratives are set at sea but never involve the conditions of maritime life; Kipling's

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1. Published in Young Folks, October 1881 - January 1882.

2. In the case of novels the date of their first publication in book form has been given with the first citation. Short stories have been dated by their first appearance in a magazine or a collection (whichever came first). The dates have been repeated where this has been considered helpful.

"Bertram and Bimi" (1891) is narrated on board ship but it is hardly a sea story, involving as it does a tale of Bornean jungles. On the other hand, Conrad's harbour story, "A Smile of Fortune" (1911) has been fully discussed (in the context of marine fiction) because the fact that it begins and ends at sea is an important element in the interpretation of the narrative's meaning. The inclusion of Conrad's "To-morrow" (1902) is more problematic. It is not set at sea and is really something of a domestic drama; nevertheless it attempts to assess differing attitudes to the wandering life of the maritime adventurer. A number of Kipling's Navy stories are set on land; of these I have included one, "Mrs Bathurst" (1904), because it is the only narrative which draws its insights from the specifically maritime - as opposed to the service - nature of Royal Navy life.

It has not been my intention to include a full discussion of every sea story written by the three writers; on the contrary, the thesis sets out to illustrate their developing skills and changing themes by choosing what appear to be the most significant narratives. Their significance has been determined by two main concerns: first, the thesis examines the three writers' response to the particular challenge that the sea story presents to the author who wishes to write serious and enduring sea fiction; and, secondly, it investigates the figures of the sailor and maritime adventurer.

## II

It is true that none of the three authors under examination thought of himself as solely a writer of sea stories. Conrad, in particular, is now famous for his distaste at the thought of being so classified.<sup>3</sup> His feelings doubtless grew more from his desire

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3. See "Preface to The Shorter Tales of Joseph Conrad", Last Essays, Dent, London (1949), p. 142 (all future references will be to The Collected Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad, Dent, London (1946-1954)).

to be considered a serious writer than from the conviction that he was not writing sea fiction. Stevenson probably thought of himself as writing adventure-romance novels, and Kipling wrote sea stories just as he wrote fiction about the army, Indian administrators, and district officers. Sea fiction does, in fact, belong to the larger classification of adventure fiction and, in choosing to employ maritime material, the three authors assumed the problem of using subject matter traditionally associated with the trivial and the ephemeral, for serious purposes. Though Kipling is largely silent about this problem Conrad's and Stevenson's critical writings and correspondence occasionally grapple with the task of outlining a theoretical basis for a type of fiction which would both entertain the senses and provoke the intellect:

Out of the material of a boys's story I've made  
Youth by the force of the idea expressed in  
 accordance with a strict conception of my method.<sup>4</sup>

The three parts of the thesis attempt to assess, in the work of each of the three writers, the relationship of the two dimensions which Conrad stresses: idea (content and meaning) and method.

Conrad's distaste at the thought of being classified as a writer of boys' fiction and the fact that sea fiction was not regarded as a vehicle for conveying serious ideas has to be understood in the context of English sea fiction in the nineteenth century. The Royal Navy had been a subject for fiction in the eighteenth century<sup>5</sup> - the most notable

4. Joseph Conrad : Letters to William Blackwood and David S. Meldrum, Edited by William Blackburn, Durham, North Carolina (1958), p. 154. Conrad was encouraged to develop his ideas on serious adventure fiction because of his dislike of the classification "Stories of the Sea". See Donald W. Rude "Conrad as Editor : The Preparation of 'The Shorter Tales'", Proceedings of the Comparative Literature Symposium, vii, Joseph Conrad : Theory and World Fiction, Texas Tech. University, Lubbock, Texas (1974), pp. 189-196.
5. For a general history of British sea fiction see H.F. Watson: The Sailor in English Fiction and Drama 1550-1800, Columbia University Press, New York (1931), (referred to below as: Watson, The Sailor); and Coasts of Treasure Island, San Antonio, Texas (1969), (referred to below as Watson, Coasts). Another study by Commander C.N. Robinson and C.G. Leyland, The British Tar in Fact and Fiction, London (1909), (referred to below as Robinson, The British Tar), contains valuable material but is not completely reliable (see Watson, The Sailor, pp. 1-2).



example being Smollet's Roderick Random (1748) - but the Napoleonic wars brought fresh impulses into the type. C.N. Parkinson has identified a sudden increase in such literature from 1826.<sup>6</sup> He ascribes the delay between impulse and effect to a "post-war reaction".<sup>7</sup> Eventually new Naval wars stimulated popular interest and ex-sailors like Glascock, Michael Scott, and Frederick Marryat, were among the first to capitalise on the potential market, and others followed their example:

The output of such books reached a peak in 1836-41 and then slowly declined until about 1856. By that date many of the veterans were dead and the Crimean War had come to interrupt the reminiscences of those who remained. 8

The majority of these stories conformed to a common pattern which has been described by H.F. Watson:

the navy yarn, presented a naval officer, usually a midshipman, in his career to post-captain, with a wealth of realistic and often historical detail.<sup>9</sup>

Their appeal is simply explained: they capitalise upon Britain's glorious Naval history in the Napoleonic Wars; and they introduce the glamorous figure of the Naval officer winning lasting renown and career preferment. The type was to last into the latter half of the nineteenth century through the pen of W.H.G. Kingston.<sup>10</sup> The short stories of "Bartimeus",<sup>11</sup>

6. C.N. Parkinson, Portsmouth Point, London (1948), p. 133 (referred to below as: Parkinson, Portsmouth Point).

7. Parkinson, Portsmouth Point, p. 133.

8. Parkinson, Portsmouth Point, p. 133.

9. Watson, Coasts, p. 5.

10. W.H.G. Kingston (1814-1880), An English author of adventure books (e.g., The Three Midshipmen (1873)).

11. "Bartimeus" (Sir L. Ritchie, 1887-1967). As a serving officer (R.N.) "Bartimeus" published his first collection of short stories, Naval Occasions, in 1914. He was denied a position in the executive branch of the service because of his poor eyesight - hence his choice of the pseudonym "Bartimeus" (the blind beggar). See his Obituary in the Times, 9 February 1967, p. 12.

written in the early decades of the twentieth century, introduced contemporary material - the minor Naval wars of the nineteenth century, for example - but, once again, the material was ephemeral and calculated to celebrate traditions rather than provoke serious thought.

It might be thought that Captain Marryat's sea fiction merits closer attention than the work of his contemporaries writing in the same field. His first narrative, Frank Mildmay (1829), in being set at sea, is the first novel of its kind in British sea fiction and one which set the popular pattern referred to above.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, his work was admired by Kipling and Conrad. Conrad's eulogistic essay on Marryat<sup>13</sup> may at first appear to be something of a puzzle, given Conrad's low opinion of the sea story, but once it is recognised that Marryat's concerns (the traditions of the Royal Navy, the initiation of a fiction which detailed the working lives of seagoing sailors, and the depiction of the career ambitions of his heroes) anticipated the very material which Conrad and Kipling were to work with, their feeling for his work is easily explained. The truth is, however, that his efforts did little to raise the intellectual status of the sea novel.

The Navy yarn is, according to Watson, one of two "fairly definite formulas" existing among the mass of early and mid-nineteenth century sea fiction.<sup>14</sup> The second formula, "the desert island romance":

wrecked or marooned its protagonist on an island,  
with concomitants of savages, buried treasure,  
pirates, or all three. 15

The voyage sections are usually brief. R.M. Ballantyne's The Coral Island (1858) is an example. Stevenson was intrigued by the type and

12. Watson, Coasts, p. 28.

13. "Tales of the Sea" collected in Notes on Life and Letters, pp. 53-55. The second half of the essay is on James Fenimore Cooper.

14. Watson, Coasts, p. 5.

15. Watson, Coasts, p. 5.

he set out to emulate it in Treasure Island, one of the very few to carry serious themes.

During the period 1880 to 1917 sea stories were a popular type of fiction.<sup>16</sup> At the same time writers were using sea narratives as a means of pressurising the government into spending more money on the navy. The so called "invasion novels" fostered national fears of invasion from abroad, and frequently contained descriptions of naval battles.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless there was no great increase in the quality of sea fiction - outside the work of Stevenson, Kipling, and Conrad - and sentimentality and melodrama continued to dominate the popular narratives of the day. There are developments, however, which are reflected in the work of the three major authors.

One of the most striking developments in the period is the increasing popularity of the short sea story. By the turn of the century best-selling authors like C.J. Cutcliffe Hyne,<sup>18</sup> F.T. Bullen,<sup>19</sup> and

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16. See William E. Messenger, "Conrad and his 'Sea Stuff'", Conradiana VI, (1974), p. 8.

17. The genre is the subject of a study by I.F. Clarke, Voices Propheying War 1763-1984, London (1966).

18. C.J. Cutcliffe Hyne (1865-1944). Books include: The Adventures of Captain Kettle (1898); The Further Adventures of Captain Kettle (1899); The Little Red Captain (1902); and Captain Kettle on the Warpath (1916). The first two collections were originally stories published in Pearson's Magazine and then collected into their respective volumes as loosely-linked chapters. Kettle first appeared as a secondary character in a novel, The Giant Sea Swindle, serialised in Alfred Harmsworth's Answers. The novel later became The Little Red Captain. (See Hyne's autobiography My Joyful Life, London (1935).)

19. F.T. Bullen (1857-1915). Books include: The Cruise of the Cachalot (1898); Idylls of the Sea (1899); Beyond (1909); and Fighting the Icebergs (1910). A remarkable man, he rose from street-urchin to chief mate (see The Log of a Sea Waif, Being Recollections of the First Four Years of my Sea Life (1899)). He also wrote a story of the Merchant Service: The Men of the Merchant Service (1900).



W.W. Jacobs<sup>20</sup> were producing large numbers of short sea stories for the magazines of the day. The implications for Conrad were important. Choosing a length somewhere between the novel and the short story as written by W.W. Jacobs and R.B. Cunninghame Graham,<sup>21</sup> Conrad wrote the majority of his sea fiction in the "long" short story form.<sup>22</sup> The exceptions - Chance (1913), Lord Jim (1900), and The Rescue are not pure sea stories at all and contain substantial amounts of non-maritime activity. Kipling wrote only one sea novel, Captains Courageous (1896-1897). Conrad's and Kipling's short sea fiction is no longer episodic in the manner of Marryat's novels but is usually tightly constructed round a unified sequence of events: Conrad's "The Secret Sharer" (1910) narrates the events on board a sailing ship during a six-day spell in the Gulf of Siam; Kipling's "A Matter of Fact" (1892) largely concerns a single incident on a single voyage.

Alongside this new development was a renewed concern with realistic nautical description. The concept of nautical realism is examined below, but it is pertinent to remark at this juncture that Conrad and Kipling were not alone in including realistic descriptions of life and

20. W.W. Jacobs (1863-1943) is remembered chiefly as a writer of humorous short stories. His sailor-comedies centre round the trio Ginger Dick, Peter Russett, and Sam Small. He also wrote a few serious short sea stories (e.g., "An Intervention" and "Over the Side", Sea Urchins (1898)). A prolific writer, his collections of short stories include: Many Cargoes (1896); Sea Urchins (1898); More Cargoes (1899); Light Freights (1901); Odd Craft (1904); and Ship's Company (1911).

21. R.B. Cunninghame Graham (1852-1936). "He was variously traveller, cattle-rancher and horse-dealer, fencing-master, Liberal M.P., pioneer socialist . . . demagogue, convict . . . political columnist, critic, story-writer . . . ." (Joseph Conrad's Letters to R.B. Cunninghame Graham. Edited with an Introduction by C.T. Watts, Cambridge University Press (1969), p. 7. Graham wrote a number of short sea stories, including: "S.S. Atlas", (The Saturday Review, LXXV, 652-3 and 676-7, 14 and 21 May 1898); and "In A German Tramp" (Thirteen Stories (1900)).

22. Lawrence Graver, Conrad's Short Fiction, Berkeley and Los Angeles, (1969), pp. viii-ix, deals with Conrad's preference for a story of thirty to forty thousand words.

work in the Merchant Service;<sup>23</sup> F.T. Bullen, and W. Clark Russell<sup>24</sup> used their knowledge of the Service as a basis for their fiction. Their only serious concern involves a desire to expose the injustices of sailing life - the poor pay and working conditions, the evils of crimping,<sup>25</sup> and the danger, as they saw it, of the increasing numbers of foreign seamen in the service. In one respect, however, the new realism helped to devalue the artistic status of the sea story. Too often in fiction of this sort the injustices become sensationalised and contribute to the role of popular maritime narratives in providing for the simple emotions of horror, disgust, and pathos. Even an apparently sincere reformer like W. Clark Russell is guilty of sensationalism. C.J. Cutcliffe Hyne's Captain Kettle stories are almost

23. What we know today as the Merchant Navy was created out of the Merchant Service in 1922 in recognition of the part it had played in the Great War. See Captain A.G. Course, The Merchant Navy, A Social History, London (1963), p. 278 (referred to below as Course, Merchant Navy).
24. William Clark Russell (1844-1911). Like Conrad, Bullen, Marryat, and Melville, Russell was, for part of his life (1857-1865), a seaman. He began as an apprentice and later became a second mate. The primitive conditions of service undermined his health and he left the sea. He did not make his name in fiction until 1874 with the publication of John Holdsworth : Chief Mate. His greatest success was The Wreck of the 'Grosvenor' (1877). He later became a journalist and wrote for the Daily Telegraph under the pseudonym "A Seafarer". A campaigner for sailors' rights, he also strove to raise the status of the sea novel (see below p.16) and wrote introductions for new editions of Marryat's and Melville's works. For further details of his life and work see his Obituary in the Times 9 November 1911, p. 11.
25. Crimping, or the business of procuring sailors by foul means, was one of the great evils of the maritime world in the latter half of the nineteenth century, although it was discouraged in Britain by the abolition of the Advance Note in 1880. (See Course, Merchant Navy, p. 240.) The Advance Note was a month's wages in advance "in the form of a note payable ten days after the seaman's ship had sailed". (Course, Merchant Navy, p. 240.) Designed to benefit the seaman's family, it was misused by seamen and "crimps" alike. Seamen accepted a good time on credit from gambling houses, brothels, and boarding houses. The credit was given at extortionate rates of interest and the seamen were frequently only able to pay by allowing the crimp to sign them on for a ship. The seaman then surrendered his Advance Note. In some ports sailors were drugged and "signed on" to ships without their consent. See Course, Merchant Navy, p. 240-244.

totally conceived along sensational lines. His formula is simple: he offers a "slice of life" from a Merchant Service whose masters are corrupt and vicious, whose owners are thieves and swindlers, and whose seamen are violent and depraved simpletons. It is possible that this sort of crude appeal for popularity, as well as contributing towards Conrad's dislike of the tag "sea-story writer", encouraged his, Kipling's, and Stevenson's use of narrative techniques which distance the impact of the more scandalous events, and render more objective the reader's perspective. It may also have made necessary the employment of sober and respectable seaman-narrators like Conrad's Marlow and Kipling's McPhee.

It should be apparent, therefore, that British sea fiction was not of a sufficient stature to inspire an author intending to write serious sea narratives. Nevertheless it was not the only tradition open to Kipling, Conrad, and Stevenson and all three authors were familiar - to varying degrees - with American sea fiction.<sup>26</sup> The sea story in American literature flourished between 1800 and 1851; its major exponents were James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851) and Herman Melville (1819-1891). Melville's great achievement, and in this he was capitalising upon the work of Cooper, was to make the sea story a vehicle for serious ideas. Though Cooper's work was known to Stevenson and Conrad, and Melville's novels were read and liked by Kipling and Stevenson, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to search for evidence of direct influence although it offers a promising field

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26. See Thomas Philbrick, James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction, Cambridge, Mass., (1961) (referred to below as Philbrick, Cooper).



for research.<sup>27</sup> The significance of both periods of achievement in the writing of serious nautical fiction is that they involved the combination of realistic nautical material and romance techniques and subject-matter.

The romance is a much older literary form than the novel;<sup>28</sup> but the "new" and realistic fiction of Richardson and Fielding,<sup>29</sup> in the eighteenth century did not spell its end. Later, in the last years of the eighteenth century and the early decades of the nineteenth, in the hands of Gothic novelists like Horace Walpole and Mary Shelley, the romance became an escape from the realistic novel's concern with the mundane, the actual, and the probabilities of ordinary life. In contrast the romance involved itself with the improbable, the exotic, and the fantastic. The sea stories examined in this thesis, however, rarely fall into such neat compartments, but when they do utilise material and techniques common to the romance, then it seems permissible to speak of romance elements. In general then, the sea narratives of Kipling, Conrad, and Stevenson fall somewhere between the two opposing poles of romance and realism.

The romance concept is of importance to maritime fiction which habitually employs material that, to the majority of readers, is improbable: desertion from a steamer in Lord Jim, escape from the law

27. Kipling read Melville's White-Jacket (1850) before embarking on manoeuvres with the Royal Navy in the late 1890's (see below p.181). Stevenson's letters make it clear that he had read Melville's early novels during his travels in the Pacific (see The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson, ed. Sidney Colvin, Tusitala Edition, London (1924), iii, 203 and 254). Conrad had a distinctly low opinion of Melville's work (see Frank Macshane, "Conrad on Melville", American Literature, XXIX (1958), 463-464). The two authors are the subject of a comparative study by Leon Seltzer, The Vision of Conrad and Melville, New York (1970) (referred to below as: Seltzer, Melville).

28. See Gillian Beer, The Romance, London (1970).

29. See Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel, Penguin, Harmondsworth (1963) i, 10.

in "The Secret Sharer", and massacre on a remote island in Stevenson's The Wrecker (1892). Even more wayward is Stevenson's use of pirates and buccaneers in Treasure Island and The Master of Ballantrae (1880), and Kipling's description of the deep sea creatures in "A Matter of Fact". It is ironic that many of these improbable incidents were founded on fact but, as Conrad acknowledged in a preface to "Heart of Darkness" (1899), they could be fictionally enhanced for "the perfectly legitimate . . . purpose of bringing [the experience] home to the minds and bosoms of the readers".<sup>30</sup> More important is the purpose which underlies the use of this material and the means by which its significance is extracted. Melville, for example, defended the employment of romance material on the grounds that "Truth" and "surface verisimilitude" were not the same,<sup>31</sup> and there is little doubt that Kipling, Conrad, and Stevenson would have agreed.<sup>32</sup> For Melville there was "actuality" (surface verisimilitude) and reality ("intuitive Truth") - "Those short, quick probings at the very axis of reality". Melville and his British successors were similar in that they used their adventure material in such a way that "Truth" - whether psychological or moral - was revealed.

From the first the mere anecdote, the mere statement I might say, that such a thing [the voyage of the Nan-Shan through a typhoon] had happened on the high seas, appeared to me a sufficient subject for meditation. Yet it was <sup>but</sup> a bit of a sea yarn after all. I felt that to bring out its deeper significance which was quite apparent to me, something other, something more was required; a leading motive that would harmonise all these violent noises, and a point of view that would put all that elemental fury into its proper place. 33

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30. Youth, p. vii.

31. See Allen Hayman, "The Real and the Original : Herman Melville's Theory of Prose Fiction", Modern Fiction Studies, VIII (1962), 211-237 (referred to below as: Hayman "Melville").

32. See Conrad's famous Preface to The Nigger of the "Narcissus"; Stevenson's essay "A Note on Realism" (Later Essays); and Kipling's prefatory poem to Many Inventions (1893) "To the True Romance".

33. Typhoon and Other Stories, p. vi.

Many of the techniques which they used - the dramatised narrator, symbolism, and metaphor - stemmed from the romance tradition.

The extent to which romance elements feature in a sea story vary considerably. It will be argued later that there is a strong impulse in sea fiction towards a high degree of surface verisimilitude in nautical matters; nevertheless a writer with as much expertise at his fingertips as Conrad could abandon the practice of using this material in pursuit of the imaginative freedom conferred upon a writer using romance material and techniques. Thus "Freya of the Seven Isles" (1912) concentrates less on the handling of ships and the description of shipboard environment because Conrad is aiming to create a symbolic setting in which characters, representing beauty, love, devotion, or, alternatively, ugliness, and malice, battle for supremacy. Predictably, perhaps, malice is associated with a squat, black gunboat, and good with a beautiful brig. His purpose, in employing romance elements, may be better understood by reference to Nathaniel Hawthorne's Preface to The Blithedale Romance (1852). He argues that the romance confers benefits which enable the writer to explore psychological and mythical truth to greater effect.

In the old countries, with which Fiction has long been conversant, a certain conventional privilege seems to be awarded to the romancer; his work is not put exactly side by side with nature; and he is allowed a license with regard to every-day Probability, in view of the improved effects which he is bound to produce thereby . . . . In its absence, the beings of imagination are compelled to show themselves in the same category as actually living mortals; a necessity that generally renders the paint and pasteboard of their composition but too painfully discernible. 34

Of course this type of fiction also offered a solution for those writers who - like Kipling and Stevenson early in their careers - lacked a close

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34. Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Blithedale Romance, The Centenary Edition, Ohio State University Press (1964), iii, 1-2.



knowledge of nautical terminology and seagoing practice. In this fashion Kipling's "The Disturber of Traffic" (1891) utilises the potential for symbolism and metaphor in a vividly imagined coastal landscape. His description relates less to what is realistic than to what is necessary for a symbolic presentation of a mind under stress. As Robert Kiely has commented, this concern with the psychological is typical of the romance, but, as with Stevenson and Conrad, it is often blended with the realist preoccupations of the social and the moral.<sup>35</sup>

In other sea stories the romance material may be severely restricted, although when included it is usually of central importance. Elsa Nettels has shown how action in Conrad's novels

begins with the sudden disruption of a character's everyday routine life, disruption which destroys those illusions of the self and the world in which he had found security. 36

These illusions are as much a part of romance fiction as the dramatic events which constitute the disruption. The same pattern of normality and catastrophe distinguishes the work of Kipling (e.g., "A Matter of Fact") and Stevenson (e.g., The Wrecker). Perry Miller's comment on Melville, who,

unlike Cooper, employed the pattern of the romance to explode the romantic thesis 37

applies equally to the sea fiction of the three British maritime writers.

The romance offers one route by which a sea story writer can introduce serious themes into his fiction. Conrad, Kipling, and Stevenson also used nautically realistic material to the same end.

35. Robert Kiely, The Romantic Novel in England, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press (1972), p. 250.

36. Elsa Nettels, James and Conrad, University of Georgia Press, Athens (1977), p. 64.

37. Perry Miller, "Melville and Transcendentalism", Virginia Quarterly Review, XXIX (1953), 568.



They employed detail drawn from the techniques of shiphandling, the complex field of marine engineering, and the world of maritime commercial dealings. In many ways surface realism of this type can be complementary to the romance material: exciting and often extraordinary events are set against a fully realised and recognisably "actual" nautical world.<sup>38</sup> In addition, surface realism, allied to social and psychological realism introduces its own serious themes into fiction. The dissertation argues that Kipling and Conrad, in particular, were concerned with a socially and psychologically accurate depiction of men at work, and for this they used the world of the Merchant Service as they had observed it. In this fashion realism offers a further challenge to the sea-story writer: once set on the realistic course the author must pay due regard to the facts of life and work at sea. The challenge appears to produce an impulse towards the nautically realistic which is not only a feature of British sea fiction. American sea narratives during the period 1800 to 1851, for example, follow the pattern.

James Fenimore Cooper's first sea novel, The Pilot (1824), was partly written as an attempt to demonstrate the lack of nautical expertise in Walter Scott's The Pirate (1822)<sup>39</sup> and, furthermore, to show that a detailed study of maritime life would not "bewilder the general reader".<sup>40</sup> He was well qualified to write such a novel (he had some five years' sea experience) and his example was instrumental in creating a new school of nautical fiction. The novels and short stories of the 1820's and 1830's, however, contained substantial romance

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38. Seltzer, Melville, pp. 110-111, comments on Conrad's and Melville's use of this technique.

39. Philbrick, Cooper, pp. 50-51.

40. Marcus Cunliffe, The Literature of the United States, 3rd edition (with revisions), Pelican, Harmondsworth (1970), p. 63.

elements and embraced such subjects as the supernatural and the fantastic (e.g., Edgar Allan Poe's The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym (1838)), the activities of pirates, and the superiority of the American character as revealed in feats of heroism and daring individuality.

Realism, however, proved to be more popular and its growing appeal was signalled by the appearance of Richard Henry Dana's Two Years before the Mast (1840), written to expose the brutalities of the American Merchant Marine.<sup>41</sup> It was by no means the first - or the last - account of its kind. Cooper's novels also became more realistic, a trend evidenced in his Afloat and Ashore (1844). Melville was affected by the popularity of realism and Redburn (1849), White Jacket (1850), and Moby Dick (1851) reveal his determination to base his search for "Truth" on an actual background.

That the trend was operating in the work of the three British authors is evident from even a cursory study of their sea fiction and the development towards realism is examined in the body of the thesis. At the same time at least one practising and very successful sea-novelist, W. Clark Russell, was calling for a national literature of the sea which would also constitute an accurate and reliable maritime record. In a magazine article,<sup>42</sup> Russell argued that this accuracy should extend to the technical details of masts and rigging and the methods of handling ships.<sup>43</sup> In addition he was particularly concerned at the distorted idea of the sailor then prevalent in literature and on the stage.<sup>44</sup>

41. Philbrick, Cooper, p. 119. Hayman, "Melville", pp. 211-212, footnote 4, also provides evidence to support the impulse towards realism in American sea fiction.

42. W. Clark Russell, "Sea Stories", The Contemporary Review, XXXVI (July to December), 343-363 (referred to below as: Russell, "Sea Stories").

43. Russell, "Sea Stories", pp. 351 and 353.

44. Russell, "Sea Stories", p. 348.

He wanted sailors described by men who understood the nature of nautical life, and by the sailor himself. He suggested that the low state into which the sea story had fallen was a direct result of this lack of realism; consequently prospective writers were at a disadvantage:

But Captain Cupples, like Marryat, Cooper, and, to a great extent, Richard Dana, has to suffer for dealing with a species of fiction which has been miserably degraded, and to an immense extent rendered really only fit for boys by people who have written about the sea in profound ignorance of marine nomenclature and customs, of the character of the sailor, of the elementary principles of seamanship and navigation, and without the least visible capacity of being moved by the grandeur and meanings of the mighty ocean, into whose summer surf they have waded knee-high and not one inch higher. 45

For Russell the lesson was obvious: if sea-writers wished to write serious and enduring sea fiction they must either become sailors or go to sea and observe the life at first hand.

Russell's impassioned plea, and the sea stories of Conrad, Kipling, and Stevenson which largely fulfilled his demands, illustrate that nautical fiction is different to most prose fiction if only because it makes demands upon the reader and the writer which are alien to the majority of novels and short stories. That the reader is as much involved in the issue of realism as the writer is evident from Erskine Childers's<sup>46</sup> The Riddle of the Sands (1903). It is a superb suspense story created out of Childers's close personal knowledge (he was a brilliant small-boat sailor) of the North German coast, the limitations of small yachts, the skills of small-boat sailing, and local weather

45. Russell, "Sea Stories", pp. 351-352.

46. Erskine Childers (1870-1922) was a civil servant who later became a leading figure in Irish revolutionary circles. He was a colleague of de Valera and in 1914 organised and carried out a gun-running expedition in his yacht Asgard. He was executed by firing squad in the Civil War. He wrote no other sea novel. For his life see: Michael McInerney, The Riddle of Erskine Childers, London (1971).



conditions, tides and currents. It is a great pleasure to read if one is sympathetic to sea fiction and a classic if one is a small-boat enthusiast. Indeed a full appreciation of its value can only lie in an attempt to understand Childers's skill at describing the nautical difficulties that the two-man crew of the Dulcibella overcome in their attempt to discover the invasion secrets of the Germans. Childers must have thought that this aspect was important because the text is accompanied by two maps which aid the reader in following the Dulcibella's progress.

We had reached the eastern outlet of the Memmert Balje, the channel which runs east and west behind Juist Island, direct to the south point of Memmert. How we had reached it was incomprehensible to me at the time, but the reader will understand by comparing my narrative with the dotted line on the chart. I add this brief explanation, that Davies's method had been to cross the channel called the Buse Tief, and strike the other side of it at a point well south of the outlet of the Memmert Balje (in view of the northward set of the ebb-tide), and then to drop back north and feel his way to the outlet. 47

In this extract the reader is being asked to understand Davies's skill in navigation and his ability to take into account the state of the tide; in other episodes his boat-handling and eye for the weather are under review. In The Riddle of the Sands, therefore, Childers's expertise lies in integrating his nautical knowledge with plot and character. In Conrad's mature sea fiction an even greater skill is in evidence: a sailor's actions on deck in a nautical crisis may well reveal much about the moral issues so often present in his fiction. In this case the reader must follow and understand the sailor's professional actions.

As the sailing ships that Conrad, Russell, and Stevenson knew, and the steamships of which Kipling wrote in poetry and prose became aspects of transport history it may still be asked whether it really

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47. Erskine Childers, The Riddle of the Sands, Dent, London (1970), p. 225.

matters if the standards of nautical realism for which these writers strove were attained. Hardy makes an analogous point and provides one answer to the problem in the General Preface to the Wessex Edition of his works.

At the dates represented in the various narrations things were like that in Wessex: the inhabitants lived in certain ways, engaged in certain occupations, kept alive certain customs, just as they are shown doing in these pages. And in particularizing such I have often been reminded of Boswell's remarks on the trouble to which he was put and the pilgrimages he was obliged to make to authenticate some detail, though the labour was one which would bring him no praise. Unlike his achievement, however, on which an error would as he says have brought discredit, if these country customs and vocations, obsolete and obsolescent, had been detailed wrongly, nobody would have discovered such errors to the end of Time. Yet I have instituted inquiries to correct tricks of memory, and striven against temptations to exaggerate, in order to preserve for my own satisfaction a fairly true record of a vanishing life. 48

In fact the sea story is watched over by numerous experts ready to pounce on the slightest mistake.<sup>49</sup> Each one of the three authors examined in this thesis showed a desire to write accurately about his chosen subject-matter - and this in spite of the fact that Stevenson and Conrad were only peripherally interested in preserving a record of life at sea. Kipling suggested that he had to be accurate because, if proved inaccurate, the public would argue "false in one thing false in all",<sup>50</sup> and this sentiment contains a substantial element of truth.

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48. Thomas Hardy, Tess of the d'Urbervilles, The New Wessex Edition, Macmillan, London (1974), pp. 474-475.

49. I am thinking in particular of the writers and correspondents of The Kipling Journal.

50. Something of Myself, Macmillan, London (1937), p. 218. This and all future references are to the Macmillan Uniform Edition, London (1899-1938).

## III

Throughout the history of British sea fiction there has been a tendency for the sailor to be cast in a particular character. He can be: a man with a characteristic manner of speech; a man immediately recognisable (e.g., by his blue clothes); a man with a strong personality, blunt, foul mouthed, cruel, courageous; or a drunkard and a womaniser.<sup>51</sup> The majority of these traditional characteristics feature as a staple content of the period 1882 to 1917. A number of these traits undoubtedly owe much to the sailor's actual and historical reputation. The sailor, for example, has long been associated with a weakness for strong drink (as in W.W. Jacobs's humorous short stories).

These traditional characteristics may show themselves in two forms: they can appear as stereotypical elements of a writer's otherwise fully-realised characters; or they may be used to form stereotypes. The main development in this period, as far as nautical stereotypes are concerned, would seem to be the discrimination with which the major writers employed them. In much of their fiction, as we have already seen, they were breaking new ground in the realistic depiction of life and work at sea, allied to the investigation of serious social, psychological, and moral questions; consequently the stereotypes (which offer substantial humorous potential) have to be employed carefully. This is not to imply that stereotypes cannot be used successfully in serious, or indeed, in realistic sea fiction. Conrad's, Kipling's, and Stevenson's works employ numerous formula characters (masters and chief engineers with iron-grey hair and scarred faces, inefficient and timorous masters, and tough seamen) which are examined in the body of the thesis. Stevenson, in particular, uses stereotypes in the manner of romance

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51. See: Parkinson, Portsmouth Point; and Watson, The Sailor.



fiction. Treasure Island may resemble a children's story with pirates and jolly tars but it also examines the impact of duplicity on a young boy.

One character of the sailor that recurs fairly frequently in literature is illustrated in the figure of the "Plain Dealer". H.F. Watson has identified the type:

He is usually a captain in rank, and is represented as rude, boisterous, amorous, and inclined to drink and fight on any occasion. Yet his very rudeness is regarded as superior to the hypocrisy and artificiality of manners on land. The figure which naturally comes to mind first is that of Captain Manly in Wycherley's Plain Dealer (1677). 52

There are many related characters in the period 1881 to 1917. Conrad's Captain Lingard, for example, detests the falsehood and deception of the land and prides himself on his blunt ways. In "Bread Upon the Waters" (1895) Kipling employs the type's honesty, blunt speech, and lack of sophistication as a basis for his plot: the Chief Engineer, McPhee, refuses to betray his professional judgement, although instructed to do so by his board; a row ensues, and he is sacked on the spot. Stevenson's Yankee skippers - notably Nares of The Wrecker - display a similar temperament. In the realms of popular fiction, Cutcliffe Hyne's Captain Kettle is a blunt, straightforward character who frequently suffers for his outspokenness.

The prevalence of the type probably indicates that many actual sailors conformed to it. There is nothing very surprising in this; sailing and steamship masters in this era were not men living their lives in a secluded environment; their profession was a tough one in a predominantly physical environment and they were expected to command the respect of tough crews and officers. David Bone records in his autobiography, Landfall at Sunset (1955), how he was advised not to



serve in the rough ships of the Atlantic Service in the 1890's.<sup>53</sup> Conrad's Captain Allistoun in The Nigger of the "Narcissus" (1897) faces a mutinous crew and has an iron belaying-pin thrown at him.<sup>54</sup> His chief mate, Baker, has a well-to-do sister who rather looks down upon him<sup>55</sup> which suggests that the sailor was not accorded a high social status because of his rough working-life. The "Plain Dealer" does, in fact, undergo mutation in the late-nineteenth century and the bluntness becomes wedded to a tough physical appearance - square jaws, grey eyes, seamed faces, and iron-grey hair - which survives today not only in popular literature but in films as well.

Much of the historically conceived sailor-characterisation draws its material from areas which are a jumble of fact and fiction.<sup>56</sup> During the latter part of the seventeenth and for most of the eighteenth century, it is difficult to distinguish between history and myth in the popular narratives detailing the careers of pirates and travellers. In addition one modern scholar suggests that "most extended narratives, whatever their origin and exact degree of veracity, became fictions during the process of consumption".<sup>57</sup> This point is illustrated in the popularity of Captain Johnson's A General History of the Pirates (1726) a work most probably written by Defoe.<sup>58</sup> It is, in fact, a "first rate historical document for the study of piracy"<sup>59</sup> but its popular appeal would appear

53. David Bone, Landfall at Sunset, London (1955), p. 91.

54. The Nigger of the "Narcissus", p. 123.

55. The Nigger of the "Narcissus", pp. 166-167.

56. See John J. Richetti, Popular Fiction Before Richardson, Oxford (1969) p. 7 (referred to below as: Richetti, Popular Fiction).

57. Richetti, Popular Fiction, p. 7.

58. Watson, Coasts, p. 19.

59. Richetti, Popular Fiction, p. 65.

to have been found in those features it shared with its more obviously fictional counterparts: its bizarre incidents and characters, its place as a sensational record of the violation of accepted morals, and, above all, its inclusion of what Richetti calls a

key fantasy behind pirate narrative: the self-sufficient rise to incredible power and influence of the man who has only his talents as <sup>^</sup>patrimony. 60

Johnson's work is significant, in this respect, for later sea fiction:

"It remains to this day the source of the popular conception of pirates".<sup>61</sup>

Part at least of its seminal influence is due to Stevenson who used it as a source for Treasure Island and The Master of Ballantrae<sup>62</sup> and whose early sea stories recall the maritime world of the eighteenth century - its pirates and buccaneers, desert islands, kidnappings, and voyage narratives.

Stevenson did not use the pirate stereotype in his two final sea novels but his early reading seems to have had an effect on the conception of his late protagonists - the nineteenth-century Pacific adventurer. The pirates and the adventurers are similar in their materialism, ruthlessness, and egoistic natures. Conrad's Lingard, who is drawn as a form of modern "pirate", is an analogous figure - as is the formidable Gentleman Jim Brown in Lord Jim. This ruthless type is described by Paul Zweig:

[the adventurer] possesses the qualities of the "hero": skill, resourcefulness, courage, intelligence. But he is the opposite of selfless. He is hungry, "heightened", not as an example, but as a presence, a phenomenon of sheer energy . . . . These heightened men are self-derived, self-determined. 63

60. Richetti, Popular Fiction, p. 72.

61. Richetti, Popular Fiction, p. 64.

62. Stevenson's use of Defoe's work is examined in: Watson, Coasts, pp. 150-156; and John Robert Moore, "Defoe, Stevenson, and the Pirates", ELH: A Journal of English Literary History, X (1943), 35-60.

63. Paul Zweig, The Adventurer, London (1974), pp. 35-36 (referred to below as: Zweig, Adventurer).

The adventurer figure is frequently employed by Conrad and Stevenson as a means of investigating the nature of evil and laying bare the hypocrisies of society.

Zweig calls the adventurer's moral opposite the "hero". He is morally disciplined and potentially altruistic:

By hero, we tend to mean a heightened man who, more than other men, possesses qualities of courage, loyalty, resourcefulness, charisma, above all selflessness. He is an example of right behavior; the sort of man who risks his life to protect a society's values. 64

There is a tendency for the hero to grace the more nautically realistic sea fiction where the appropriateness of "heroic" values is worked out in the context of the professional standards existing in institutions like the Merchant Service of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.<sup>65</sup> Within the thesis I have referred to this type of narrative as institutional sea fiction,<sup>66</sup> and I have used the terms "adventurer" and "hero" as defined by Zweig.

64. Zweig, Adventurer, p. 34.

65. The stress in institutional sea fiction on heroic values probably owes much to the conditions under which men served in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Legislation was not always effective in eradicating malpractices (such as overloading and undermanning) and could not solve immediately the sea-going limitations of the sailing ship and early steamship. Life and work at sea was consequently unrewarding and dangerous:

In the period 1872-84, 36,000 seamen lost their lives, or one in six of the number at sea. If 24 years is taken as the average working life of a seaman at that time, then one in three lost their lives at sea. (Course, Merchant Navy, p. 247).

The danger is mirrored in the work of all three major sea-writers and informs their conceptions of manly endurance and - in Kipling's and Conrad's stories - a community of effort and sacrifice. Stevenson's later sea fiction reflects the equally dangerous and much more brutal world of the American Merchant Marine.

66. The fact that the Merchant Service could be represented as an institution was due to the increasing amount of legislation governing the ships, the sailors, and the owners. The legislation dates from the 1830's, and was a result of growing public concern over the poor conditions existing on board ships, and the large numbers of lives and ships lost at sea.

The growing control exercised by the Board of Trade over the service must have contributed to the idea of it as a unified body with a common core of conduct and traditions, as opposed to the amorphous mass of largely independent



Although it is a reasonable suggestion that the greater number of the major characters in the best sea fiction of the period are either heroes or adventurers this is not the case with the minor characters. It was said above, for example, that the stereotype offers the nautical writer substantial humorous material. The thesis is not concerned primarily with humorous sea fiction but, because so much of Conrad's and Kipling's institutional stories employ humorous minor characters (e.g., the disappointed chief mate or the drunken sailor) it is important that some of the main types of nautical humour are identified.

Some of the comic elements which contribute to these figures have a history extending back to the earliest periods of prose fiction. The idea of sailors, for example, using nautical metaphors in land situations is at least as old as Ned Ward's The Wooden World Dissected (1708).

His very conversation is so salt that he cannot have a tooth drawn ashore without carrying his interpreter. 'It is that aft-most grinder aloft on the starboard quarter' will he cry to the all-wondering operator. 67

Treasure Island is well-stocked with examples although Stevenson's later novels are free of such usage. Kipling, because his stories are often humorous, uses the form frequently. His Petty Officer Pyecroft is particularly skilled at it:

'About three minutes later I'm over'auled by our sub-lieutenant, navigatin' under forced draught, with his bearin's 'eated. 'E had the temerity to say I'd instructed our Antonio to sling his carcass in the alleyway, an' 'e was peevish about it. 68

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#### 66 (Continued)

companies which came into existence after the dissolution of the East India Company in 1833. It is this unified institution which is reflected in Conrad's and Kipling's work. Significantly both men write mainly of the officers: one of the groups most affected by the new legislation. These changes in Britain's merchant fleet are dealt with in Course, Merchant Navy, pp. 214-267.

67. Quoted in Robinson, The British Tar, p. 88.

68. Traffics and Discoveries (1904) p. 47.

Possibly some sailors did speak in this fashion; even William Clark Russell, who condemns the use of such language as producing "those shiver my timber absurdities" describes a sailor in The Wreck of the 'Grosvenor' (1877) as having a "cast in the port optic".<sup>69</sup> The point is that such usage is unavoidably humorous and Conrad utilises it in creating some of the lighter moments in The Nigger. The crew are discussing women:

'Jack likes a good pay-day', exclaimed a listener on the doorstep. 'Aye, because then the girls put one arm round his neck an' t'other in his pocket, and call him ducky. Don't they Jack?' - 'Jack, you're a terror with the gals'. - 'He takes three of 'em in tow to once, like one of 'em Watkinses two-funnel tugs waddling away with three schooners behind'. 70

The idea of a sailor "towing" women or "ships" behind him had been extensively used in the preceding century. C.N. Robinson includes a number of prints illustrating the point in The Tar in Fact and Fiction: "An English Sloop engaging a Dutch Man-of-War" and "An English Man-of-War taking a French Privateer".<sup>71</sup> C.N. Parkinson in his Portsmouth Point quotes an extract from The Post Captain, or the Wooden Walls Well Manned (1805) which constitutes a further development. A captain muses on a miniature portrait while in bed: "'Can any face,'" cried he, 'be more angelic? Such top-lights! Or any form be more ravishing? Such a pair of cat-heads!'"<sup>72</sup> Kipling's narrator in "Bread Upon the Waters" thus conforms to something of a tradition when he says of McPhee's wife, Janet, "There is no small free-board to Janet McPhee".<sup>73</sup>

69. W. Clark Russell, The Wreck of the 'Grosvenor', London (n.d.) p. 3.

70. The Nigger of the 'Narcissus', p. 108.

71. Robinson, The British Tar, facing p. 166.

72. Parkinson, Portsmouth Point, p. 22.

73. The Day's Work, p. 284.

In general, however, Conrad and Stevenson cannot be described as great humorous writers and do not, indeed, fully exploit the potentials of nautical humour. Few of their stories are completely humorous, although Conrad often uses comic subsidiary characters cast in various types and employed in such a way as to illustrate his major themes. An obvious example is the evangelist Podmore in The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' whose heroism in fetching the crew a hot drink while the Narcissus is on her beam-ends off the Cape,<sup>74</sup> is both humorously narrated and seriously conceived. Podmore is driven on by his conception of Christian duty which, if comic, at least produces results. His character contrasts with the negro, Wait, who lacks such a saving conception and is therefore a coward. Kipling is a major humorous writer in his own right but his Royal Navy farces are more often set on land than at sea.

#### IV

The following three parts of the thesis deal with Stevenson's, Kipling's, and Conrad's fiction respectively. Each part attempts to demonstrate the problems that the three authors met in writing sea stories as well as describing the manner in which these problems were solved. In addition to this concern with the development of each writer's skill in the maritime field, an effort has been made to identify the serious themes which underly their sea stories as a group. The images that they present of the sailor form a continuous theme but care has been taken to concentrate discussion on this point to where it is instrumental in assisting interpretation and evaluation.

As a result of Conrad's, Kipling's, and Stevenson's realistic concerns, the thesis has, in the case of the last two authors, included a certain amount of biographical detail; for, although Conrad's career

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74. See The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' pp. 80-81.



as a serving master has been extensively documented and is available in a number of modern studies,<sup>75</sup> Stevenson's and Kipling's associations with the sea, ships, and sailors have been neglected. In fact both men learnt about sea life by making journeys and talking to seamen and engineers, and it therefore seemed appropriate to collect together in one place (as opposed to the present resources of incidental articles and scattered references in biographies) a record of their travels and researches, and then to show how these experiences were reflected in their fiction.

The question of their accuracy over nautical detail has been more problematic, although the sea story has often been examined within this frame of reference. The members of the Kipling Society, writing in The Kipling Journal, have argued for decades over whether Kipling erred in his portrayal of, for example, the rebuilding of the Haliotis's engines in "The Devil and the Deep Sea" (1895). The problem is that the task of assessing a writer's accuracy is a huge one, and one requiring a nautical expert, which I am not. Consequently I have not attempted to follow in the footsteps of the Kipling Society. Where it has been considered a relevant exercise I have summarised the conclusions of the experts. Stevenson and Kipling's early fiction, for example, was arguably conditioned by their lack of nautical expertise and it has been found necessary to investigate the extent of their difficulties.

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75. See Jerry Allen, The Sea Years of Joseph Conrad, London (1965); Jocelyn Baines, Joseph Conrad : A Critical Biography, London (1960); and Norman Sherry: Conrad's Eastern World, Cambridge (1966); and Conrad's Western World, Cambridge (1971).



PART ONE : ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

## CHAPTER ONE : Stevenson and the Sea

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### Chapter One : Stevenson and the Sea

#### I

This chapter will be concerned with Stevenson's association with and knowledge of the sea, ships, and sailors. It is necessary to understand the extent of his involvement because Treasure Island (1883) the most famous of his sea stories, might suggest that he was merely an armchair sailor, learning enough from studies of pirates and ships to write children's romances. It is true that he had a love for colourful maritime figures - smugglers, excise men, jolly tars, pirates, and buccaneers - extending back to his earliest years: he later wrote enthusiastically of his childhood fascination for Skelt's Juvenile Drama (a toy theatre) which incorporated maritime figures among its cut-out sets of characters.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, his youth saw a quite contrasting relationship with the sea which later helped him to write competently on small-boat handling and coastal topography. As an adult he was to travel extensively in the Pacific and his experiences were

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1. See David Daiches, Robert Louis Stevenson and his World, London (1973), pp. 12-13. Daiches includes an illustration of the cut-out figures. Stevenson wrote about his childhood passion in his essay "A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured", "Memories and Portraits", The Pentland Edition of the Works of Robert Louis Stevenson, ed. Edmund Gosse, Edinburgh (1906-07) (referred to below as: PE), ix, 128-135.

to be reflected in serious sea fiction which was not concerned only with the colourful and the dramatic, but also with the more mundane business of realistically describing ships and sailors as well as other aspects of maritime life.

As the son of a family of famous engineers, Stevenson was trained as what would now be called a civil engineer. His family had made its name building lighthouses and harbours on the Scottish coast and he was sufficiently proud of their achievements to write a family history, Records of a Family of Engineers (1912). His father had hopes that his son would follow in his footsteps and his hopes were justified to the extent that Stevenson enrolled as an engineering student at Edinburgh University in 1867. For four years he studied theory in the winter months and spent his vacations engaged in practical work.<sup>2</sup> It is this practical work which is significant to the student of his sea fiction because it explains many of its strengths. A man who had descended in a diving suit and spent days working at sea in small boats was better prepared than most landmen to write sea fiction:

My hands are<sup>all</sup> skinned, blistered, discoloured, and engrained with tar . . . . The worst work I had was when David (MacDonald's eldest) and I took the charge ourselves. He remained in the lighter to tighten or slacken the guys as we raised the pole towards the perpendicular, with two men. I was with four men in the boat. We dropped an anchor out a good bit, then tied a cord to the pole, took a turn round the sternmost thwart with it, and pulled on the anchor line. As the great, big, wet hawser came in it soaked you to the skin: I was the sternest (used, by way of variety, for sternmost) of the lot, and had to coil it - a work which involved, from its being so stiff and your being busy pulling with all your might, no little trouble and an extra ducking. 3

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2. See Graham Balfour, The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson (1901) i, 71. (referred to below as: Balfour, Life).
  3. The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson, ed. Sidney Colvin, Tusitala Edition, London (1924) i, 22 (referred to below as Letters).



This business-like and vivid description is echoed in many later passages from "The Merry Men" (1882) to The Ebb Tide (1894). It is obvious that his talent grew from a close acquaintance with practical work and a thorough understanding of the difficulties of working on or close to the sea. His knowledge was furthered by visits to the islands on the government yacht, Pharos, and sailing and canoe trips in the northern waters. Engineering was not, however, to claim Stevenson for long; in April 1871 he gave up the profession to train as a lawyer.

Although he passed his final examinations he never practised as a lawyer. Encouraged by Sidney Colvin and Mrs Sitwell he began to take authorship seriously and, during the following years, he published a number of essays and two travel volumes, An Inland Voyage (1878) and Travels with a Donkey (1879). The travel books were a result of his Continental holidays. The first was inspired by a canoe trip made in the summer of 1876 from Antwerp inland, up the Scheldt and the upper waters of the Oise. He visited Paris on a number of occasions and spent holidays in the Latin quarter and among the artistic communities of Barbizon. His experiences provided material for the early parts of The Wrecker (1892).<sup>4</sup>

## II

Stevenson's travels on the continent between 1871 and 1879 need not concern us here; they contributed little towards the specifically nautical content of his fiction. More important, in this respect, are the two great adventures that mark the adult Stevenson's life: his American trip (1879-1880), beginning with the Devonia voyage; and his South Sea period, comprising three voyages in the Pacific, and his residence at Vailima, Samoa. These two episodes were to have important

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4. See James Pope Hennessy, Robert Louis Stevenson, London (1974), p. 215.

consequences for his fiction: he was placed in close association with seamen, ships, and maritime life, and both provided material which enabled him to write realistic maritime fiction. His two factual records of these periods are contained in the volumes From Scotland to Silverado<sup>5</sup> and In the South Seas (1896).

The effect of Stevenson's travels on his fiction was considerable; made for the most part on small ships, they furnished his work with fresh subject-matter and, in addition, stimulated his critical insights into the culture and civilisation of the western world. Above all, his sea narratives reveal a close interest in the nature of society. This blend of adventure material and serious ideas is perfectly consistent with his views on the purpose of fiction. "Victor Hugo's Romances" (1874) goes some way towards defining his opinion on the nature and purpose of adventure fiction. In the essay he remarks how Fielding's novels lack any meaningful treatment of the political and social relationships which bind men to the community, and, commenting upon Fielding's deficiencies, he notes that the only mention he makes of the Jacobite rebellion in Tom Jones (1749, and set in 1745) is to "throw a troop of soldiers in his hero's way". On the other hand Stevenson admired Hugo's fiction because it contains the very content that Tom Jones lacks.

So that, for Hugo, man is no longer an isolated spirit without antecedent or relation here below, but a being involved in the action and reaction of natural forces, himself a centre of such action and reaction; or an unit in a great multitude, chased hither and thither by epidemic terrors and aspirations, and, in all seriousness, blown about by every wind of doctrine . . . .

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5. "The Amateur Emigrant", which Stevenson wrote during and immediately after his voyage in 1879, was first published posthumously in 1895 in a bowdlerised edition. The first complete version is contained in From Scotland to Silverado, ed. James D. Hart, The John Harvard Library, Cambridge, Mass. (1966) (referred to below as: From Scotland to Silverado).

Art, thus conceived, realises for men a larger portion of life, and that portion one that it is more difficult for them to realise unaided; and, besides helping them to feel more intensely those restricted personal interests which are patent to all, it awakes in them some consciousness of those more general relations that are so strangely invisible to the average man in ordinary moods. It helps to keep man in his place in nature, and, above all, it helps him to understand more intelligently the responsibilities of his place in society. 6

He might be describing his own novel The Wrecker written many years later. It is strange that his concern with the appropriate social context has not been fully investigated. The later adventure narrative The Wrecker is set in a realistically drawn contemporary situation and explores the nature of late-nineteenth century society. By examining Stevenson's Devonia and South Sea experiences I intend to show how he was made more fully aware of the tensions at work within society and to demonstrate how the sea novel became the natural medium for their expression.

### III

Stevenson's later travels were idyllic compared to his experiences on the Devonia in 1879. The voyage to America was made in order to marry Fanny Osbourne, at that time still married to an American. For a variety of reasons the journey was arduous, unpleasant, and depressing. Conditions on board ship were primitive but Stevenson was also depressed by lack of money, his poor relationship with his own family, and the uncertainty over whether Fanny would actually divorce her husband and marry him. The year in America was to have two results of particular interest: the Monterey coastline, which he had seen while he was living in San Francisco, furnished the island scenery of Treasure Island;<sup>7</sup> and the many friends that he had made in America, as well as the virtually

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6. PE, iii, 44.

7. Letters, iii, 316.



nomadic style of life with which he had become familiar, made inevitable his return to America and, consequently, his eventual emigration to the South Seas. He returned to America in 1887 and from this period date his voyages in the Pacific.

"From Clyde to Sandy Hook", the first part of From Scotland to Silverado, is a record of the Devonia voyage. It was written during and immediately after the events it describes but it was not published until after Stevenson's death and then in a bowdlerised form. The unexpurgated text is, however, a fully detailed and often bleak account. It is consequently a surprising book for those familiar with the image of Stevenson as an optimistic author dealing in the exciting and the colourful.<sup>8</sup> "From Clyde to Sandy Hook" is an objective presentation of the unpleasant conditions on board a steamer carrying emigrants. Stevenson travelled second class but his experiences were very little different from the poorest class of passengers in the steerage accommodation.

The second cabin, to return, is thus a modified oasis in the very heart of the steerages. Through the thin partition you can hear the steerage passengers being sick, the rattle of tin dishes as they sit at meals, the varied accents in which they converse, the crying of their children terrified by this new experience, or the clean flat smack of the parental hand in chastisement. 9

I presume (for I never saw it) that some cleansing process was carried on each morning; but there was never light enough to be particular; and in a place so full of corners and so much broken up by fixtures and partitions, dirt might lie for years without disturbance. The pens, stalls, pews - I know not what to call them - were besides, by their very design, beyond the reach of bucket and swab. Each broad shelf with its four deep divisions, formed a fourfold asylum for all manner of uncleanness. When the pen was fully occupied, with sixteen live human animals, more or less unwashed,

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8. An image created, at least in part, by G.K. Chesterton in his Robert Louis Stevenson, 2nd edition, London (1927) (referred to below as: Chesterton, Stevenson).

9. From Scotland to Silverado, p. 4.

lying immersed together in the same close air all night, and their litter of meat, dirty dishes and rank bedding tumbled all day together in foul disorder, the merest possibilities of health or cleanliness were absent. 10

This objective description is matched by a nice awareness of the vagaries of human nature: the contrasting behaviour of the two stowaways, one lazy and one hardworking; and the odd mentality of the man who presented the passengers with a religious riddle.<sup>11</sup> He displays a talent for describing the varying behaviour of men and women from differing social backgrounds and notices with a wry humour how, because he was poorly dressed, he was taken for a working man,<sup>12</sup> and, conversely, how the very dress of the more affluent cabin passengers constituted an insult when they visited the steerage: "They seemed to throw their clothes in our faces".<sup>13</sup>

It has been maintained that the American trip was a key period in Stevenson's life.<sup>14</sup> Certainly it is true that, following 1879, Stevenson increased his output; in the succeeding years he was to write the essays later collected in Virginibus Puerisque (1881) and Familiar Studies (1882) as well as the imaginative fiction Treasure Island and The Merry Men and Other Stories (1887): much of this output was occasioned by the need to support his family but his artistic insights seem to have been sharpened and his work shows signs of a new maturity. Indeed it could hardly be otherwise; Stevenson had endured, for the most part alone, a harrowing year under the most trying conditions.

10. From Scotland to Silverado, p. 22.

11. From Scotland to Silverado, p. 25.

12. From Scotland to Silverado, p. 74.

13. From Scotland to Silverado, pp. 27-28.

14. From Scotland to Silverado, Introduction, p. XXXVI.

His letters, written at the time of his journey and during the writing of the From Scotland to Silverado essays, are evidence that he was then at a personal crossroads.

To say truth, I feel already a difficulty of approach;  
I do not know if I am the same man I was in Europe . . . .<sup>15</sup>

More surprisingly, for an author consistently regarded as the champion of romance fiction, he is seen to be convinced that realism was the correct vein for his talent.

. . . the book The Amateur Emigrant of a man, that is, who has paid a great deal of attention to contemporary life, and not through the newspapers. <sup>16</sup>

It is a pity if I die in one sense, for I believe the class of work I might yet give out is better and more real and solid than people fancy. <sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, although Stevenson's experiences gave him a new conviction as a writer, one cannot pretend that the nature of his fiction during the 1880's was in the same realistic and contemporary vein. It was not until the 1890's that he began to develop in this direction. The character of the intervening decade's work was formed by a number of factors, the most important of which was that, although he could deal with adventure stories in an historical setting, he lacked the knowledge to write modern adventure stories; he was only able to gain this knowledge once he was in the Pacific where he could observe the activities of sea-captains, traders, and adventurers.

Circumstances, both on the Devonia and later in San Francisco, combined to give Stevenson a poor opinion of sailors. The sailor, especially in the historical stereotype of the buccaneer, smuggler, or pirate has frequently been cast in a callous, unsympathetic, or

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15. Letters, ii, 78.

16. Letters, ii, 86.

17. Letters, ii, 88.



cruel role but Stevenson's sailors are almost always so: the pirates in Treasure Island and The Master of Ballantrae (1889), and the sailors and adventurers of The Wrecker and The Ebb Tide. One incident which may have contributed to this trend in his fiction is recorded in "From Clyde to Sandy Hook". He had come across a desperately sick man, "grovelling on his belly in the west scuppers",<sup>18</sup> but, to his surprise, the crew were uninterested and it was only after some considerable difficulty that help was obtained. Later, when he was in San Francisco, Stevenson would have had ample opportunity to see more sailors as the port was one of the most important in the world. American sailors, and more particularly the officers, were renowned for their brutality,<sup>19</sup> and Stevenson knew enough about them to draw two full-length character studies in The Wrecker and The Ebb Tide. The Wrecker contains material on this subject, which, as I shall argue later, was accurate in its portrayal of murder and brutality as a feature of the American Merchant Marine. Stevenson could have come by this material either in 1879-1880 or later in 1888. His convictions on this subject must have been considerably strengthened when, in 1888, he met Captain A. H. Otis who was to command the small yacht Casco on which the Stevensons were to make their first voyage into the Pacific.

#### IV

There are many reasons why Stevenson emigrated to the Pacific. J.C. Furnas argues that the idea had long been in his mind as a solution to the problem of his recurrent and debilitating attacks of T.B.<sup>20</sup> In addition Stevenson was undoubtedly filled with a temperamental enthusiasm

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18. From Scotland to Silverado, p. 46.

19. See below pp. 101-103.

20. J.C. Furnas, Voyage to Windward : The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson, London (1952), pp. 268-272 (referred to below as: Furnas, Life).

for adventure and travel which must have been stimulated by the sight of island trading schooners on the waterfront in San Francisco. There is some revealing material in The Wrecker about the informal meetings of a group of men, the "South Seas Club", who met in San Francisco solely to mull over the delights of Pacific life.<sup>21</sup> He also met and made friends with Charles Warren Stoddard, a South Sea enthusiast.<sup>22</sup>

The final decision to stay in the South Seas was made only after a total of three voyages on which he enjoyed the best health he could remember. The first of the three cruises was undertaken on the beautiful schooner-yacht, Casco, in 1888; the second lasted for six months in 1889, on board the trading-schooner, Equator; and the third trip, on board the island steamer Janet Nichol, took place in 1890. The voyages were broken by short spells of residence on the islands themselves.<sup>23</sup> His travels enabled him to see most of the large groups of islands and to observe their native communities, which ranged from the semi-civilised to the totally primitive. The articles which he wrote to pay for his travels are collected in the volume In the South Seas. Quite apart from the benefits of the warm, dry climate in sustaining his health, there is little doubt that he enjoyed his life in the Pacific. He contemplated investing in an island trading-schooner, to be called the Northern Light,<sup>24</sup> and involved himself in supervising the building of his house at Vailima and organising his plantation. Nevertheless his work suffered in competition with the myriad alternative activities - including his meddling in local politics. His later fiction is often poorly finished and displays every visible sign of having been done under considerable strain.

21. PE, xii, 149-150.

22. Furnas, Life, p. 268.

23. See the map of Stevenson's travels in the Pacific in Balfour, Life II, opposite p. 41.

24. Furnas, Life, p. 311.

The effect of the Pacific upon Stevenson's writing was immediate and on his second voyage, on the Equator, he was eagerly planning forthcoming books based upon his experiences. Ultimately his four-year period in the area was to produce two full-length novels, an unfinished novel (Weir of Hermiston (1896)), three short stories, a number of essays, and the travel volume, In the South Seas; most of his output drew inspiration from his experiences in the Pacific. The Wrecker<sup>25</sup> was first planned on the Equator in June, 1889, and was written on board ship and during short stays on the islands, hardly the most favourable of circumstances. His second novel on Pacific life, The Ebb Tide, began life as "The Pearl Fisher" in December, 1888, on the Casco and, after a further change of title (to "The Schooner Farallone") became The Ebb Tide in 1890. Of the three short stories which make up the volume Island Nights Entertainments (1893), only "The Beach of Falesa" need concern us here: it began life as "The High Woods of Ulufanu" in 1890 and, after a lengthy time of writing at Vailima, it was published as "Uma" in The Illustrated London News.<sup>26</sup>

The Pacific provided the sort of material that Stevenson required for adventure novels set in a contemporary world. The exact nature of what he saw in the Pacific can best be studied through In the South Seas. It was such an ambitious project that it never fulfilled the plans Stevenson made for it. It was originally envisaged as an objective study of European and native life and, as planned on the Equator, had

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25. Both The Wrecker and The Ebb Tide were published under the co-authorship of Stevenson and his stepson Lloyd Osbourne. I have followed Edwin M. Eigner, Robert Louis Stevenson and Romantic Tradition, Princeton, New Jersey (1966), in regarding the two novels as "almost entirely Stevenson's own" (p. 98). Eigner reviews the evidence to support this view in footnote 34, pp. 98-99 (referred to below as: Eigner, Stevenson and Romantic Tradition). See also Furnas, Life, p. 359.

26. 2 July - 6 August, 1892.



seven parts. The first part underwent a fate which illustrates the closeness of Stevenson's fiction and non-fiction; it had four chapters:

Marine...Contraband ( smuggling, barratry, labour  
traffic)...The Beachcomber. . . . Beachcomber stories.<sup>27</sup>

The majority of this material is not included in In the South Seas and it would seem reasonable to suggest that it was worked into The Wrecker (the "Marine" and "Contraband" sections) and The Ebb Tide (Beachcombers, insurance fraud, barratry, and labour traffic). I shall examine later how this material featured in his sea fiction.

## V

When Loudon Dodd, the main narrator of The Wrecker, listens to the enthusiasm of the "South Seas Club" for the delights of island life he is eager to experience them himself.

. . . precipitous shores, spired mountain-tops,  
and the deep shade of hanging forests, the  
unresting surf upon the reef, and the unending  
peace of the lagoon; sun, moon, and stars of  
an imperial brightness; man moving in these  
scenes scarce fallen, and woman lovelier than  
Eve; the primal curse abrogated, the bed made  
ready for the stranger, life set to perpetual  
music, and the guest welcomed, the boat urged,  
and the long night beguiled with poetry and  
choral song.      28

Subsequent events leave him much wiser about the real nature of life in the Pacific because he finds his attention forced upon the activities of the whites who traded and travelled in the area. Stevenson must have undergone a similar change of heart. His early letters, written on board the Casco, contain glowing descriptions of the life: "The climate is delightful; and the harbour where we lie one of the loveliest spots imaginable".<sup>29</sup> He seems to have come to terms fairly quickly

27. Letters, iii, 273.

28. PE, xii, 150.

29. Letters, iii, 202.

with the cannibalism of certain tribes and even the brutal attitude of the master of the Casco, A.H. Otis.<sup>30</sup> His two Pacific novels, The Wrecker and The Ebb Tide, are, however, much darker in tone because they concentrate on the greed and violence of the white man in the Pacific. The Ebb Tide begins,

Throughout the island world of the Pacific, scattered men of many European races and from almost every grade of society carry activity and disseminate disease. 31

The novel makes it quite plain that Stevenson was thinking more of moral "disease" than purely physical disease. By the time of the Equator voyage even his eagerly planned "book of travels" had become a projected study of Western commercial activity.

The reasons for his change of heart and his emphasis on the Westerner are not immediately apparent from his non-fiction. The answer probably lies in what he saw of the commercial life of the area. He had, for example, originally intended to invest in a trading company, the Northern Light venture, but he withdrew because of the dishonesty involved in island trading.<sup>32</sup> In fact he must have seen the activities of traders at very close hand; he sailed with them in the Equator and the Janet Nichol and he stayed with traders on various islands. They were a motley crew. Some, like Wiltshire of "The Beach of Falesa", must have been tolerably honest, but others were obviously exploiting native ignorance. A crucial incident appears to have occurred when the Stevensons arrived at Butaritari on the Equator in July, 1889. Island celebrations were under way but the large amount of drink sold to the natives resulted in a series of riots.

30. See Stevenson's comments on the American Merchant Marine, Letters iii, 205-206. For his attitude to cannibalism see PE, xvii, 96-100.

31. PE, xviii, 9.

32. Furnas, Life, p. 307.

The riots on Butaritari, which are described in In the South Seas,<sup>33</sup> were arguably important in the formation of Stevenson's ideas about the Pacific because they brought together two themes which had long been a feature of his work: man's innate violence and the corrupt desire for material wealth which Stevenson connected with civilised society. The violence on Butaritari was a direct result of the influence of white traders, then making large profits in the Pacific and helping, by creating demands for their products, to destroy the primitive culture of the islands. Stevenson describes the trading situation on Butaritari with a clarity which anticipates the skill with which he later constructed the commercially based plots of The Wrecker, "The Beach of Falesa", and The Ebb Tide. He observes how the traders were often tempted to break a voluntary bar by selling gin in large quantities to the islanders in pursuit of the considerable profits to be gained. This ban was broken on Stevenson's arrival and the native population went berserk. He vividly describes some of the incidents he observed.

Then came a brutal impulse; the mob reeled, and returned and was rejected; the stair showed a stream of heads; and there shot into view, through the disbanding ranks, three men violently dragging in their midst a fourth. 34

Later he was further shocked when he saw a fight between two women.

The first was uppermost, her teeth locked in her adversary's face, shaking her like a dog; the other impotently fought and scratched. So for a moment we saw them wallow and grapple there like vermin; then the mob closed and shut them in. 35

The harm done was probably not much, yet I could have looked on death and massacre with less revolt. The return to these primeval weapons, the vision

33. PE, xvii, 233-241.

34. PE, xvii, 239.

35. PE, xvii, 240.



of man's beastliness, of his ferality, shocked in me a deeper sense than that<sup>with</sup> which we count the cost of battles. 36

It is perhaps to this incident that we owe the growing pessimism of his later work and his awareness of a certain kinship with Zola<sup>37</sup> - if he had read L'Assommoir (1876) he could hardly not have recalled the fight between Gervaise and Virginie<sup>38</sup> as he wrote his own description.

The energetic Whites figure largely as the central characters of The Wrecker which, as I shall argue below, strives to show the fragility of civilised values in the face of man's violence and materialism. Both The Ebb Tide and The Wrecker have plots which grow from the maritime economy of the Pacific and the fate of the adventurers is sealed by their involvement in maritime commercial deals - the buying and selling of wrecks, insurance frauds, pearling, opium smuggling, and crooked tradings. It was obviously not only Stevenson's experiences, but also his practical interest in commercial affairs, which put this subject matter at his disposal and made possible his move into serious adventure fiction set in the contemporary world.

The Ebb Tide describes the other type of Westerner to be found in the Pacific, the white failure. Fanny Stevenson's published diary, The Cruise of the 'Janet Nichol' (1915) gives an idea, as well as photographs, of the beachcombers (whites living on the bounty of natives and what they could pick up from the beaches) Stevenson met on his travels. Some of these men were less successful than others at maintaining the rudiments of existence and the portrait of Captain Randall in "The Beach of Falesa" reveals Stevenson's disgust at the worst cases.

36. PE, xvii, 240.

37. See Letters, V, 40 and 43.

38. Emile Zola, L'Assommoir, translated with an introduction by L.W. Tancock, Harmondsworth (1970), pp. 43-47.

In the back room was old Captain Randall, squatting on the floor native fashion, fat and pale, naked to the waist, grey as a badger, and his eyes set with drink. His body was covered with grey hair and crawled over by flies . . . . Any clean-minded man would have had the creature out at once and buried him; and to see him, and think he was seventy, and remember he had once commanded a ship, and come ashore in his smart togs, and talked big in bars and consulates, and sat in club verandahs, turned me sick and sober. 39

The Ebb Tide examines the failed white very closely. Attwater, an energetic European, explains his equivocal liking for the Pacific to one of the failures:

If I like the islands at all, it is because you see men and women here plucked of their lendings, their dead birds and cocked hats, their petticoats and coloured hose. 40

His remark more than adequately summarises the theme of the novel; man is seen for what he is.

There is a further reason for Stevenson's increasing pessimism in his final years. It was not known until comparatively recently the content of the passages which Colvin cut from the published versions of Stevenson's letters from the South Seas. A recent study by Bradford A. Booth<sup>41</sup> of these excisions has shown the strain under which Stevenson wrote his later work: Fanny's nervous breakdown in 1893; the continual tension between Fanny and her children, Belle and Lloyd; and the disruptive marital infidelities of Joe, Belle's husband. Booth comments

I completely misread all the evidence if it is not true that during the last two years of his life he rarely had a relaxed moment at home. 42

39. PE, xvi, 219.

40. PE, viii, III.

41. Bradford A. Booth, "The Vailima Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson", Harvard Library Bulletin XV (1967), 117-128 (referred to below as: Booth, Vailima Letters).

42. Booth, Vailima Letters, p. 124.

He considers that Fanny's "abnormal behaviour" seriously interfered with Stevenson's creativity. It would appear reasonable to assume that these family tensions account for many of the weaknesses of his last two completed novels, The Wrecker and The Ebb Tide.

Stevenson's acquaintance with the seamier side of Western civilisation as well as the family depressions of the late 1880's and early 1890's is reflected in these last novels and gives them serious contemporary themes; nevertheless it must not be assumed that his early fiction is trivial. Treasure Island, "The Merry Men" and The Master of Ballantrae (which, although a late novel, bears a close relationship to its predecessors) do not lack serious themes but, more importantly, display his growing mastery of the traditional features of romance and popular adventure fiction: exciting plots, vivid and dramatic episodes, and sophisticated narrative techniques. The last is an important accomplishment for the writer of serious adventure narratives which effectively distances the reader from the plots and enables the "message" to be drawn from the events. In the late 1880's, therefore, Stevenson was in a position of strength: he had the techniques to exploit the contemporary adventure material he was then acquiring in the Pacific. The following chapter investigates Stevenson's developing skills alongside his use of the sailor stereotype as it existed in 1880.



CHAPTER TWO : The Romances:  
Treasure Island and The Master of Ballantrae

## Chapter Two : The Romances: Treasure Island and The Master of Ballantrae

### I

Treasure Island was designed unashamedly as a children's sea romance and The Master of Ballantrae is not properly a sea novel, in the narrow definition of the term, although it contains substantial amounts of maritime material. They appear, at first sight, to be quite different from the later sea fiction; there is very little realistic description of ships, the sea, or weather conditions, and the sailors are mostly stereotypical figures: buccaneers and pirates sporting cutlasses and knives. It is these last elements which so readily identify the two novels as romances but they also feature other romance characteristics which were to remain in Stevenson's fiction long after he had abandoned pirates and buccaneers. The following chapter consequently has a dual purpose: it investigates Stevenson's use of the formula characteristics of the early and mid-nineteenth century sea novel and it attempts to relate the early romances to the later sea novels, The Wrecker and The Ebb Tide.

Treasure Island and The Master of Ballantrae, whatever their more serious themes, are illustrative of Stevenson's masterly storytelling. The children's romance at its best - as in Treasure Island - is a straightforward and direct narrative in which suspense is carefully

maintained. He obviously felt this to be a prime duty of the adventure story writer as well:

the characters need to be presented with but one class of qualities - the warlike and the formidable. So as they appear insidious in deceit and fatal in the combat, they have served their end. Danger is the matter with which this class of novel deals; fear, the passion with which it idly trifles; and the characters are portrayed only so far as they realise the sense of danger and provoke the sympathy of fear. To add more traits, to be too clever, to start the hare of moral or intellectual interest while we are running the fox of material interest, is not to enrich but to stultify your tale. 1

Stevenson's later fiction was to become progressively more interwoven with "moral or intellectual interest". This deepening is accompanied by developments in narrative structure (e.g., the use of dual narrators and broken time-schemes) which are grounded in his knowledge of the romance. These changes, which are evident in The Master of Ballantrae, parallel his expanding ideas. Nevertheless, he was never to lose his ability to tell a good story; the narrative flow of his later work is rarely restricted and, indeed, incident begins to assume metaphorical and symbolic associations in the best tradition of the romance. However, although Treasure Island lacks many of these sophistications, it is an essential introduction to Stevenson's work.

## II

Treasure Island is a classic among children's books, and its appeal would appear to be timeless as long as pirates, desert islands, and sailing ships are remembered. The novel was written in Scotland and Davos, Switzerland. Stevenson first drew the famous map, which

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1. "A Humble Remonstrance" (1884), PE, ix, 168. This essay was written in reply to an article by Henry James, "The Art of Fiction" (1884). Both are collected in Janet Adam Smith, Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson, London (1948) (referred to below as: Smith, James and Stevenson).



accompanies the novel, and worked up the plot from this simple base.<sup>2</sup> The plot is simplicity itself. It is narrated in the first person by a young lad, Jim Hawkins, the son of an innkeeper and later cabin boy on the Hispaniola, and four chapters are narrated by Dr. Livesey, a surgeon. The Hispaniola's voyage to "Treasure Island" is made to recover a hoard of buried treasure, hidden by a notorious pirate, Flint. Unfortunately for all involved one of the expedition's backers, Squire Trelawney, talks too much about the treasure in Bristol, the port of departure, and when the ship eventually sails it numbers among its crew a substantial group of pirates led by Long John Silver, Flint's old quartermaster. Once the island is reached the crew splits into two parties - pirates and loyalists - and the scene is set for a running battle over the treasure. As I have already commented, the narration is particularly well-handled. The first part of the novel, for example, is dominated by mystery and fear as the defenceless Hawkins family are embroiled in a pirate feud; all the classical elements of suspense are present: pursuit, bloodchilling threats, and violent death. The third and fourth parts see the island reached, the abandonment of the Hispaniola, and the subsequent siege of the stockade. In addition to the main confrontation between the loyalists and buccaneers there are other narrative threads: Jim's solo adventures and Silver's tangled and violent association with the buccaneers. The fifth part is the climax of the novel: the recapture of the Hispaniola and the recovery of the treasure.

The craftsmanship which Stevenson displayed in constructing the plot has received attention in David Daiches's study Robert Louis Stevenson. Daiches shows the fashion in which the narration allows

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2. See "My First Book - 'Treasure Island'", "Later Essays", PE, XV, 369-371. Watson, Coasts p. 125 examines the sequence of composition.

for the identification of the young reader with the hero, Hawkins, by removing from the beginning any doubts as to the eventual success of his exploits. He pays particular attention to the opening paragraphs in which Stevenson wastes no time in beginning the story and arousing the reader's curiosity by the use of evocative imagery and romantic names. In addition Daiches praises his skill at juxtaposing the strange and the familiar to produce a background against which the events of the plot are acted out.<sup>3</sup>

The novel employs much romance subject-matter, including the use of an evocative historical period, exotic island scenery, and sailor stereotypes. The last were not of his own making. They had existed, as my Introduction noted,<sup>4</sup> for some time. In essence these stereotypes are a blend of three actual historical figures: the Nelsonian Jolly Tar, the buccaneer, and the pirate.<sup>5</sup> The blend produces sailors with tarry fingers and pigtails and a liking for singing and grog, and sustains, in addition, sinister overtones of murder, walking the plank, and the vendetta. This blended stereotype dominates Treasure Island from the moment in the first paragraph when Bill Bones arrives at Hawkins's father's inn, the "Admiral Benbow". Bones, who was Flint's first mate, moves immediately into a carefully matched background. The inn lies near a sea-hamlet in which revenue officers are stationed to combat the activities of smugglers who use a local cove known as Kitt's Hole. Bones is a "brown old seaman" with a sabre cut - both marks of men accustomed to the rigours of pirate feuds and exposure to the elements.

3. David Daiches, Robert Louis Stevenson, Norfolk, Connecticut (1947), pp. 32-51 (referred to below as Daiches, Stevenson).

4. See above pp. 19-23.

5. Although buccaneers and pirates were historically different types (buccaneers were originally a group of free-traders, illegally operating in the Spanish Colonies in the West Indies and the Isthmus; pirates were active in eastern seas after an international agreement in 1697 forced the buccaneers out of existence) Stevenson does not appear to be aware of the distinction. See Watson, Coasts, pp. 19-20.



I remember him as if it were yesterday, as he came plodding to the inn-door, his sea-chest following behind him in a hand-barrow; a tall, strong, heavy, nut-brown man; his tarry pig-tail falling over the shoulders of his soiled blue coat; his hands ragged and scarred, with black, broken nails; and the sabre-cut across one cheek, a dirty, livid white. 6

Bones's more obvious nautical trademarks, his sea-chest and his pig-tail, are accompanied by less immediately apparent detail; his "black, broken nails" are presumably a mark of his occupational handling of tar and ropes. These last particulars also betoken a certain disreputability which is strengthened by his soiled blue coat and the alarming sabre-cut.

Much of the description might appear perfectly commensurate with a realistic approach but Stevenson also shows himself aware of the potential for making a more theatrical - pantomimic would perhaps be the appropriate word - impression; an impression which is central to the appeal of the children's romance. On his arrival at the inn Bones bursts out into Stevenson's melodramatic pastiche of an old sea song: "Fifteen men on a dead man's chest". This approach is tenable because Treasure Island was conceived as a children's story; Stevenson was able to use such nautical theatricalities with a freedom that is in complete contrast to Conrad's efforts to free fictional sailing-life from the very sort of detail his predecessor so eagerly uses. Thus Bones's voice sounds as if it has been "tuned and broken at the capstan bars",<sup>7</sup> he taps at the window with a stick "like a handspike"; and he spends his time watching ships through a brass telescope and drinking grog in the inn. In the evening he sings wild songs, forces the terrified company to accompany him, and tells "dreadful stories" about "hanging, and walking the plank, and storms at sea, and dry Tortugas, and wild deeds and places on the Spanish Main".<sup>8</sup>

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6. PE, v, 15.

7. PE, v, 15.

8. PE, v, 18.



Stevenson employs a stereotyped seaman's jargon to mark Bones out as a sailor. When he arrives at the "Admiral Benbow", Bones announces:

'This is a handy cove . . . and a pleasant sittiated  
grog-shop - Much company, mate?' 9

A related characteristic is to designate the sailors by their choice of metaphor: when Blind Pew and a sailor find that Bones's belongings have been searched, the sailor exclaims, "'Bill's been overhauled a'ready . . . nothin' left.'" "Overhauled" like "Grog" and "mate" are established nautical terms. Pew and his "mates" also use a choice selection of nautical sounding phrases: "'Shirking lubbers - Scatter and look for them dogs - If you had the pluck of a weevil in a biscuit - We've got the doubloons - Oh shiver my soul.'"<sup>10</sup> It is exactly this sort of language that impelled William Clark Russell to complain bitterly of the tendency for writers to produce stereotypical seamen in their fiction.<sup>11</sup> Stevenson was, however, writing a children's story and he was brilliantly utilising the stereotype in an appropriate context.

### III

H.F. Watson's book on the sources of Treasure Island argues that it is a culmination of nineteenth-century sea fiction before 1881.<sup>12</sup> Watson identifies the two main types of Victorian sea fiction<sup>13</sup> and shows how Stevenson drew inspiration from them. The Naval yarn type of sea story contributed to the characterisation of Long John Silver, Squire Trelawney, Captain Smollett, and the eccentrics (although not

9. PE, v, 16.

10. PE, v, 44-45.

11. See above, p. 16.

12. Watson, Coasts, p. 3.

13. Watson, Coasts, p. 5; and see above p. 5.

their names) Black Dog, Pew, and Ben Gunn.

Long John's 'Ay, ay, sir,' and stress on 'dooty' suggest the navy man, as does his habit of saluting. Captain Alexander Smollett, who says he has flown his sovereign's colours, is something of a martinet, and mildly bullies Jim: 'I'll have no favorites on my ship!' He covers Tom Redruth's body with the Union Jack . . . and paraphrases the naval service 'duty to King and Country' as 'duty to captain and owner'. The bachelor Squire comes close to being an Old Commodore, with his years of sea travel, his imitation of an officer's dress and a sailor's walk, and his assertion, 'I am an admiral'. 14

The desert island convention provided the island scenario, the idea of buried treasure, the stereotypes of pirates and buccaneers, and many of the names of sailors, places, and ships.<sup>15</sup>

Watson's study is also valuable because it demonstrates the exact extent to which Stevenson drew upon his reading of the nineteenth-century sea story in writing the major episodes of his tale. He was, of course, quite open about his reading. The verses "To the Hesitating Purchaser", which preface the book, refer to the "old romance" and make it quite clear that the novel was modelled on well-established lines. In the second stanza he names specific authors:

If studious youth no longer crave,  
His ancient appetites forgot,  
Kingston, or Ballantyne the brave,  
Or Cooper of the wood and wave 16

Some time later, in 1884, he acknowledged a debt to Kingsley's At Last A Christmas in the West Indies (1871).<sup>17</sup> In fact the opening scenes, involving Bill Bones in the "Admiral Benbow", owe much to Washington Irving's "Wolfbert Webber" (1824).<sup>18</sup> He culled ideas and inspiration

14. Watson, Coasts, pp. 132-133.

15. Watson, Coasts, pp. 123-178.

16. PE, v, 9.

17. Letters, iii, 315.

18. Stevenson acknowledged his debt to Washington Irving in "My First Book - 'Treasure Island'", PEW, XV, 371-2. Watson, Coasts (pp. 143-150), demonstrates the extent to which Stevenson borrowed ideas from Irving's "Wolfbert Webber" (a tale in "The Money Diggers", Part IV of Tales of a Traveller (1824).



from Fenimore Cooper's The Sea Lions (1849),<sup>19</sup> which suggested Bill Bones's sea chest, Ballantyne's Coral Island (1858), which has a parallel scene to Hawkins's takeover of the Hispaniola with Israel Hands on board,<sup>20</sup> and W.H.G. Kingston's The Early Life of Old Jack (1859) which offered a fight around a besieged blockhouse.<sup>21</sup> Stevenson also used, as I noted in the Introduction,<sup>22</sup> the eighteenth-century study of pirates, A General History of the Pirates, by Captain Johnson. Watson also argues that Stevenson did not read it until the early chapters of Treasure Island were completed.<sup>23</sup> By Chapter Ten he was using it fairly frequently to provide names and historical background.

Watson's researches do not detract from the artistry and appeal of Stevenson's novel but they are important in establishing its place in the history of the sea story. In general its action operates on a simple level and its serious issues are muted. The nineteenth-century English sea story, as it existed before the work of Stevenson, Kipling and Conrad, functioned almost entirely on such a simple plane - exciting plots, colourful incident, and bizarre characters. It was Stevenson's contribution to the fiction of his day that he began to use the marine novel to make serious and worthwhile statements about man and society. Nevertheless, certain aspects of nineteenth-century sea fiction which feature in Treasure Island were to re-emerge in "The Merry Men", The Wrecker and The Ebb Tide. All three narratives use islands on which the major characters are isolated and events brought to a head. "The Merry Men" involves, as a sub-plot, a sunken treasure; The Wrecker

19. Watson, Coasts, pp. 160-163.

20. Watson, Coasts, pp. 164-168.

21. Watson, Coasts, pp. 169-172.

22. See above, p. 22, and Watson, Coasts, pp. 150-156.

23. Watson, Coasts, p. 134.



begins as a hunt for hidden wealth, supposedly on board the Flying Scud wrecked on Midway Island in the Pacific.<sup>24</sup>

At the same time we must not overestimate the conventional (in nineteenth-century adventure novel terms) nature of Treasure Island. It is a remarkable children's novel in that it raises questions about the ambiguities of human behaviour and the human personality which remain unanswered. Irving Saposnik, in a valuable study of Stevenson's work, highlights its place as an "economic myth".<sup>25</sup> He argues that the pirates and loyalists are united by a common greed: "a compulsive desire for material acquisition and self-aggrandizement".<sup>26</sup> The vision of a world overcome by an all-pervasive materialism lies at the heart of The Wrecker and The Ebb Tide. The second serious theme concerns the character of Long John Silver.

#### IV

Treasure Island is essentially Jim Hawkins's story and he narrates it not only as an exciting adventure but also as a personal revelation concerning the difference between what men seem and what they are. The story has, in fact, a psychological relevance which is achieved through the medium of a vividly-imagined adventure narrative. This interest in psychology is just as typical of the romance as the source of Jim's discomfiting revelation, Long John Silver, who is cast in the role of the ruthless and strong-willed adventurer.

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24. A number of these features are also found in Conrad's Victory (1915). See Robert Kiely, Robert Louis Stevenson and the Fiction of Adventure, Cambridge, Mass. (1965), p. 185 (referred to below as: Kiely, Stevenson). Kiely identifies some of the similarities between Victory and The Ebb Tide.

25. Irving S. Saposnik, Robert Louis Stevenson, Twayne's English Authors Series, New York (1974), p. 108 (referred to below as: Saposnik, Stevenson).

26. Saposnik, Stevenson, p. 108.

In Bristol, where Jim first meets him, Silver appears as the very image of the genial good-natured host (he is the keeper of the "Spy Glass Tavern"). His "large firm grasp" and his sailor-talk seem to signify straightforwardness and honesty. In fact he is attempting to conceal his fraternisation with the pirates. When Jim first enters the "Spy Glass" he sees a man he knows to be a pirate. The man makes a quick exit but Silver manages, by sharp questioning of the man's companion, to fool Jim into dissociating the tavern from any idea of the pirates. Silver is the very image of forceful honesty:

'Do you call that a head on your shoulders, or a blessed dead-eye?' cried Long John. 'Don't rightly know, don't you! . . . Come now, what was he jawing - v'yages, cap'ns, ships? Pipe up! What was it?'

'We was a-talkin' of keel-hauling,' answered Morgan.

'Keel-hauling, was you? and a mighty suitable thing, too.'<sup>27</sup>

Jim is easily fooled but, once the voyage is under way, his education begins. One evening he crawls into the ship's almost-empty apple-barrel (looking for an apple) and hears the genial Silver plotting a mutiny.<sup>28</sup> From this moment Silver ceases to be a simple caricature and Jim watches his very real and frightening ruthlessness turn first against the loyalists and later against his fellow mutineers.

Silver is a violent man and he expresses no remorse for his murders and plottings; nevertheless he retains a compelling attractiveness simply because he is so energetic, courageous, and resourceful. When the Hispaniola first reaches the island and the various parties land, Hawkins is horrified by Silver's murder of one of the loyal sailors who refuses to join the rebels: "[Silver] had twice buried his knife up

27. PE, v, 67.

28. PE, v, 83-89. Stevenson was drawing upon family history for this incident. See "Records of a Family of Engineers", PEW, XV, 49-50.



to the hilt in that defenceless body".<sup>29</sup> Later events serve to stress his courage and, appropriately enough, Jim finds himself facing the mutineers with Silver at his side.

Silver is always recalling the deeds of the famous buccaneer, Flint, and his status as an adventurer is measured against Flint's memory. This is apparent when he is searching for the treasure, and Ben Gunn, the castaway, attempts to frighten the pirates by singing Flint's song, "Sixteen men". Silver's companions are thoroughly terrified, prompted, as they are, to remember Flint's deathbed agonies; nevertheless, Silver, who had earlier claimed that Flint had a healthy respect for him, masters his own fears and calms his men. Later, accompanied by Jim, he faces the five buccaneers in a fight to the death over the treasure-cache.<sup>30</sup> Flint fades into the background in the face of Silver's ruthless courage.

Silver's strength and courage, as well as his ruthlessness and resourcefulness, are reflected in a number of Stevenson's later adventurer-protagonists - especially the crew members of the Currency Lass trading schooner who murder an entire ship's crew off a remote island in the Pacific. He also anticipates Attwater in The Ebb Tide, a similarly self-seeking figure, who manages to defeat the attempts of the three Farallone sailors to rob him by playing them off against each other. The Ebb Tide illustrates the place of Treasure Island as a pattern, albeit skeletal, for the later sea stories. Present in the two narratives is an island setting, the theme of materialism, a figure in whom are combined both energy and evil, and a plot which comes to no satisfyingly real conclusion: Attwater and Silver survive along with their unworthy desires. Both tales are reminders that the Stevensonian adventure-story is neither conventional nor trivial.

29. PE, v, 109.

30. PE, v, 239-240.



## V

The Master of Ballantrae, like Treasure Island, is an exciting story, but the high regard in which it has always been held<sup>31</sup> is a testimony to its serious concerns. Its plot is not as tightly constructed as its predecessor's but this is offset by its narrative structure: it has two narrators who observe and comment upon the protagonist, James Durie. Neither narrator is wholly reliable and each takes his place as a character who must be assessed by the reader. This device (similar refinements are used by earlier romancers like Mary Shelley, James Hogg, and Emily Brontë)<sup>32</sup> succeeds in creating the central problem of the novel: what is evil and how is it to be assessed?

An historical novel set in the eighteenth century, it is mostly narrated by Ephraim Mackellar, a weak and timorous man, ill at ease in the world of adventure. His character has an important effect upon the novel because his weakness highlights the energy and masculinity of the adventurers. This is a contrast which Stevenson had already employed in the Balfour novels and which he was to set up once again in The Wrecker (Dodd and Nares) and in The Ebb Tide (Herrick and Davis).

Mackellar, a steward, serves two brothers: the elder, James, dashing, extravagant, and reckless; and the solid, unimaginative, pecunious Henry. Mackellar is drawn towards Henry who presides over the ancestral home, Durrisdeer, and wrestles with the considerable financial burdens of the estates. Durrisdeer is a centre of convention: here James is seen as an evil influence making unfair demands on his

31. In March 1890 Henry James wrote to Stevenson, "a pure hard crystal . . . a work of ineffable and exquisite art", Smith, James and Stevenson, p. 185. Eigner, Stevenson and Romantic Tradition, p. 171, calls the work "Stevenson's major completed romance".

32. Eigner, Stevenson and Romantic Tradition, pp. 143-144 discusses Stevenson's use of the narrator in the context of the history of the novel. Mackellar, as an unreliable narrator, is used in a similar fashion to Charles Darnaway in "The Merry Men". See below, pp. 73-74.

brother and causing nothing but acrimony and suffering. James conforms, in fact, to Zweig's definition of the adventurer,<sup>33</sup> the man who is strong and resourceful, a "phenomenon of sheer energy", but who serves his own ends and is contemptuous of conventional morality. He is reminiscent of Long John Silver and, like him, is to be admired and feared, indeed, the second narrator, Burke, sees and feels for James's glamour.

Mackellar, who is occasionally compelled to admire James, is puzzled by his ambiguous aspect. His bewilderment is neatly caught in an incident on a journey they make to America. Faced with his companion's good parts, his pleasant speech and charming manners, he tries hard to remember James's cruel treatment of Henry. At one point James tells Mackellar an anecdote which reveals James's cruelty and ruthlessness. The motion of the ship represents Mackellar's state of mind:

But this tale, told in a high key in the midst of so great a tumult, and by a narrator who was one moment looking down at me from the skies and the next peering up from under the soles of my feet - this particular tale, I say, took hold upon me in a degree quite singular. <sup>34</sup>

James's energy is represented by his restless movements; he comes and goes from Durrisdeer in a smuggler's-lugger, he travels to India, Europe, and America, and he is never content to remain a provincial laird. These essentially maritime associations produce two calculated effects: his familiarity with pirates and ships becomes a mark of his masculinity, the ability to fight, command, and survive in a predominantly physical world; and his association with a group of pirates marks him out as callous, lawless, and unscrupulous. Lawlessness allied with characters who are rootless wanderers is a feature of The Wrecker, where the

33. See above, p. 23.

34. PE, xi, 321.



adventurers escape the consequences of their actions simply because of the remoteness of the scene of their crime and the great distances involved. Gillian Beer makes a related point in her study of the romance: "Romance is always concerned with the fulfilment of desires . . . ." <sup>35</sup> The Master of Ballantrae, The Wrecker and The Ebb Tide are set in worlds which allow strong characters to pursue their fantasies and desires; some characters, like James, want power and devoted followers, others, like Teach, the pirate captain, are able to indulge their cruelty and greed. In The Master of Ballantrae the environment is an historical one but Stevenson's travels in the Pacific presented him with a contemporary, but similarly lawless, world:

I am going down now to get the story of a shipwrecked family, who were fifteen months on an island with a murderer: there is a specimen. The Pacific is a strange place; the nineteenth century only exists there in spots; all round, it is a no man's land of the ages, a stir-about of epochs and races, barbarisms and civilisations, virtues and crimes. 36

This also enabled Stevenson to combine his study of the adventurer with an investigation of nineteenth-century civilisation.

The lawlessness of the maritime world in The Master of Ballantrae is mainly established in the pirate episode. Fleeing from Culloden, James had been pressed into the service of a pirate called Teach. Teach is incompetent and cowardly but he is dangerous and, during the year in which he is a pirate, James participates in a series of gruesome crimes. The narrator, at this point a soldier of fortune called Burke, is horrified.

Twice we found women on board; and though I have seen towns sacked, and of late days in France some very horrid public tumults, there was something in the smallness of the numbers engaged, and the bleak dangerous sea-surroundings that made these acts of

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35. Gillian Beer, The Romance, London (1970), p. 12.

36. Letters, iii, 261.



piracy far the most revolting. I confess ingenuously  
that I could scarce proceed unless I was three parts  
drunk . . . . 37

The portrait of Teach, a stereotypical pirate, has been criticised,  
especially by G.K. Chesterton.<sup>38</sup> It is possible that Stevenson was  
attempting to set up a contrast between the very real evil of James,  
who effectively controls the pirates, and the largely <sup>ineffectual</sup> wickedness  
of the pirates.<sup>39</sup> He managed this but one can appreciate Chesterton's  
criticism: Teach, who before fighting, works himself up into an  
aggressive fury below decks and emerges chewing glass amidst exploding  
fireworks, has little place in an adult novel. He was apparently  
modelled on Blackbeard,<sup>40</sup> but this factual base does little to alleviate  
the situation. The point is that, in Treasure Island, Stevenson had  
used the pirate stereotype with a childlike belief which carries away  
our objections so that the reader can accept them on their own terms.  
In The Master of Ballantrae the uses of the stereotype do not balance  
against its disadvantages; Stevenson was not to use it extensively  
again.

The following sea novels, The Wrecker and The Ebb Tide incorporate  
further changes and the most striking involve subject-matter rather than  
method or theme. The scene has shifted from an historical world to a  
contemporary - but equally lawless - location in the Pacific. Neverthe-  
less the two novels display his old narrative skills - his ability to  
create an exciting yarn full of incident and drama, and the capacity  
(in The Wrecker) to employ the dramatised narrator. Silver and James

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37. PE, xi, 175.

38. Chesterton, Stevenson, p. 163.

39. See Eigner, Stevenson and Romantic Tradition, p.176.

40. See Moore, "Defoe, Stevenson and the Pirates", pp. 46 and 54-55.  
Moore shows that Stevenson used A General History of the Pirates  
for the characterisation of Teach, p. 54.

Durie remain but in contemporary forms: the seaman and the eighteenth-century gentleman of fortune become merged with the gambling adventurer in a primitive world undergoing the throes of early capitalist enterprise. Even the desert island reappears on which less romantic but equally ruthless adventurers compete in, what Stevenson called, the "dollar hunt". Before the two later novels are examined, however, it is necessary to investigate Stevenson's use of realistic maritime detail in Treasure Island and "The Merry Men".

CHAPTER THREE : Stevenson's use of Maritime Detail in  
Treasure Island and "The Merry Men"



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Treasure Island and "The Merry Men"

I

For the most part Treasure Island avoids the direct treatment of its nautical subject-matter: the most uneventful part of the novel is the voyage section (Part II); its plot involves activity in England and on the island itself, rather than scenes set at sea; and the incidence of purely nautical episodes is remarkably low. The buccaneers and sailors owe more to a literary tradition than <sup>to</sup> fact. The inference should be obvious: the nature of Treasure Island was imposed not so much by choice as by necessity; Stevenson had neither the nautical expertise nor the confidence to write a realistic sea novel.

In the previous chapter, I summarised the work of H.F. Watson who has demonstrated how closely Stevenson followed the conventional form of the nineteenth-century sea story. In addition he was shown to have relied upon Captain Johnson's historical account of the eighteenth century pirates. His studies, however, could not provide him with practical experience in seamanship and he obviously felt ill at ease in describing nautical incidents:

Of course, my seamanship is jimmy in Treasure Island; did I not beseech you W.E. Henley I know not how often to find me an ancient mariner - and you, whose own wife's <sup>own</sup> brother is one of the ancientest, did nothing for me? As for my seamen, did Runciman ever

know eighteenth century Buccaneers? No? Well, no more did I. But I have known and sailed with seamen too, and lived and eaten with them; and<sup>1</sup> made my put-up shot in no great ignorance, but as a put-up thing has to be made, i.e., to be coherent and picturesque, and damn the expense. Are they fairly lively on the wires? Then favour me with your tongues. Are they wooden, and dim, and no sport? Then it is I that am silent, otherwise not. The work, strange as it may sound<sup>2</sup>, is not a work of realism. 1

He was perfectly correct to stress that his novel was "not a work of realism", but it is immediately apparent that he would have liked it to be otherwise. Nevertheless even his limited excursion into the realms of nautical detail did not prevent him from making mistakes. His mother later asked Otis, the master of the Casco, what he thought of her son's writing: "He told her rudely that he had only read Treasure Island and - doubtless put off by its seamanship . . . saw small reason to try another".<sup>2</sup> Stevenson must have been well aware of his limitations but his claim that he had "sailed with seamen too" is surely a modest advertisement for those parts of Treasure Island which are realistic.

In the early 1880's, when he was writing Treasure Island, Stevenson did not possess any real knowledge about sailing ships although he did have a close acquaintance with the handling of small boats in coastal waters, experience gained in his engineering days. This experience is put to effective use in Treasure Island. When the Livesey party decide to abandon the Hispaniola and establish themselves in the stockade they transport their stores and arms in the Jolly boat.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Letters, ii, 276. Significantly, perhaps, Stevenson first published the novel under the pseudonym of Captain George North (in Young Folks, October, 1881 - January, 1882). He thought that the Hispaniola should have been a brig but made her a schooner because "I could make shift to sail her as a schooner without public shame." PE, xv, 370.

2. Furnas, Life, p. 271.

3. PE, v, 121-131.



This is a small craft, of exactly the sort that Stevenson would have become acquainted with in the operations at Wick harbour. In the novel it makes a number of trips and, on the last, comes under fire from the Hispaniola's gun. The episode is simply but graphically represented: its crew are rowing towards the shore against a strong ebb tide, and their task is made harder because it is overloaded. Behind them the buccaneers are furiously pumping round shot in their direction; vigorous rowing only serves to swamp the boat and the only way Hawkins can find of making for the shore is to steer "due east, or just about right angles to the way we ought to go".<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately this means that they lie parallel to the Hispaniola, consequently the boat "offered a target like a barn door". To make matters worse a group of buccaneers sets out from the shore to cut them off. The success of Stevenson's presentation of this episode stems from his familiarity with his subject matter allied to his skill in narrative presentation; consequently the novel becomes, for a short while, a sea story whose drama grows completely from the nautical action and subject matter: an overloaded boat, an adverse tide, the limitations inherent in rowing, and the nature of marine gunnery in the eighteenth century.

It is significant that the other detailed nautical episode also involves a small boat, Ben Gunn's coracle; once again Stevenson was using familiar subject-matter. Hawkins, fleeing from the pirates, finds the coracle and, after cutting the Hispaniola's cable, floats with the ebb tide into the open sea. The coracle's subsequent movements are aided by reference to the map of Treasure Island. The use of a map, also employed by Erskine Childers in his The Riddle of the Sands, adds greatly to the pleasure of reading the novel.

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4. PE, v, 128.



It was broad day when I awoke, and found myself tossing at the south-west end of Treasure Island. The sun was up, but was still hid from me behind the great bulk of the Spyglass, which on this side descended almost to the sea in formidable cliffs.

Haulbowline Head and Mizzen-mast Hill were at my elbow . . . . 5

Hawkins's position is thus vividly represented and the reader is in a good position to understand the conditions - of weather, tide, and current, - which determine his movements and the decisions he makes. He is carried by the current up the west coast of the island where he is forced to give up the idea of making for Haulbowline Head; he decides to make for the Cape of Woods. He is frustrated in this purpose because the heavier seas make it impossible for him to paddle without upsetting his fragile craft. Eventually he begins to overhaul the Hispaniola, also moving north, and, when she suddenly begins to drift as though she were no longer under control, he manages to board her.

Stevenson shows himself aware of the dramatic potential inherent in the deck-plan of a sailing ship. This is an important element also in the fiction of Conrad, who was, through long familiarity, in an ideal position to employ such knowledge. When Hawkins is pursued by Israel Hands around the Hispaniola's deck and ultimately up the mainmast, Stevenson is not only recalling the children's game of catch-as-catch-can, he is also exploiting a natural potential for drama and suspense in the confined areas of a ship.<sup>6</sup>

Once the limitations of Stevenson's knowledge are appreciated, the eventual form of Treasure Island is seen to be inevitable; his own stress upon careful research and craftsmanship ensured that he would not write a bogus sea story stocked with nautical errors. These factors serve to explain why he wrote no adult sea story between the land-based

5. PE, v, 171.

6. PE, v, 188-191.

"The Merry Men" and The Wrecker, and why there is little sea detail in the other novels and short stories which is not historically based. History lends itself to research and is probably less likely to attract adverse comment. Stevenson's use of the sailor caricature was therefore inevitable. A writer lacking nautical knowledge is offered either or both of two courses: he can portray sailors on land, as with Kipling and W.W. Jacobs; or he can fall back on the sailor caricature, a type which mimics "salty" dialogue, nautical dress, and marine lore. The greatest practitioners of the sea story, Melville and Conrad, were able to portray their sailors at sea in a working environment; Stevenson, too, was to make some headway in this direction.

## II

The first draft of "The Merry Men" was written in June, 1881, shortly after Treasure Island, at Kinnaird Cottage, Pitlochry, in the Scottish highlands.<sup>7</sup> It has a dual significance: it is the first of Stevenson's adult, serious sea stories; and it is a realistic narrative based upon a man's relationship with the seas surrounding his island home. It is fitting that this should be his first adult nautical narrative because it draws upon his own early association with the sea as an apprentice civil engineer,<sup>8</sup> and its themes elicit a kind of ancestral force from his family who had long constructed harbours and defences against the sea. The story is related to a period in his life when "he spent three weeks on the little island Earraid off the coast of Mull," in 1870.<sup>9</sup>

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7. PE, vi, 111.

8. Furnas, Life, p. 49, makes this point.

9. PE, vi, 111.



The subject-matter of the story, wrecks, remote island communities, and the ideas of wreckers luring ships onto rocky coasts, is the very stuff of romance. Set in the eighteenth century, the tale capitalises on what must have been fast becoming legendary in his own day, the reputation of Britain's remote coastal communities for plundering wrecks.<sup>10</sup> The subject obviously appealed to Stevenson (as a boy he had written a play named "The Wreckers")<sup>11</sup> and with good reason: he had detailed knowledge of an exact location; and the idea of wreckers and wrecking afforded the chance to investigate a number of themes, the nature of paranoia, the mechanics of fear, and the character of evil.

The wrecker in the story is the paranoid Gordon Darnaway. A middle-aged man, he has been brought up and lived faithfully as a strict Calvinist. His gloomy view of existence has been further confirmed by a life of unremitting labour, as a fisherman, in straitened circumstances. In addition to his religious sense Gordon has a strongly superstitious mind full of fear and morbidity.

'If ye had but used the een God gave ye, ye would  
 hae learned the wickedness o' that fause, saut,  
 cauld, bullering creature, and of a' that's in  
 it by the Lord's permission: labsters an' partans,  
 an' sic-like, howking in the deid; muckle, gutsy,  
 blawing whales; an' fish - the hale clan o' them  
 - cauld-wamed, blind-ee'd uncanny ferlies.  
 'Oh, sirs,' he cried, 'the horror - the horror  
 o' the sea!' 12

The atmosphere of the story provides an obvious explanation for Gordon's horror: he is a simple islander surrounded by terrible seas, and the beauty and grandeur which does exist in his world is distant and remote - like the mountain, Ben Nyaw, overlooking the island. On the other

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10. e.g., Richard Larn and Clive Carter, Cornish Shipwrecks, i, The South Coast, London (1969), p. 20, comment, "contain districts such as Breage and Germoe, Porthleven and the Scillies were particularly notorious for the scale and efficiency of their plundering". Deliberate wrecking was, however, rare: "popularly cherished but quite unsubstantiated" (p. 19).

11. Balfour, Life, i, 65-66.

12. PE, vi, 132.



hand the sense of violence in the meeting place of sea and land pervades the atmosphere of the island; even on the accompanying promontory the "air was always sea air, as salt as on a ship".<sup>13</sup> Gordon is therefore revealed as a man who has been persecuted by his environment and, consequently, he is ripe for any force that can release his frustrated energies. To this end he is portrayed as a tough man, "he had led a rough life to which he could look back with envy . . . a rough, cold, gloomy man",<sup>14</sup> but a man with a heightened imagination and an inner fire: "his eyes shone with a deep-seated passion".<sup>15</sup>

Gordon's energies are released by the power of the surrounding seas when a number of ships are wrecked on the island and he is able to salvage them. His manservant, Rory, abets him in these activities but his daughter, Mary Ellen, is wary of their good fortune. When the narrator, Charles Darnaway, Gordon's nephew, arrives on the island, he is surprised by the signs of wealth in the cottage:

there were chairs in the kitchen covered with strange brocade; curtains of brocade hung from the window; a clock stood silent on the dresser; a lamp of brass was swinging from the roof; the table was set for dinner with the finest of linen and silver . . . . 16

Charles soon learns that these things have been salvaged from a wreck but it is some time before he discovers that Gordon has gained more than material goods: he has acquired a deluded sense of power from watching the destruction of the wrecks, and he feels that he has become a part of the destructive forces of the sea. This is made apparent as he watches the wrecking of a Spanish ship caught in Sandag Bay by an onshore

13. PE, vi, 119.

14. PE, vi, 128.

15. PE, vi, 130.

16. PE, vi, 126.

gale, and blown onto the pillars of granite rocks known as the "Merry Men". He watches from the cliffs high above the bay.

It was upon the progress of a scene so horrible to any human-hearted man that my misguided uncle now pored and gloated like a connoisseur. As I turned to go down the hill, he was lying on his belly on the summit, with his hands stretched forth and clutching in the heather. He seemed rejuvenated, mind and body. 17

The violent forces released in Gordon's madness are symbolised in the destructive energy of the waters. It is an essential element of the story's meaning that the capacity to be violent is not restricted to the paranoiac or the criminal but is connected with an irrational substratum that underlies the human personality:

As [an observer] might look down from the window of a house upon some street disturbance, so, from this post, he looks down upon the tumbling of the Merry Men. On such a night, of course, he peers upon a world of blackness, where the waters wheel and boil, where the waves joust together with the noise of an explosion, and the foam towers and vanishes in the twinkling of an eye . . . . And yet the spectacle was rather maddening in its levity than impressive by its force. Thought was beaten down by the confounding uproar; a gleeful vacancy possessed the brains of men, a state akin to madness; and I found myself at times following the dance of the Merry Men as it were a tune upon a jiggling instrument. 18

Charles's normally subdued and sober personality experiences a sense of identification with the violent energy at work beneath him.

The sea not only prompts Gordon's paranoia, it is also instrumental in his destruction. When the story begins Charles has two purposes: to discover a bullion-hoard in the wreck of a Spanish galleon believed to be lying in shallow water in Sandag Bay; and to marry Mary Ellen. His discovery that Gordon might not only have wrecked a ship but that he may also have killed a lone survivor leads him to a third purpose:

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17. PE, vi, 154.

18. PE, vi, 159.



to discover the extent of his uncle's guilt. At this juncture a Spanish ship arrives off the island and begins a search for the bullion in Sandag Bay. In an approaching storm the Spanish ship's boat has to make for the parent ship and, in the ensuing haste, a negro sailor is left sheltering in the remains of the wreck, standing broken-backed on the sands, which Gordon has salvaged. When Charles and Gordon arrive in the bay Charles makes his uncle stand over what he believes to be the grave of the sailor whom Gordon had killed; at that very moment the negro emerges from the wreck on the sands. The effect on Gordon is dramatic:

. . . he had fallen on his knees, his face was agonised; at each step of the castaway's the pitch of his voice rose, the volubility of his utterance and the fervour of his language redoubled. 19

Gordon's nerve breaks and, in the following twenty-four hours, he becomes wilder and wilder as he is chased about the island by the negro and Charles. Finally, he is pursued into the waters of Sandag Bay where he and the negro are swept out to sea. The sea thus provides the mechanics of his destruction, but the appearance of the negro sailor is supremely ironic: Gordon is destroyed both by his own imagination, which endows the negro with the status of a devil come to claim the sinner, and by the outer world, represented by the foreign ship, from which he has been isolated for so long.

It should be obvious that "The Merry Men" contains many of the romance elements which were identified in Treasure Island and The Master of Ballantrae: the presence of a dramatised narrator; and the skilful handling of highly coloured events (such as Charles's treasure hunt) to "generate action".<sup>20</sup> In addition, and in this the story relates more

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19. PE, vi, 167.

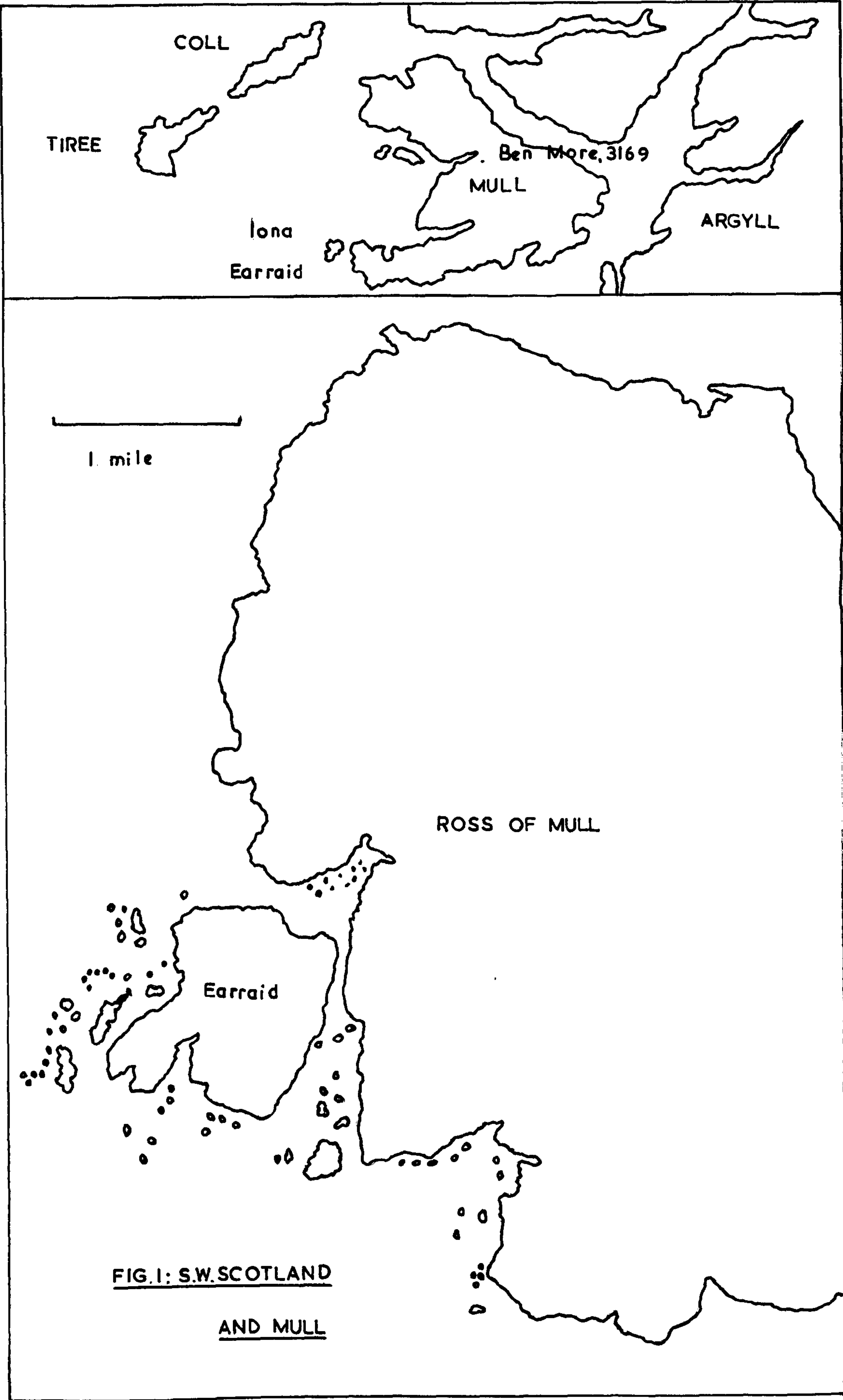
20. The phrase is Sapoznik's, Stevenson, p. 81.



to the later The Master of Ballantrae, Stevenson uses symbolism: the sudden appearance of the negro; the towering seas striking the Merry Men; and the dual death of Gordon Darnaway and the negro. Nevertheless "The Merry Men" stands apart from The Master of Ballantrae and Treasure Island because of its extensive use of realistic material: it is based upon Stevenson's close knowledge of the topography of a particular area of the Scottish coast; and, more importantly, the psychology of its characters bears a close relation to the Scottish islanders Stevenson's family had had dealings with as lighthouse builders. "The Merry Men" is, in fact, a concerted attempt to combine elements of romance and realism.

### III

The first chapter of the story is entitled "Eilean Aros" and it details Charles's journey along the Ross of Grisapool to the island. We may better understand this journey by reference to the map below (Fig. I) which is of the Ross of Mull (Grisapool in the story) with the small island of Earraid (Eilean Aros) lying at its western tip. Stevenson's descriptions tally closely with the map although he appears to have transferred the Merry Men of Mey from the Pentland Firth and added the roost - a tidal race. Charles describes his own journey, on foot, from somewhere in the east, along a twisting path to the small island in the west. Behind him, in the east, is the mountain, Ben Kyaw (Ben More, 3169', on the inset map). Charles's description of the promontory is shot through with a rather sad beauty. It utilises words suggestive of a continuing tragedy: the sea "sobs" among the rocks and the traveller can hear the "fearful" voices of the breakers. He emphasises the sense of vulnerability on the surrounding land; there are few dwellings and little cultivation. Everything seems to be tending towards the sea: Charles's journey and the huge granite rocks



(clearly visible on the south coast on the map) "go down together in troops into the sea, like cattle on a summer's day."<sup>21</sup>

Once Charles is established on the island Stevenson pays close attention to the action of the sea on the coast. In fact it is his knowledge of currents and tides which creates the conditions for his plot to take effect. We can examine this point more closely by reference to Chapter Three where Charles sets out to find the treasure ship. His description of Sandag Bay would appear to owe much to his training as an engineer.

← It is a pretty large piece of water compared with the size of the isle; well sheltered from all but the prevailing wind; sandy and shoal and bounded by low sand-hills to the west, but to the eastward lying several fathoms deep along a ledge of rocks. It is upon that side that, at a certain time each flood, the current mentioned by my uncle sets so strong into the bay; a little later, when the Roost begins to work higher, an undertow runs still more strongly in the reverse direction; and it is the action of this last, as I suppose, that has scoured that part so deep. Nothing is to be seen out of Sandag Bay but one small segment of the horizon and, in heavy weather, the breakers flying high over a deep-sea reef. 22

It is an orderly, efficient, but graphic description. He first conveys the shape and size of the prominent features, then enumerates the currents and the shelter the bay affords, and finally gives an impression of the bay as it would look to a man standing on the beach. The detail, however, is not gratuitous: it contributes to the plot. The prevailing winds and the shape of the bay cause the wreck of the Spanish ship, the ship Gordon wrecked, and, by inference, the wreck of the galleon. The depth of the bay makes the treasure irretrievable and thus heightens the drama of Charles's attempt to locate it by diving from the rocks. The vicious undertow sweeps the negro and Gordon to their deaths.

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21. PE, vi, 120.

22. PE, vi, 140.



The realistic tenor of "The Merry Men" does not stop at close topographical description. The story explores the psychology of a particular type of Scottish islander. In effect it is an investigation of the influence of environment upon character. It might be advanced that, because Gordon was not an islander by birth, the story could hardly be applicable to the native islanders. In fact Gordon's position as an outsider is the exception that proves the rule; even the newcomer is susceptible to the influences that have moulded island psychology. Stevenson's intention to make "The Merry Men" relevant as social exploration is made plain in a recorded conversation with Graham Balfour, his biographer.

and three ways

There are, so far as I know, three ways<sup>and three ways</sup> only, of writing a story. You may take a plot and fit character to it, or you may take a character and choose incidents and situations to develop it, or lastly . . . you may take a certain<sup>express</sup> atmosphere and get action and persons to<sup>and</sup> realise it. I'll give you an example - "The Merry Men". There I began with the feeling of one of those islands on the west coast of Scotland, and I gradually developed the story to express the sentiment with which that coast affected me. 23

For anyone acquainted with Stevenson's life and the history of his family, it is clear that the "sentiment" involved was both complex and deeply felt.

The Stevensons built lighthouses, but the building of them was not particularly welcomed by the local inhabitants who, like Gordon Darnaway, made profit out of the wrecks.<sup>24</sup> In Records of a Family of Engineers Stevenson includes an account of how his grandfather narrowly escaped shipwreck in the Pentland Firth. His ship was driven increasingly closer to the rocky coast of an island, watched by the inhabitants of a fishing village who were eager for the chance of salvage. The story was well known by Stevenson as a child. He wrote of the villagers:

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23. Balfour, Life, i, 141-142.

24. PE, xv, 53-55.

There was no emotion, no animation, it scarce  
seemed any interest; not a hand was raised;  
but all callously awaited the harvest of the sea,  
and their children stood by their side and waited  
also. 25

"The Merry Men" is an attempt consonant with the argument of the essay on Victor Hugo, to dramatise and explain why island people could be so callous. That this was a matter of some weight to Stevenson is possibly indicated by the fact that Records of a Family of Engineers contains a further attempt at elucidation. He suggests that the Scottish islanders of the time, belonging as they did to inward, self-sufficient communities, were unable to adjust to the plight of strangers "life-sized apparitions". The reasons he gives explain part at least of Gordon's attitude.

For these [islanders] no bond of humanity exists, no feeling of kinship is awakened by their peril; they will assist at a shipwreck, like the fisher-folk of Lunga, as spectators, and when the fatal scene is over, and the beach strewn with dead bodies, they will fence their fields with mahogany, and, after a decent grace, sup claret to their porridge. It is not wickedness: it is scarce evil; it is only... the wise disinterestedness of feeble and poor races. Think how many viking ships had sailed by these islands in the past . . . and blame them, if you are able, for that belief (which may be called one of the parables of the devil's gospel) that a man rescued from the sea will prove the bane of his deliverer. 26

Like these islanders Gordon is a poor man who cannot, for a variety of reasons, identify with the sufferings of shipwrecked sailors. His nephew, who is not even an islander, fears that the Spanish ship intends some harm to the family. Ironically Gordon is killed, however unintentionally, by the negro who pursues him into the sea - thus fulfilling the parable of the devil's gospel.

There are a number of other means by which Stevenson enlarges upon Gordon's (and therefore the islanders') attitudes. Charles, for example, an educated man, unwittingly imitates some of his uncle's

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25. PE, xv, 47.

26. PE, xv, 55.



prejudices. At first he is sceptical of Gordon's superstitions, but later he is ready to "read" encouraging signs in the sea-runes of Sandag Bay.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, when diving for treasure, he is overcome by a quite irrational horror when he grasps hold of what he believes to be the leg-bone of a dead man.<sup>28</sup> He too is religious but, although he roundly condemns Gordon's salvaging activities,<sup>29</sup> he is ready to dive for the bullion of the wrecked galleon. He is over-ready, perhaps, to attribute Gordon's predicament to the will of God: "Heaven's will was declared against Gordon Darnaway".<sup>30</sup> As a result of the narrator's incrimination, the reader is less ready to condemn Gordon's prejudices and state of mind, and one is consequently led, through the use of an unreliable narrator, into a fresh understanding of the islanders' psychology.

#### IV

The preceding sections demonstrate some of the main aspects of Stevenson's early development as a sea-story writer. In the Treasure Island section I showed how Stevenson was placed at a disadvantage because of his deficiencies in nautical knowledge, and how his ignorance of sailing-ship technology and seamanship conditioned the form his narrative took. In his dissatisfaction with "Jimmy" seamanship was revealed a strong desire to write with greater authority on ships and sailors. At the same time Treasure Island was shown to be endowed with a number of nautically-realistic episodes. Sections II and III of the present chapter revealed Stevenson combining romance and realism in

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27. PE, vi, 134-135.

28. PE, vi, 146.

29. PE, vi, 126-127.

30. PE, vi, 172.



"The Merry Men". In some ways this was not a successful combination:<sup>31</sup> the sudden appearance of a negro at the climax of the plot jars incongruously with a realistically-realised setting in eighteenth century Scotland. Nevertheless there are signs in "The Merry Men" that Stevenson is on the way to a successful blend of romance and realism within a serious adventure story. Though the dramatic events may at times appear inappropriate, the distinctively romance use of the dramatised narrator performs a valuable function: at various points in the narrative the reader is nudged into a deeper perception of the significance - social and psychological - of Gordon's plight by Charles's actions, comments, and thoughts. "The Merry Men", in fact, offers a glimpse of the method and form of the later sea stories which form the subject of the following two chapters.

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31. J.R. Moore, "Stevenson's Source for 'The Merry Men'" Philological Quarterly, XXIII(1944), 140 criticises the weak integration of the treasure sub-plot.

## CHAPTER FOUR : The Wrecker

## Chapter Four : The Wrecker

### I

For anyone approaching Stevenson's work from the perspective of the sea story, The Wrecker appears to be his most significant and highly developed fiction. This is not to suggest that its appeal is confined to its place as a sea narrative. On the contrary, its achievement lies in the integration of contemporary social comment with the sea story, an integration which is accomplished by using the maritime world at large - its commercial activity in particular - as a paradigm of the capitalist world. This necessarily involves a high degree of realistic detail as this forms the base upon which the themes are built. The narrative techniques perfected in Treasure Island and The Master of Ballantrae, as well as Stevenson's early preoccupations - evil, violence, materialism - appear alongside his new found contemporary interests.

That The Wrecker is an integral part of Stevenson's achievement as a serious adventure-story writer has not been hitherto appreciated. Despite recent critical studies of his work<sup>1</sup> it still seems that David Daiches's assessment holds firm; he argues that The Wrecker is an interruption in Stevenson's career and merely "full of life and variety

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1. Eigner, Stevenson and Romantic Tradition; Saposnik, Stevenson; and Kiely, Stevenson.



and excitement at a fairly simple level".<sup>2</sup> He classifies it as a picaresque romance with its appeal lying in the "entertaining variety of scenes and characters rather than in the integrated structure as a whole".<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the novel is closely integrated and reveals a high degree of sophistication in the very area for which Daiches praises "The Beach of Falesa", its "social and psychological subtlety".<sup>4</sup>

## II

The structure of The Wrecker falls into two parts; its first part, comprising an investigation, conducted by the narrator, Loudon Dodd, into a mysterious affair which itself forms the subject of the second part. The mystery is centred on the remote island of Midway in the Pacific, and involves Norris Carthew and the crew of the trading-schooner, Currency Lass. Dodd, the narrator and investigator, is a character whose background and personal history are fully detailed because they are essential to the interpretation of the novel's meaning. The purpose of the following chapter is to demonstrate the underlying unity of the novel's seemingly disparate parts.

Dodd is the son of a rich American stockjobber who sends him to art school in France. In Paris he meets a young American businessman, Pinkerton, a self-made man, seemingly motivated by the desire to make money but very respectful of culture.<sup>5</sup> When Dodd's father is bankrupted Dodd rejoins Pinkerton who is now living in San Francisco. He assists him in the buying and selling of commodities and stocks and shares.

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2. Daiches, Stevenson, p. 94.

3. Daiches, Stevenson, p. 143.

4. Daiches, Stevenson, p. 15.

5. Pinkerton was modelled on S.S. McClure the American publisher. See Rudyard Kipling's autobiography, Something of Myself, p. 124, and Saposnik, Stevenson, p. 140, n., 7.

The plot gathers pace when they attend the auction of a ship wrecked on Midway (which, if bought, would be salvaged - its cargo retrieved and sold). The sale is supposed to be rigged in Pinkerton's favour but the wreck is only bought at a huge cost, inflated by competition from an unknown party. The partners manage to buy the wreck only by borrowing huge sums of money, encouraged by vain hopes that the salvage will yield large dividends (there are rumours of a smuggled cargo of opium). Dodd sails to Midway on board the Norah Creina, but his salvage efforts uncover nothing of real value. It later transpires that the wreck was only worth its high price because it was the key to a mystery which Norris Carthew and the Currency Lassies, as Stevenson calls them, would rather keep unsolved. The mystery, the disappearance of the crew of the British brig Flying Scud, involves the story of Norris Carthew and his friends and business associates.

The Englishman, Carthew, had been one of five crew members of the trading-schooner Currency Lass which had sailed from Sydney to Butaritari in the Gilbert Islands. At Butaritari the crew had quite unexpectedly sold the ship's entire stock for an outrageous profit and gained a lucrative charter for San Francisco. Forty miles from Midway, the Currency Lass was dismasted in a freak storm and the crew had made for the island in a whaler. They had been marooned on Midway for six days when the Flying Scud, commanded by a Captain Trent, arrived off the island. Trent's subsequent demand, that the Currency Lassies should surrender their profits for the privilege of being rescued, sparked off a violent sequel in which he and his entire crew were massacred. The Currency Lassies, posing as the dead crew, were rescued by a British man-o'-war and eventually reached San Francisco where they attempted to buy the wreck hoping, thereby, to conceal their crime. It is at this point that the paths of the adventurers cross Dodd's, and the investigation begins.

The maritime adventurer, a direct descendant of James Durie and Long John Silver, is consequently a significant feature of the novel. His energy, enterprise, and practical skills form an index of the virtues upon which civilisations are built; at the same time, he is the victim of forces unleashed by his own commercial activity. The novel is, in fact, a deeply-felt analysis of modern acquisitive society, a society in which commerce, capitalistic enterprise - in themselves glamorous, and certainly not evil or socially harmful pursuits - act as a spring-board for violent confrontation. In the ensuing mêlée of interests, culture and civilisation are exposed as dangerously thin veneers. That these ideas should emerge from Stevenson's Pacific period is not at all surprising, considering the nature of his experiences at Butaritari.

### III

The early chapters of The Wrecker are the weakest part of the novel. Stevenson defended them in his Epilogue by explaining that he wanted to make the events on Midway "inhere in life".<sup>6</sup> The problem is not that they are unrelated to the themes of the novel. Pinkerton's instigation of a classroom brawl<sup>7</sup> and the stabbing of a student,<sup>8</sup> in a separate incident, demonstrate that violence exists even in Paris, the centre of art and culture. The stockjobbing operations of Pinkerton and Dodd's father, and Dodd's own enrolment in a business college,<sup>9</sup> make plain some of the elements of a capitalist world ridden with materialism. At the same time Dodd's attempt to exist independently of this world fails miserably. These themes are present but they exist under a

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6. PE, xii, 459.

7. PE, xii,

8. PE, xii,

9. PE, xii,



plethora of detail and are revealed through a multitude of characters and incidents.

Once the hunt for the Flying Scud's crew is under way the novel becomes much better. Nevertheless, Dodd's early experiences make plausible his passion for the Pacific. He embarks on the Norah Creina, skippered by a seaman called Nares, in a spirit of optimism. He is ready, too ready to forgive Nares's violent behaviour towards the crew:

as we accept and admire, in the habitable face of nature, the smoky head of the volcano or the pernicious thicket of the swamp. 10

Nares, however, is a man with a limited degree of self-knowledge. A tough man, he claims to have no illusions about the reality of violence and the impossibility of living life without dirtying one's hands. He maintains that the violent life at sea,

kind of shakes the starch out of the brotherly love and New Jerusalem business. 11

The rub is that such an observation is virtually a tacit approval of violent behaviour - and has the merit of rationalising Nares's violent outbursts. The events on Midway which Dodd investigates demonstrate the inevitability of violence but they also impress the participants with its full horror.

The massacre of Trent and his crew is one of the most powerful scenes in Stevenson's fiction.<sup>12</sup> The events are horribly prolonged as an unarmed crew are chased about the ship and men in the rigging are shot inexpertly from the deck. Brown, the last man of the Flying Scud's crew to die, is shot only at the third attempt as he cowers in the forepeak; both Wicks and Carthew are hard put to summon the necessary coldness to shoot him and they are physically sick afterwards. The prolonged

10. PE, xii, 213.

11. PE, xii, 216.

12. PE, xii, 422-428.

violence, criticised by G.K. Chesterton as a series of murders rather than a massacre,<sup>13</sup> is convincing if Stevenson's purpose is understood. The events are meant to be seen as a result of forces largely beyond the participants' control, forces engendering a terrible momentum sufficient to move the tragedy to its end. The massacre stems not only from the nature of man and the society in which he lives but also from a malevolent universe.

The most violent member of the Currency Lass's crew, the protestant Irishman, Mac, who joins the ship at Butaritari, is another symbol of man's dual nature. He is prone to sudden outbreaks of irrational violence, followed by equally sudden spasms of penitent regret. On Midway he had shown great restraint in sacrificing substantial winnings in a card game for the sake of peace and sanity and yet, not a day later, his sense of injustice sparks off the sequel of violent events. Ironically he has no stake in the money Trent is demanding from his companions. In fact Stevenson is demonstrating the strength of man's materialism; Mac is unconsciously supporting a collective possessiveness in which principle is as important as personal gain. After the massacre he is quick to propose the saying of a prayer for forgiveness.<sup>14</sup>

#### IV

The massacre on the Flying Scud is caused directly by materialism.

True, it must be owned, we for the present, with our Mammon-Gospel, have come to strange conclusions. We call it a society; and go about professing openly the total separation, isolation. Our life is not a mutual helpfulness; but rather, cloaked under due laws-of-war, named 'fair competition' and so forth, it is a mutual hostility. 15

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13. Chesterton, Stevenson, p. 222.

14. PE, xii, 437.

15. Thomas Carlyle, Past and Present, Centenary Edition, New York (1899), p. 146.

The Wrecker lays bare the true state of affairs in a materialistic society and places Stevenson in a great tradition of artists and writers who have denounced the evils of materialism and, in the nineteenth century, capitalism. If his approach was anything new then the novelty lay not in his vision of the evils that grow from materialism, or in his clear realisation of the impersonality of capitalist endeavour, but his objective rendering of the appeal of capitalism as a form of romantic endeavour. The results for man are no less disastrous, but the realisation is more objective. He calls this romantic endeavour the "dollar hunt" and one might compare the term to Conrad's "material interests", examined in Nostromo (1904). The dollar hunt embraces all the typical operations of capitalism: Pinkerton uses a carefully organised advertising campaign to sell Thirteen Star State Brandy;<sup>16</sup> Dodd's father employs credit to finance stock market speculation,<sup>17</sup> and credit buys the wreck of the Flying Scud, supports the salvage operations, and underpins the Currency Lass Island Trading Company.

Dodd's experiences in San Francisco and on the Norah Creina develop three characteristics of capitalism: its dishonesties, its attractions, and its impersonal nature. Carthew's story then strips away the last two characteristics rather in the fashion that Nostromo's fate highlights the pitiless tyranny of material interests. Stevenson's portrayal of capitalism involves a comparatively close and detached account of the commercial operations of the nineteenth-century maritime world.

Most of the financial undertakings in The Wrecker are associated with the maritime world and almost all are run on dishonest lines. Dodd refers to his own father's operations as "little better than highway

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16. PE, xii, 38. The bottles and their labels are imitations of "Courvoisier" brand.

17. PE, xii, 117-118.



robbery",<sup>18</sup> and Pinkerton, to Dodd's displeasure, deals in gun-running and smuggling.<sup>19</sup> Pinkerton's most lucrative business is wrecking, the salvage of wrecks which are bought through a ring (of buyers) which ensures low prices by eliminating competition at the auctions.<sup>20</sup> As a sideline he finances the illegal resale of condemned ships under false names.<sup>21</sup> - a practice which obviously endangers the lives of unsuspecting sailors. Dodd is, however, aware of the attractions of capitalism.

Reality was [Pinkerton's] romance; he gloried to be thus engaged: he wallowed in his business. Suppose a man to dig up a galleon on the Coromandel coast, his rakish schooner keeping the while an offing under easy sail, and he, by the <sup>blast of a</sup> great fire of wreckwood, to measure ingots by the bucketful on the uproarious beach; such an one might realise a greater material spoil; he should have no more of profit of romance <sup>than Pinkerton</sup> when he cast up his weekly balance-sheet in a bald office. 22

Dodd's nautical metaphor is ironically chosen: the reality behind Pinkerton's activities is revealed at sea in just such a romantic setting.

Dodd discovers, despite his earlier attempts to dissociate himself from money-making, that he too is susceptible to the romance of capitalism. In San Francisco he finds himself caught up in the drama of the Flying Scud auction, but his deeper complicity is revealed in the voyage to Midway. In Chapter Eleven the Norah Creina is threatened by a storm as she approaches the island; Dodd is faced with a clear choice: heave to, knowing that delay could bankrupt Pinkerton, or press on and risk the lives of all on board.

'And all this, if you please, for Mr. Pinkerton's dollars!' the captain [Nares] suddenly exclaimed. 'There's many a fine fellow gone under, Mr. Dodd, because of drivers like your friend . . . . What do they care for sailors' lives alongside of a few thousand dollars?' 23

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18. PE, xii, 27.

19. PE, xii, 117.

20. PE, xii, 156-157.

21. PE, xii, 116.

22. PE, xii, 115.

23. PE, xii, 222.

Dodd chooses to press on, not merely for Pinkerton's sake, but because he has become a prisoner of the romance of capitalism, symbolised by the excitement of the chase. The telling irony is that the storm never materialises and the rival gang, which Dodd believes he is racing to Midway, is in fact fleeing as fast as possible in the opposite direction. The search on board the wreck raises similar issues; in the mad and destructive rush to find the opium the ship is torn apart and a substantial cargo of rice and tea is thrown overboard.<sup>24</sup> Stevenson is dramatising the clash between the excitements of commercial enterprise and the destructive results. In fact little "romance" is left intact and even the romantic bonds that exist between adventurers are exposed to a critical irony. Dodd, for example, regards opium-smuggling as a form of "massacre" but he sells the opium to pay off the creditors (who lent him money to buy the Flying Scud wreck).

Carthew's voyage on the Currency Lass is carefully contrived to illustrate the dangers which civilisation faces from capitalism. There is no little irony in the change of names which gives the old schooner, Dream, the odd name of Currency Lass<sup>25</sup> - suggestive as it is of the reality of "hard cash"; neither is there much to inspire confidence in the appointment, as master, of the sailor Wicks - a fugitive from justice and a murder suspect. The means by which the Currency Lass make their fortunes on Butaritari are closely related (within the terms of the plot) to Trent's later demands on Midway, indeed their very success sharpens Trent's avarice. Wicks, who bargains for the Currency Lass on Butaritari, and later Trent, find themselves in possession of a complete monopoly of goods and services. Topelius, the Butaritari trader, had his regular store ship, the Leslie, wrecked on the reef.

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24. PE, xii, 261.

25. PE, xii, 384.

He has three ships waiting for supplies and he is consequently in desperate need of the Currency Lass's cargo. It is the classic monopoly situation and, consequently, the Currency Lasses sell their entire trading stock at a huge profit and make their fortunes in a single transaction. Wicks, who had bargained as ruthlessly as his criminal background would suggest, announces his success with a phrase that foreshadows the slaughter on Midway:

'I bled him in four thou'!' he cried, in a voice  
that broke like a schoolboys's. 26

Trent, who was once convicted of running an illegal pawnshop, an activity which suggests both his meanness and his pettiness, looks with some pride on his business background. His simple demand, that the marooned Currency Lasses turn their fortune over to him in return for their rescue, is merely an extension of the law of supply and demand. If his demands seem to overstep the bounds of propriety and gentlemanly conduct then it must be remembered that such codes normally serve to hide the true nature of business acumen.

The card game on Midway precedes Trent's arrival; it is an important episode which serves to keep the dual themes of violence and materialism in full focus. The gambling, which so nearly ends in violence, parodies the operations of the capitalist world. When the Currency Lasses arrive, Mac's comment, "'There's nothing here but wreck and coffin-boards'",<sup>27</sup> is suggestive both of the events to come and what a modern reader might call the waste land of modern civilisation. At first the crew are struck by the uselessness of the money, so carefully brought with them: "'no more use than that much dung.'"<sup>28</sup> It is not

26. PE, xii, 397.

27. PE, xii, 405.

28. PE, xii, 406.



long, however, before it regains its old power and the men are soon compulsively playing cards for it. Its value grows in direct proportion to the men's optimism as to the chance of rescue. At one point it even becomes the means of their rescue: "'Do you mean to say that won't affect a ship's compass?'"<sup>29</sup> Wicks exclaims. It is an unconsciously ironic remark; Trent reaches Midway after having passed it six days before, adverse winds having driven him back on his tracks. Meanwhile the men on the island have become obsessed by the money: "The presence of that chest of bills and specie dominated the mind like a cathedral".<sup>30</sup> Man's preoccupation with wealth and financial speculation has replaced his religion and faith in the modern world. At first the men make vain and abstruse calculations as to the exact amount each possesses, but their inability to arrive at an exact figure leads to a card game for a proportion of the ready money. It is a game which obsesses them for three days. It is dramatically a means of raising the tension of the plot, a tension which is ironically lowered when the Flying Scud appears on the horizon. The tension is developed through the compulsive interest of the players and Carthew's growing conviction that it must cease. It is a neat irony, and one suggestive of the irrationality of man's conduct and desires, that it is through the offices of Mac and Carthew, the two men most to blame for the massacre, that the game is finally stopped. At the very moment when peace has been restored the Flying Scud appears.

V

The last two sections advanced the proposition that The Wrecker is an attempt to demonstrate that violence underlies the fabric of society and that man's greed and possessiveness continue to exist under

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29. PE, xii, 406.

30. PE, xii, 409.

the sophistication of modern commercial endeavour. The novel also considers the arguments of those who contend that capitalism is a force for good, in a cultural sense. Pinkerton, for example, sees his own justification in his energetic activity and capacity for hard work. He rarely questions his creed or the benefits of capitalism because, as far as he is concerned, his quest for material wealth keeps the wheels of modern society turning;<sup>31</sup> in addition he is willing to support the artist, Dodd. At the beginning of the novel, in Paris, Dodd rejects these ideas; he attempts to withdraw from all but the most necessary involvement in the money world, and idealises those artists who have achieved success in the face of material poverty.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, in practice, he fails miserably: as the son of a rich father he poses as a Bohemian consuming cheap food and cheaper wine,<sup>33</sup> and as the destitute son of a bankrupt father he can only live the life of a dishonest parasite.<sup>34</sup> Once destitute he has to compromise and join Pinkerton in San Francisco. He is never at ease, however, and he and Pinkerton have numerous arguments over the morals of business practice.

Dodd eventually sees an escape in a life of activity - at sea in the Pacific.

Those who dwell in clubs and studios may paint excellent pictures or write enchanting novels. There is one thing that they should not do: they should pass no judgement on man's destiny, for it is a thing with which they are unacquainted. Their own life is an excrescence of the moment, doomed, in the vicissitude of history, to pass and disappear. The eternal life of man, spent under sun and rain and in rude physical effort, lies upon one side, scarce changed since the beginning. 35

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31. PE, xii, 58 "To build up the type!" [Pinkerton] would cry. 'We're all committed to that; we're all under bond to fulfil the American Type! Loudon, the hope of the world is there. If we fail, like these old feudal monarchies, what is left!'"

32. PE, xii, 44-46.

33. PE, xii, 45.

34. PE, xii, 83-87.

35. PE, xii, 256-257.

For some time it appears that he has neatly solved his dilemma: he is involved in Pinkerton's schemes only as a servant; and he has dismissed the artistic world, in which he was a complete failure. His choice of insult is unintentionally ironic, for the events surrounding the massacre on the Flying Scud suggest that man's destiny cannot be viewed with anything but pessimism; the wreck, covered with bird excrement on Dodd's arrival,<sup>36</sup> implies that life itself, however simple, is tainted with evil. In fact Dodd's own career furnishes enough evidence to question his illusions: he sells opium and fails to prevent Nares's "hazing" of the crew. The massacre strips away Dodd's illusions and he is left with the starkly cruel fact that no man can live without dirtying his hands. The result is no deep catharsis, but only a decision to compromise his former ideals. The man who had earlier turned to "rude physical effort" is overweight and inhabits a ship furnished with old English bookshelves and French renaissance books.<sup>37</sup> His trading ship is run in the defiance of the rules of capitalism (Dodd makes no profit) and he conducts his life with a leisured and placid indifference. It is a final irony that, in his dependence on the newly rich Carthew, he is existing upon a combination of capitalist enterprise and physical ruthlessness. Dodd has managed to combine artistic independence, the benefits of wealth, and the illusion of living an active life as a "seaman-trader".

The Currency Lass's voyage confronts a further question: can civilisation and culture do anything to help man in his struggle against his own evil self? Stevenson's answer lies in the facts of the incident and a variety of symbols. Tommy Hadden, who had first broached the idea of a trading company to Carthew in Sydney, brings on board with him a

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36. PE, xii, 231.

37. PE, xii, 16.



copy of Buckle's History of Civilisation. Dodd later remarks, when narrating the episode: "Buckle, and not a creature fit either to read or understand it".<sup>38</sup> The volume serves only to send Hadden to sleep and it becomes a standard joke on board to say a "glass of Buckle" or a "bottle of Civilisation" instead of a glass or a bottle of sherry.<sup>39</sup> Later, when Carthew attempts to halt the game of cards on Midway, somebody gives the inevitable answer:

'Give that man a glass of Buckle', said somepne, <sup>inevitably</sup> and a fresh bottle was opened, and the game went <sup>40</sup> on.

It is an ironic comment on the indifference with which men view culture and civilisation, and a rejoinder to Dodd's faith in the simple life. It should also be remembered that when the wrecked crew had arrived on Midway they felt they were being watched from California and China: the newest and oldest civilisations.<sup>41</sup>

The shallowness of man's commitment to civilised conduct is most forcefully demonstrated in the massacre. It is begun by a religious crew member, the protestant Irishman, Mac, but its continued course is assured by the Scandinavian first mate of the Flying Scud, Goddedaal, who goes berserk in the small cabin, irrationally beating Hemstead's corpse.<sup>42</sup> He is then shot by the artist, Carthew, who instigates the slaughter on deck. Of Goddedaal we are told:

He ran continually over into Swedish melodies, chiefly in the minor. He had paid nine dollars to hear Patti; to hear Nilsson, he had deserted a ship and two months' wages; and he was ready at any time to walk ten miles for a good concert, or seven to a reasonable play. <sup>43</sup>

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38. PE, xii, 393.

39. PE, xii, 391.

40. PE, xii, 412.

41. PE, xii, 406.

42. PE, xii, 423.

43. PE, xii, 415.

At this point Stevenson is making a general point about civilisation: culture (Goddedaal is a lover of music) cannot withstand the more basic desires in human nature. Obviously, culture is important because it sustains man's humanity and compassion, but it is seen to be powerless against the "dollar hunt" and the "life of instinct": "but there was no counsel, no light of reason in that ecstasy of battle".<sup>44</sup>

## VI

It is important not to underestimate the place of the sea, ships, and sailors in The Wrecker. The maritime basis of the plot gives it a width of relevance embracing a number of continents: Australia, Europe, America, and the Pacific Islands. In fact Stevenson's use of the Pacific deserves closer examination. Told that the novel involves the South Seas, the reader might, with Dodd, think that subsequent events will reveal the workings of a primitive culture, that of the South Sea islanders. Dodd contemplates his forthcoming voyage in San Francisco in a similar frame of mind:

I stood there on the extreme shore of the West and of to-day. Seventeen hundred years ago, and seven thousand miles to the east, a legionary stood, perhaps, upon the wall of Antoninus, and looked northward toward the mountains of the Picts. <sup>45</sup>

Ironically he learns very little of the islanders but a great deal about the primitive instincts of modern man. This ironic perspective anticipates Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" which contains just such a civilisation-barbarism metaphor<sup>46</sup> and ends with a similar revelation of the primitive heart of civilised man. In this fashion Stevenson uses the seaman-adventurer as a surrogate for civilised man who is to be tested in the primitive, free environment that is the adventurer's

44. PE, xii, 423.

45. PE, xii, 143.

46. "'I was thinking of very old times, when the Romans first came here . . . .'" Youth. p. 49.

world. The condition of freedom is important because only then can man's true nature be revealed free from the constraints of law and convention.

When Stevenson reviewed the structure of The Wrecker in the Epilogue<sup>47</sup> it was the detective-story element that assumed pride of place. This is understandable because Dodd's travels, including the central voyage to Midway, are an investigation into a mystery. In fact the mystery element determines the eventual impact of the broken time-scheme upon the reader because, unlike Lord Jim or Nostromo, there is no structural irony; Stevenson was proud that his mystery could not be solved by the reader and, as the reader has no idea of what has occurred at Midway until the last pages, any irony is retrospective. Stevenson forces the reader to look back and make the connections between Dodd's search for a solution to the problems of the artist and the sensitive man in a capitalist society, and the events on Midway. That this technique of retrospective irony is possible, indeed successful, owes much to the wealth of striking nautical incident and equally striking nautical symbolism. This can best be illustrated by an examination of the Currency Lass's last voyage.

The trading venture begins in an optimistic atmosphere, an optimism which is totally and ironically misplaced. I have already shown how the crew's success at Butaritari compares with Trent's demands. It is after their success at Butaritari that the ship's sail splits and the rotten mainmast pitches overboard. The incident is memorable enough:

It was for all the world as though some archangel with a huge sword had slashed it [the sail] with a figure of the cross; all hands ran to secure the slatting canvas; and in the sudden uproar and alert, Tommy Hodden lost his head. 48

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47. PE, xii, 455-461.

48. PE, xii, 400-401.



The rotten mainmast indicates the corrupt motives of the crew and their place as representatives of a materialistic society. The accident itself suggests the ominous events which are to follow. The religious imagery recalls the crew's ruthless bargaining with Topelius at Christmas - ostensibly a time of peace and goodwill.

The Currency Lass has to be abandoned but the crew only make for Midway because of an error in Hoyt's Pacific Directory which wrongly credits the island with a coaling station, a fact that Mac vainly denies.

Each saw in his mind's eye the boat draw in to a trim island with a wharf, coal-sheds, gardens, the Stars and Stripes . . . a few weeks in tolerable quarters, and then step on board the China mail, romantic waifs, and yet with pocketsful of money, calling for champagne, and waited on by troops of stewards. 49

When the whaler reaches Midway Stevenson, consciously or not, uses an archetypal symbol to focus attention upon the impending tragedy. The island has long existed in literature as a symbol of illusion, a mirage tempting the protagonist from his quest, and, when the spell or illusion is broken, the island is seen for what it is, a place of horror.<sup>50</sup> This is exactly what occurs in The Wrecker. The men approach the island under the illusion that it is a haven and, only after the massacre, appreciate the island for what it is.

'To stay in this place is beyond me. There's the bloody sun going down - and to stay here is beyond me.' 51

In addition to these incidents may be added smaller, but none the less vivid, symbols: the Flying Scud covered in bird excrement, the card game on Midway, and the copy of Buckle's History of Civilisation.

49. PE, xii, 403.

50. See W.H. Auden, The Enchafed Flood or The Romantic Iconography of the Sea, London (1951), pp. 29-30; and below pp. 373-374.

51. PE, xii, 436-437.

The unfolding of the mystery which Dodd sets out to solve is achieved mainly by nautical means. The central actor in this drama is Nares, the master of the Norah Creina. Nares provides the clues that cast doubt on the accepted version of the Flying Scud's misfortune. This version, put about by the Currency Lasss, is that the Flying Scud, misled by Hoyt's Directory, had put in for Midway to obtain fresh water. Calms had then delayed her for seven days, at which time, in attempting to put to sea, a sudden change of wind had put her ashore. Two men had been killed in attempting to lower a boat.

Nares's nautical knowledge soon begins to lay bare this story. At first he is confused by the presence of fresh water in the scuttlebutt of the Flying Scud; this would be impossible if, as the accepted version maintained, her water had run out - there being no fresh water on Midway. Nares explains this inconsistency by remembering that water can rot "'and come sweet again'".<sup>52</sup> His suspicions linger, however, and are aroused once more when he cannot find the boat that was supposedly lowered after the stranding, there being a full complement of boats on the Flying Scud's deck. Eventually he realises that the ship could have been refloated when his men, operating the Flying Scud's pumps, discover that there is little water in the hull.<sup>53</sup> His doubts are confirmed by three circumstances: Dodd and Nares find an extra small boat on Midway (it is actually the Currency Lass's whaler, a type of boat which would not have been carried by a deep-sea square-rigger like the Flying Scud<sup>54</sup>); Dodd fails to find a Hoyt's Directory in the brig's cabin, only a red Admiralty book giving correct details about Midway's desert island status,<sup>55</sup> and, finally, they discover a photograph of the

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52. PE, xii, 234.

53. PE, xii, 236.

54. PE, xii, 239.

55. PE, xii, 250-251.

Flying Scud's crew which bears no relation to the men Dodd saw in San Francisco.<sup>56</sup>

The bogus story, put about by the Currency Lasses, was a direct result of their vain attempt to sail the Flying Scud away from Midway and sink her at sea. The episode draws heavily upon Stevenson's new found nautical knowledge and his friendship with at least two Pacific masters, A.H. Otis of the Casco, and Denis Reid of the Equator.<sup>57</sup> Wicks, who directs operations on board the Flying Scud, is a schooner sailor and unfamiliar with the handling of a brig like the Flying Scud. At first he fails to get her under way.

'Heave away on your anchor, Mr. Carthew.'

'Anchor's gone, sir.'

'Set jibs.'

It was done, and the brig still hung enchanted. Wicks, his head full of a schooner's mainsail, turned his mind to the spanker. First he hauled in the sheet, and then he hauled it out, with no result. 58

He eventually achieves success but his resultant over-confidence has a sad end:

To stay a square-rigged ship is an affair of knowledge and swift sight; and a man used to the succinct evolutions of a schooner will always tend to be too hasty with a brig. It was so now. The order came too soon; the topsails set flat aback; the ship was in irons. Even yet, had the helm been reversed, they might have saved her. But to think of a sternboard at all, far more to think of profiting by one, were foreign to a schooner-sailor's mind. Wicks made haste instead to wear ship, a manoeuvre for which room was wanting, and the Flying Scud took ground on a bank of sand and coral about twenty minutes before five. 59

56. PE, xii, 253.

57. Furnas, Life, p. 358.

58. PE, xii, 434.

59. PE, xii, 435-436.



Stevenson had come a long way since Treasure Island;<sup>60</sup> and his use of nautical knowledge, as a key pivot in a plot, anticipates Kipling's "Bread upon the Waters" and Conrad's "The Secret Sharer".

## VII

The Wrecker employs a sophisticated narrative structure but, although it succeeds in identifying Stevenson's serious purpose, it is not an outright success. There are, in effect, two plots: Dodd's search for self-realisation; and the story of Carthew and the Currency Lass. The two plots are interlocked by making Carthew's activities the subject of a detective investigation by Dodd. Nevertheless the marriage of the two parts is unsatisfactory. The reason does not lie in the detective element, which is neatly done, or in the Currency Lass chapters, which are well-constructed and dramatically powerful. The weakness lies in Dodd's story which is disproportionally long (Dodd's narrative is twenty-five chapters to Carthew's four). The reasons for this inordinate length lie in the heavy burden of the Paris and San Francisco scenes which are closely detailed; on the other hand, Stevenson's use of maritime realism - commercial and nautical - can hardly be faulted. It would appear that he was well versed in <sup>handling</sup> maritime realism, a skill which is readily explained by the - albeit limited - practice he had gained in his earlier fiction. The early parts of the novel also lack the figure of the adventurer who so dominates the latter half. That he does appear before the Currency Lass chapters is due to Stevenson's new creation: the American master represented by Nares, skipper of the Norah Creina. Nares is an

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60. I had Stevenson's account of the incident checked by a nautical expert (Mr. W. Smith) who lectures on the Yachtmaster's Course at Wigston College of Further Education, Leicester; his comment was "Stevenson's description is nautically impeccable, showing an insight and easy flow of seaman-like terms which must surely stem from personal experience."

adventurer who serves nobody but himself and lacks any of the concern for which Conrad's officers feel for the welfare of their men. It is the adventurer-seaman who is more fully examined in The Ebb Tide.

It would be wrong, however, to concentrate on The Wrecker's faults. Its structure (the use of a dramatised narrator who conducts a personal quest, and its shifting narrative perspective) and themes (the evils of Western civilisation; its vision of deep personal failure in the character of Dodd) anticipate aspects of Conrad's Nostromo and "The Heart of Darkness". Stevenson is revealed as an artist preoccupied with ideas and fictional techniques which were to occupy twentieth-century writers and thinkers. His next, and final completed novel, The Ebb Tide, is much shorter than its predecessor and structurally much simpler. In choosing this form, a choice which may have been due to a reaction following the complexities of The Wrecker, Stevenson was exploiting a type of adventure-narrative which was used by Kipling and Conrad. Less complex and frequently carrying a lighter burden of descriptive detail, these stories achieve their effects differently.

## CHAPTER FIVE : The Ebb Tide



## Chapter Five : The Ebb Tide

### I

The Ebb Tide was written soon after The Wrecker, but their common thematic ground is not immediately apparent. Where The Wrecker was expansive in structure and closely detailed in texture, The Ebb Tide is tightly constructed, moves to a swift climax, and is sparsely detailed. It is not set in the civilised world at all and, whereas The Wrecker has a large number of characters, it has a mere four main characters and perhaps ten very minor characters. Stevenson does not use a dramatised narrator and the plot has a straightforward time-scheme.

The Ebb Tide involves the white failures and outcasts of South Sea life. The three men "on the beach" (or destitute) sheltering in a deserted jail are in imminent danger of being arrested by the French authorities of Papeete as vagrants. Davis, a tough American skipper, has forfeited his certificate after losing a ship while drunk in command; Huish, a Cockney clerk, is unemployed; and Herrick is an Oxford graduate and the son of a now bankrupt, but once wealthy, father. At the eleventh hour, with the prospect of hard labour staring them in the face, Davis is offered the command of a small schooner, the Farallone, which has lost its two white officers from smallpox. The trio determine to disobey the consul's instructions and make for South America, instead of Sydney,

where they intend to sell the ship and its cargo of champagne. Herrick, an honest but weak character, endures agonies of conscience before he accepts the idea. Once on board, and out of sight of land, Davis succumbs to his old weakness for drink. He and Huish are soon drunk and Herrick, a nautical novice, is left to sail the ship as best he can. A sudden squall brings Davis back to his senses but his resolution to abstain in future is followed by a revelation. The "champagne" proves to be water with a few cases of the real thing to maintain the deception of a valuable cargo. The trio piece together the earlier history of the schooner and realise that she was meant to be lost at sea so that the owners could claim the insurance, a form of maritime fraud known as barratry. The previous white crew had died before they could scuttle her. Davis and company next decide to blackmail the owners but their plans are frustrated when they discover their stores have run down. At this point they sight an island.

The trio navigate the Farallone towards what they believe to be a pearl island; Davis and Huish's avaricious desires are sharpened accordingly. The island is ruled by a religious fanatic called Attwater. He is accompanied by three natives, the remnant of an island population decimated by smallpox. Attwater perceives the trio's violent intentions from the beginning and easily masters their bungling attempts to shoot him and rob him of his pearls. Finally, Herrick places himself at Attwater's disposal, Davis undergoes a religious conversion, and Huish is shot in the final confrontation.

Today The Ebb Tide seems a curiously imperfect work with its very real merits confined largely to the latter part where the narrative moves swiftly to its strange climax. Stevenson's admirer André Gide, made this point in 1905: "You can't get into The Ebb Tide until after the first hundred pages but suddenly it becomes excellent and remains so

almost to the end".<sup>1</sup> It has a number of faults which one does not customarily associate with Stevenson's work; these may have been a result of the strain he was then under as the head and sole financial support of a large household.<sup>2</sup> For at least part of the time he was writing the novel he was suffering from T.B., and Colvin notes that the manuscript was finished only with "an unusual degree of strain and effort".<sup>3</sup> Interestingly enough he wrote the climactic - and impressive - Chapter Eleven three times. In the end he was quite enthusiastic about the entire work: "I think it excellent."<sup>4</sup>

Its faults are not hard to spot. Although he had convincingly portrayed failure and weakness in The Master of Ballantrae and The Wrecker, he is not always at ease with the characterisation of the despairingly histrionic Herrick: "'If I can't do anything, be merciful and put a bullet through me; it's only a puppy with a broken leg!'"<sup>5</sup> In addition, Davis is most convincing when he is fulfilling a tough and energetic role; his pathos and sentimentality do not ring true.

The Ebb Tide is a disconcerting novel because it is a mixture of the conventional and the unconventional in adventure fiction. Conventional enough is the figure of the adventurer. In this respect Attwater, the victor of the final confrontation, is ruthless and sinister enough to rank alongside James Durie. His religious ardour is suspect because he is seemingly materialistic and demonstrably cruel. He has ruled his island population harshly and dictatorially with little consideration other than his own comfort and well-being. Conventional also is Stevenson's

1. The Journals of André Gide, trans. Justin O'Brien, New York (1947), i, 147.

2. See above p. 43.

3. Letters, v, 2.

4. Letters, v, 114.

5. PE, xviii, 143.



mastery of the familiar aspects of adventure-narrative: the emphasis on physical confidence and prowess, expressed through the figures of Attwater and Davis, and through the novice, Herrick, struggling to find his feet in the adventurer's world.

What is unconventional is the lack of any centre of moral authority; even The Master of Ballantrae has such a centre in the characters of Henry Durie (who is strong enough to defeat James Durie in a duel)<sup>6</sup> and Mackellar. The trio - as Stevenson refers to Davis, Herrick, and Huish - are largely ineffectual criminals, a "twopenny pirate" Attwater calls Davis.<sup>7</sup> Herrick, who has a rudimentary morality, is weak and unable to translate his convictions into action. In the early chapters the reader is left to identify with Davis who, although a criminal, has the advantage of being tough and resilient, and the saving grace of a kindly attitude to Herrick. The final chapters of the narrative rudely shatter the reader's allegiance: Davis is physically humiliated after his shameless concurrence in the attempt to kill Attwater with vitriol. Finally, and most strangely, Attwater secures the willing, indeed eager, allegiance of Davis and Herrick.

The novel appears less unconventional if it is compared to later narratives such as Conrad's Almayer's Folly (1895) and The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' which, like The Ebb Tide, are studies in failure. In Stevenson's novel the figure of the tough, masculine American sailor is under examination and, in Davis, he achieved a reasonably successful portrait of an American officer-seaman in a role other than as a masterful and invincible stereotype (as in Nares of The Wrecker). Davis is realistically conceived both as a seaman and as a psychological type. Herrick, who is also a study of failure, fits into the novel's structure because he is the typical novice striving to attain some sort of standing in Davis's nautical world.

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6. PE, xi, 242-243.

7. PE, xviii, 134.

## II

The American Merchant Marine of the latter half of the nineteenth century was renowned for the brutality of its officers - "bucko mates and bully masters" - who were employed by their owners to obtain the maximum work out of their crews.<sup>8</sup> Some drove their crews so hard that they would desert at the first opportunity; in this case the owners would be pleased for they would have to pay no wages. Stevenson appears to have known quite a lot about the service and this would be the result of the time he spent in San Francisco in 1880 and 1888, and his friendships with captains Otis and Reid. The Gleaner episode of The Wrecker, in which Dodd meets Nares and another officer disembarking from the ship Gleaner, betrays a more than passing knowledge of the state of affairs then extant.<sup>9</sup> Dodd learns that five men had been murdered on a trip, round the Horn, from Sandy Hook, New York, to San Francisco. These bare facts might easily have been drawn from any contemporary account of malpractices in American merchant ships. A series of such cases was in fact published by the National Seaman's Union of America in 1897. The document was called The Red Record<sup>10</sup> and covered the seven years from 1888 to 1895. It detailed sixty-four cases of cruelty and murder in the Cape Horn fleet.

Warrant sworn out for mate's arrest; mate disappeared and could not be found (Ship Standard at San Francisco October, 1889). 11

In the Gleaner episode the mate also disappears.

8. See Basil Lubbock, The Down-Easters, 2nd ed. Glasgow (1930) (referred to below as Lubbock, Down-Easters).

9. PE, 145-147. On board the Casco Stevenson had read R.H. Dana's Two Years Before the Mast, a highly realistic account of life in the American Merchant Marine. See Letters, iii, 206.

10. The Red Record, San Francisco (1897), is not available in this country. The extracts are quoted from Lubbock, Down-Easters.

11. Lubbock, Down-Easters, p. 18.

Pinkerton's opinions of seamen sound very much what one would expect from a shipowner. He has no qualms about endangering the lives of sailors by commissioning condemned ships and staunchly defends Nares against the charge of brutality: "He's a typical American seaman - brave as a lion, full of resource, and stands high with his owners."<sup>12</sup> Nares, as we have seen, is quite unrepentant about his behaviour. He believes that one can only run a ship, crewed by poor seamen, with a show of force. For him life at sea is a case of the survival of the fittest.

How would you like to go on deck for your middle watch, fourteen months on end, with all your duty to do, and every one's life depending on you, and expect to get a knife ripped into you as you come out of your state-room, or be sand-bagged as you pass the boat, or get tripped into the hold . . .? <sup>13</sup>

Stevenson was not exaggerating the violence. Basil Lubbock, a highly respected nautical authority, and one who had sailed in a "Down Easter" (as American deep-water ships were called) gives a testimony to the toughness of the life in his book The Down Easters:

Down East mates for the most part believed that it was necessary to instil terror into all foremast hands, and they usually succeeded in doing this without straining themselves. <sup>14</sup>

He acknowledges that some American officers habitually carried knuckle-dusters and sported belaying-pins pushed down their boots.<sup>15</sup> Lubbock's account suggests that Stevenson was portraying a type which was something of a living legend. Lubbock compares him to the Western gunman.

There was far more, however, to the make-up of the American deep-water mate than the picturesque belaying-pin and cruel knuckle duster. He was a distinct American type, a virile type, in the same category and with much the same outlook on

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12. PE, xii, 199.

13. PE, xii, 216.

14. Lubbock, Down-Easters, p. 21.

15. Lubbock, Down-Easters, p. 14.



life as those frontiersmen, the cowboy and the miner and the lumberman. He was also a product of the times, obeying that law called "the survival of the fittest", for one must remember that he invariably began life as a ship's boy, a "red neck" or a "greenhorn", a lamb for slaughter; surviving which he became an able seaman; then, through a show of initiative or powers of leading in times of stress, was promoted petty officer, and finally by sheer character and driving force fought his way to the quarter-deck. 16

Lubbock's portrayal might easily be a summary of Nares's character and, in The Wrecker, Stevenson confines himself to a presentation which, although it demonstrates Nares's unpleasant and perhaps self deceiving side, accepts the masculinity of the type. It is the virtue of his character-sketch of Davis, the type's representative in The Ebb Tide, that the very idea of a tough, self-sufficient man of action is attacked.

Davis is cast in much the same mould as Nares except that Stevenson exploits a traditional weakness of the "bucko" sailor - his liking for drink. His drunkenness is a result of the death of his daughter. At the time of her death he had been master of a deep-water ship, the Oregon. Later he reveals that he had wrecked the crack ship, Sea Ranger, while drunk in command and while his mistress was on board.<sup>17</sup> His grief for the loss of his daughter is all too evident in the novel and it logically explains his conduct. He is, however, recognisably a tough seaman. Destitute on the beach at Papeete, Tahiti, he is resourceful and obtains food and later work for his companions.<sup>18</sup> Once on board the Farallone he "shakes down" the crew and overcomes Huish's antipathy to work and obedience. He reveals himself as a "bully" master when Herrick notices how he enjoys frightening the crew and, when one of the hands deserts as she clears the harbour (a "pier-head jump"), he leaps among them with a belaying-pin.<sup>19</sup> His early plans, if dishonest, are well conceived and executed.

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16. Lubbock, Down-Easters, pp. 14-15.

17. PE, xviii, 28.

18. PE, xviii, 35 ff.

19. PE, xviii, 50.

## III

Stevenson put a great deal of effort into making Davis a convincing and realistic character-study of a seaman and put to good use his own experiences in the Pacific. The Farallone's course, from Tahiti, through the Dangerous or Tuamotu archipelago, to Attwater's pearl island (for which an approximate position is given), was almost the reverse of the Casco's own voyage from San Francisco, through the Dangerous archipelago, to Papeete, Tahiti - the very port from which the Farallone sails - in 1888.<sup>20</sup>

The detail with which Stevenson describes Davis's decisions as master of the Farallone can be appreciated from a number of key episodes in the novel. When Davis leaves Papeete,<sup>21</sup> for example, he has two conflicting purposes. He must deceive the authorities who have employed him to sail the Farallone west to Australia and he must also manoeuvre the schooner in order to make for America in the east. Papeete lies on the north side of Tahiti and so Davis, fully justified in sailing north to clear the land, must not be seen to make for the east, consequently he waits until darkness before putting the ship over; this delay disappoints him because, as the prevailing winds are the south-east trades (blowing the "wrong" way as far as he is concerned), he must make for the east as soon as he can. All this information is rendered in colloquial speech and so one can appreciate Stevenson's difficulties.

The first crisis occurs when Davis puts the ship about.<sup>22</sup> He takes the helm and puts Huish at the mainsheet (i.e., the rope which keeps the mainsail taut against the wind). Huish is instructed to keep the rope and the sail taut by taking in the slack (the rope would

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20. See the map of the Casco's voyage in Balfour, Life, ii, facing p.41.

21. PE, xviii, 52-53.

22. PE, xviii, 56.

inevitably slacken as the Farallone turned closer to the wind). Huish is clumsy and stands in the wrong place. He is in danger of being knocked over by the boom of the mainsail and tangled in the coils of rope. Davis displays his quick wits and seamanship by knocking him over and saving his life.

'Where would you have been if that boom had swung out and you bundled in the slack? No, sir, we'll have no more of you at the mainsheet. Seaport towns are full of mainsheet-men; they hop upon one leg, my son, what's left of them, and the rest are dead. 23

The incident is vivid and, if one cannot fully understand what is happening from a nautical point of view, Huish's danger and Davis's quick thinking are readily apparent. Davis's nautical platitude - "they hop upon one leg" - is very convincing.

There is some talk in the novel of keeping the Farallone's "Dead Reckoning".<sup>24</sup> The references are important because they relate to Davis's decline from an efficient and workmanlike seaman to a drunken incompetent, and they form an index to Herrick's attempts to be a competent seaman. Dead Reckoning refers to a navigational procedure used in the days before radio time-checks and radar to keep a record of the ship's position when the sun or stars could not be seen.<sup>25</sup> The distance travelled, as recorded by the ship's log, was combined with her last known position and the compass bearings the ship had followed to produce an approximate position. A ship sailing against a current would have to know the speed of the current to obtain a true record of the distance sailed.

At first Davis is very efficient: he states the need for a Dead Reckoning and sees to it that the necessary records are kept. This

23. PE, xviii, 56.

24. PE, xviii, 55 and 61.

25. See The Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea, ed., Peter Kemp, Oxford University Press (1976), p. 234.



prompts Herrick to decide to be efficient, but Davis's drunken stupors later make him contemptuous of the need for a Dead Reckoning, which Herrick, nevertheless, attempts to compute. However, Herrick needs help because he does not know what to allow for the current (Davis at least advises him on this matter). Herrick is not particularly successful at the task and has cause to reproach himself for not keeping a strict eye on the compass-bearings.<sup>26</sup>

The second crisis,<sup>27</sup> which happens when Davis is drunk, is an important episode. The ship has been rolling and banging in a dead calm for three days and has made no progress. The situation itself is a fair representation of the apathy which has struck Davis and Huish. On the morning of the fourth day Herrick sees a squall coming; the captain<sup>is</sup> oblivious to the danger. Davis is setting more sail and Herrick fears that the Farallone will be dismasted. He is paralysed with fear and alarm but does manage to warn Davis. If Herrick has revealed that he is more of a sailor than he was, then Davis is shown to be a true seaman - despite his inebriation. He springs into action and orders the sails to be lowered; most importantly he cuts the foresheet with a pocket-knife and so releases the strain on the masts:

And meanwhile, in the waist, up to his knees in water  
- so low the schooner lay - the captain was hacking  
at the foresheet with a pocket-knife. It was a  
question of seconds . . . . 28

Once again the issues are vividly represented and one does not have to be a sailor to comprehend what is at stake. In fact Stevenson was using his own experience of a similar incident which occurred in the Dangerous Archipelago on the Casco. In that incident the landsman, Stevenson, had been the hero.<sup>29</sup>

26. PE, xviii

27. PE, xviii, 67-70.

28. PE, xviii, 70.

29. Letters, iii, 231.

## IV

When Davis and his companions see the island it presents them with the only solution to their problems. The Farallone's stores are low and so they cannot make for South America or even Samoa (where they had planned to sink the vessel, make for San Francisco, and blackmail the owner). From Findlay's Directory, Davis discovers that the island is the site of some pearling operations and he decides to attempt a robbery. Attwater proves an invincible opponent. His superior manner goads Davis and Huish into an irrational fury which helps to make their subsequent actions ineffective. At the dinner party, held on the evening of the Farallone's arrival,<sup>30</sup> he makes Huish drunk and is consequently able to extract all the information he needs about the history of the trio's association. Davis's first attempt to shoot him is easily defeated. The captain runs up to the house in a blind rage waving a revolver;<sup>31</sup> Attwater and his men are quite ready - Davis's blunt, unsophisticated attempt is typical of the simplicity of the man.

Davis is defeated and eventually brought to heel because, by a combination of events, he loses his self-confidence and consequently the initiative in the contest. His self-confidence is assailed by a long series of setbacks which prompt his superstitious imagination into a state of depression.

Then came over Davis, from deep down in the roots of his being, or at least from far back among his memories of childhood and innocence, a wave of superstition. This run of ill-luck was something beyond natural . . . it seemed as if the devil must serve the pieces. 32

He is consequently ready to participate in Huish's evil scheme to blind Attwater with vitriol during a truce. Nevertheless Huish's plan ignores

30. PE, xviii, 120-129.

31. PE, xviii, 134.

32. PE, xviii, 145.

Attwater's superior perception and Davis's good sense, displayed at sea in the Farallone, has no chance to assert itself: Huish holds the initiative.

In the confrontation,<sup>33</sup> Attwater shoots Huish and then pins Davis up against the white figurehead and gives him sixty seconds to "'make his peace with God!'"<sup>34</sup> He refuses but eventually prays for his children when Attwater begins to shoot close to his body. Attwater lets Davis off the hook and he collapses in a heap at the foot of the figurehead. When we next see him he is praying on the beach and appears to have undergone some sort of religious conversion. His conversion must surely be read as a mental breakdown.<sup>35</sup> He has lost all his tough mental attitudes and is blind to Attwater's faults. His religion expresses itself as a total identification with God in the manner of an evangelical priest; more significantly he has no thought of his family:

Why not come to Jesus right away, and let's meet in  
yon beautiful land? That's just the one thing wanted;  
just say, 'Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief!' 36

His state of mind is not unprepared for he had always displayed strong feelings of guilt and, once on the island, he was ready to interpret events as a judgement.

. . . his mythology appeared to have come alive and  
Tophet to be vomiting demons. 37

Stevenson creates a sense of the inevitability of Davis's defeat through imagery and symbolism. The trio are marked out as outcasts from the very beginning. They sail from an island, where they have been living in a derelict jail, on a schooner for which no one will take

33. PE, xviii, 144-165.

34. PE, xviii, 163.

35. The idea may have been suggested to Stevenson by his wife's own breakdown in 1893 (see Booth, Vailima Letters, p. 124). The Ebb Tide was finished during the latter part of 1893.

36. PE, xviii, 168.

37. PE, xviii, 159.



responsibility. Their planned crimes are ironically frustrated: the cargo they intend to steal is itself part of a fraud, and their own bungling strands them in the midst of the aptly named Dangerous Isles. The atmosphere of imagery and decay travels with them. Papeete had been infected with influenza and the Farallone had lately been infected with smallpox; Attwater's island has been decimated by the same disease.

The approach to the island is particularly suggestive of decay and disease.<sup>38</sup> The Farallone sails into an island shaped like a horse-shoe. It is, indeed, a symbolic trap for, as Davis later realises, the ship has no choice but to stay: they have no provisions, there is no wind, and the surrounding seas and islands are inhabited by cannibals. The island is beautiful but the atmosphere is threatening: "and the silence of death was only broken by the throbbing of the sea".<sup>39</sup> The heat is intense and the adventurers daunted by their own excitement which "glowed about their bones like a fever";<sup>40</sup> they close with the land like eavesdroppers and thieves.<sup>41</sup> The natural harbour is dominated by a group of bungalows and a jetty. On the jetty stands a figurehead of "leprous whiteness".<sup>42</sup>

The figurehead is a suggestive symbol.<sup>43</sup> At this early point in the narrative it is a salutary warning to the three adventurers for it suggests, because it is part of a shipwreck, the end of adventure.<sup>44</sup> Each of the trio stands in a different relation to it. Herrick, who

38. PE, xviii, 89-94.

39. PE, xviii, 90.

40. PE, xviii, 90.

41. PE, xviii, 91.

42. PE, xviii, 93.

43. In Mrs R.L. Stevenson, The Cruise of the 'Janet Nichol', London (1915) facing p. 56 there is a picture of just such a white figurehead.

44. Kiely, Stevenson, p. 191 makes this point.

lands first, sees a "defiant deity" hurling a missile at the schooner, and then he pauses to regret "that she was not a goddess . . . that he might have bowed down before her in that hour of difficulty".<sup>45</sup> This captures his lack of conviction in himself and his desire for a masterful superior. Huish, who believes in gambling on fortune, turns to it, "as though he were about to address it to his devotions".<sup>46</sup> Davis is later cornered by Attwater and is humbled as he stands before it.

## V

Herrick is a key figure because his development relates to Davis's failure, a failure which suggests that the man-of-action's toughness is an illusion. Herrick, as we have seen, fulfils the role of novice or "greenhorn" on the Farallone and, although he tries hard, he is not particularly successful as a sailor. Once on the island he exists in a state of confusion; he feels bound to Davis and Huish: "There was an implied bond of loyalty in their cohabitation of the ship",<sup>47</sup> but he knows that their plans are wrong; he is repelled by Attwater's sinister aspect; and, finally, he is depressed by his lack of courage and decision. The last point is important; Herrick is conscious of his inability to live up to the standards of masculinity embodied in Davis and Attwater.

Herrick achieves some measure of self-development. In fearing for Attwater's life and the fortunes of his companions, he sheds his self-pity, which had been earlier revealed in his maunderings in the old calaboose where he had written Latin quotations on the wall, bewailing his misfortune. Self-pity as an unworthy sentiment is itself a common theme of adventure fiction, as it is in The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'

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45. PE, xviii, 105.

46. PE, xviii, 160.

47. PE, xviii, 115.

and Captains Courageous. Herrick, nevertheless, remains in a state of depression and tries to commit suicide by jumping over the Farallone's side. The attempt fails because his hold on life is too strong and he swims to the shore. His failure constitutes, for him at least, the final straw:

he saw himself implacably confronted for the duration of life: stretched upon a cross, and nailed there with the iron bolts of his own cowardice. He had no tears; he told himself no stories . . . . He lay there, and admitted the facts, and did not attempt to rise. 48

Attwater finds him on the shore and threatens him with a rifle:

Herrick slowly rose to his feet; his heart throbbed hard, a hideous excitement shook him, but he was master of himself. Slowly he turned and faced Attwater and the muzzle of a pointed rifle. 'Why could I not do that last night?' he thought. 49

Herrick has in fact, within the terms of adventure fiction, become a "man". He has learnt to be contemptuous of death and injury, and to scorn self-pity.

The problem is that one expects a "man" to reject all that Attwater stands for, but Herrick's association with Attwater as his joint "favourite" (with Davis) appears a rejection of his new found sense of self. The point is that The Ebb Tide is not a conventional adventure-story, and, in fact, exposes the conventions of masculinity. When the crew of the Farallone first see Attwater's island it is only as a reflection of her lagoon on the horizon.<sup>50</sup> The island and all that transpires on it does indeed act as a mirror: the trio are presented with an image of their shortcomings; as a result, Davis suffers a mental breakdown, Huish embarks upon a suicidal course of action, and Herrick achieves a degree of self-respect. On the other hand, Attwater exists as a sort of "ideal"

48. PE, xviii, 141.

49. PE, xviii, 142.

50. PE, xviii, 84-85.



image of their aspirations. He is stronger, more ruthless, and more successful than Huish and Davis (who, in a more perceptive moment, admits it)<sup>51</sup> and he is more self-confident and self-aware than Herrick. Of course he is also more unpleasant than Davis, if not Huish, but this is in line with Stevenson's objective: he is suggesting that the standards by which the adventurer lives are detestable. Herrick, in gaining his self-confidence, has lost his sense of justice.

## VI

Stevenson's purpose in The Ebb Tide would appear to be dual. First, he is concerned with realising a morally-diseased world where right and wrong have little meaning - prerogative resides with the strongest man, Attwater, who, though blatantly evil, claims the right to be judge over his fellow men. Secondly, the novel investigates the weaknesses - moral and mental - of the man who, like Davis, claims to be a tower of strength. It is through these concerns that Stevenson can reasonably be said to share affinities with Kipling and Conrad, as well as the later adventure-novelist, Graham Greene. Each one of these three writers uses the adventure story as a serious medium for the portrayal of moral issues. In addition, Conrad and Greene are particularly interested in failure. Conrad, like Stevenson employs bankruptcy and insolvency to create plots in which men are exposed to further revelations of personal weakness. Two obvious examples are Captain Whalley in "The End of the Tether" (1902) and Almayer in Almayer's Folly. Conrad's interest in the failure of manliness (in his sea fiction) is investigated below.<sup>52</sup>

At the same time it must not be assumed that The Ebb Tide is the only sea story of Stevenson's that shares similarities with Conrad's

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51. PE, xviii, 125.

52. Part III, Chapter III, pp. 281-319.

fiction; indeed, mention has already been made of The Wrecker's use of techniques and subject-matter which were to become features of the later author's work. In addition, and on a more nautical level, Stevenson's sailor-portraits (of men at work and thinking closely about their work) compare not unfavourably with Conrad's officer-seamen - no mean feat, considering Conrad's nautical training. Finally, we might add that both men were adept at exploiting the symbolic possibilities of nautical incidents.

Though Kipling, like Conrad but unlike Stevenson, has an interest in the maritime hero (as opposed to the adventurer) there are parallels to be drawn between the nautical fiction of Stevenson and Kipling. Both men had an urge to write sea stories which were nautically accurate and, consequently, their careers follow a similar pattern. Each writer progressively introduced realistic nautical material and yet neither completely rejected romance elements. Together, and before the advent of Conrad, they managed to change the nature of sea-adventure fiction which, from being ephemeral and trivial, became enduring and serious. It is, therefore, satisfyingly appropriate that, whereas Stevenson was to work for the most part in the sea-novel, Kipling concentrated almost exclusively on the short sea story.

**PART TWO : RUDYARD KIPLING**



## PART TWO : RUDYARD KIPLING (1865-1936)

### CHAPTER ONE : Many Inventions

#### I

Kipling's verse and prose contains a varied picture of the communications system of the British empire in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth. This in itself is a reflection of Kipling's origins as a member of an Anglo-Indian family. He was born in Bombay, spent his schooldays in England, and later worked as a journalist in Lahore and Allahabad. He was consequently in an ideal position to appreciate the importance of the steam-engine and the steamship in the maintenance of the unity of the British empire. His verse celebrates the liners which conveyed the Anglo-Indians back to England for furlough, the ports from which they sailed, and the tramp-ships which carried the produce of the empire.

The sea, ships, and sailors were a romantic subject for Kipling, and his enthusiasm might be reasonably said to date back to his unhappy days in the house at Southsea where he and his sister lived from 1871 to 1877. They were looked after by a retired Naval captain and his wife. Kipling was desperately unhappy although he liked the captain, who was himself a romantic figure. Carrington records that the sailor

used to say "shiver my timbers!" and "taught him old sea-songs, introduced him to Jorrocks, and delighted him by talking like a sailor in a book

. . . ."<sup>1</sup> There is a vivid description of the captain and the docks at Southsea in Lord Birkenhead's account of Kipling's early years:

Her husband was a retired Navy captain, once a midshipman at Navarino, with a dry black scar on his leg caused by an accident from a harpoon line while whale-fishing, a scar at which Rudyard used to gaze with horror and fascination. The house stood in the suburbs of Southsea. Near by, in Portsmouth harbour, the timber for the Navy lay in booms. The training brigs stood out opposite Southsea Castle and outside lay the desolate Hayling Island, Lumps Fort, and the lonely village of Milton. Rudyard was soon to know all these places in his walks with the scarred sea-captain, his only friend in the House of Desolation - the mud banks with their screaming sea-birds, the great harbours with the ships riding at anchor, their slimy jetties, and seaweedy smell, the dock-  
yards with the marine store shops smelling of tar and ropes, and the brass-countered offices where the Captain went every three months with a slip of blue paper to claim his wound pension. 2

the  
hammers  
ringing,

Unfortunately the captain died not long after Kipling's arrival.

After spending his teens at the United Service College, Westward Ho!, Kipling returned to India to work as a journalist; he served on two newspapers between 1882 and 1889.<sup>3</sup> While he was a journalist he wrote stories about Indian and army life later collected in Plain Tales from the Hills (1888), Soldiers Three (1890) and Wee Willie Winkie (1890). His knowledge of army life was to serve him well when he began to write about the Royal Navy at the turn of the century. In 1889 he decided to combine a trip to England with a world tour. The travel sketches he wrote en route are collected in From Sea to Sea (1889) and they tell of

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1. Charles Carrington, Rudyard Kipling : His Life and Work, Macmillan, London (1955), p. 16 (referred to below as: Carrington, Rudyard Kipling).
  2. Birkenhead, Frederick Winston Furneaux Smith Earl of, "The Young Rudyard Kipling", Essays by Divers Hands, n.s., XXVII (1955), p. 67.
  3. These were: the Civil and Military Gazette, Lahore (1882-1887); and the Pioneer, Allahabad (1887-1889).

voyages which took him to Calcutta, Rangoon, Hong Kong, Nagasaki, Yokohama, and San Francisco. As Carrington indicates, sea travel was vastly different in an age before the wireless:

The liner life that Kipling knew is as extinct as the stagecoach life that Dickens knew, and Kipling is the poet of the steamship as Dickens is the novelist of the stagecoach. It is Kipling's discovery of ships and harbours and seafaring men that is noteworthy from this voyage; he was quickly fascinated by the yarns that are told in liners' smoking-rooms . . . . There was the man's world of the smoking-room and the deck on the tropical night, and there was the woman's world of the saloon, where every gentleman scrupulously dressed for dinner . . . . 4

It is evident that his experiences of sea travel were vastly different from Stevenson's - who, during 1888 and 1889, was at sea in the Pacific in the tiny Casco. Kipling, compared to Stevenson on the Devonia, was very much a privileged passenger.

Once in England he set out to make a living. His Army and Indian stories, then recently published in England, soon made him quite a celebrity and one of the reasons why he cut short his American visit in 1891 was because he was pestered by reporters on arrival in New York.<sup>5</sup> Later that year he sailed to Cape Town and from this journey dates "The Long Trail",<sup>6</sup> a poem full of Wanderlust and romantic descriptions of the sea and sunny islands. He left Cape Town for Hobart and Wellington, a run described in "McAndrew's Hymn".<sup>7</sup> By this time Stevenson was settled in Samoa, and Kipling made plans to visit him; they came to nothing and he continued his journey to Australia and later to India.<sup>8</sup>

4. Carrington, Rudyard Kipling, pp. 121-122.

5. Carrington, Rudyard Kipling, p. 184.

6. Carrington, Rudyard Kipling, pp. 185-186.

7. Carrington, Rudyard Kipling, p. 187.

8. Something of Myself, p. 100 (referred to below as: SOM).



After his return to England he married an American, Carrie Balestier, in 1892. They lived in Brattleboro', Vermont, from 1892 to 1896 when a family quarrel drove them back to England.<sup>9</sup> While in America he wrote Captains Courageous (1897), a story about the American Grand Banks fishermen. He continued to live in England until his death in 1936, although from 1900 to 1908 he spent the winter months in South Africa.<sup>10</sup> His best naval story, "Mrs Bathurst", draws upon his knowledge of the Naval base at Simonstown.

Kipling's sea stories belong mainly to the years 1893 to 1904. The early part of this period is characterised by stories and verse of merchant ships and ship's engineers. This is understandable because it was a period when sea travel had assumed a large presence in his life. The relevant volumes are: Many Inventions (1893), The Day's Work (1898),<sup>11</sup> and the collection of verse, The Seven Seas (1896). The later years are involved, as far as sea fiction is concerned, with the Royal Navy. Most of the Naval stories are collected in Traffics and Discoveries (1904). Kipling's association with engineers and the Royal Navy is examined in later chapters.

Part Two will not be directly concerned with Kipling's verse, although two dramatic monologues, "McAndrew's Hymn" and "The Mary Gloster", enhance an understanding of the sea stories in The Day's Work. It would be a mistake to ignore his verse completely. Some of it celebrates the cities and ports which he visited on his travels, and this adequately explains part of the appeal that Kipling holds for retired soldiers and sailors (who returned home by sea from overseas duty). His descriptions

9. See Frederic F. Van de Water, Rudyard Kipling's Vermont Feud, New York (1937).

10. Carrington, Rudyard Kipling, p. 316.

11. In addition Kipling published two sea stories: "An Unqualified Pilot", Windsor Magazine, February, 1895; and "The Burning of the Sarah Sands", Youth's Companion, 10 November 1898. They were later collected in Land and Sea Tales for Scouts and Guides (1923).

of ships and seascapes are often tinged with the "exile's" emotional identification with his homeland.

Through the endless summer evenings, on the lineless, level floors;  
Through the yelling Channel tempest when the siren hoots and roars -  
By day the dipping house-flag and by night the rocket's trail - 12

His political verse is frequently couched in imagery drawn from specifically maritime dangers; "The Dykes" and "The Storm Cone", for example, warn England of impending danger from abroad.

It is probably true to say that Kipling was happier with the sea and sailors as subjects for verse than for prose. His sea stories have not received the critical acclaim accorded other areas of his work and, indeed, form a minor part of his prose output. T.S. Eliot's remark about the difficulty of a writer making the most of "two such very different forms of expression as poetry and imaginative prose",<sup>13</sup> is very relevant at this juncture. Kipling was conscious of a duty to be realistic and accurate in his descriptions of nautical life, and there are indications that he did not write more sea stories because of the difficulties involved in maintaining the standards of realism he set himself.<sup>14</sup> Verse offers forms and modes of expression that allow for the impressionistic presentation of nautical detail.

## II

The following chapters suggest that Kipling met the same difficulties in writing sea stories as Stevenson before him. His developing response to the challenge of realism follows a similar pattern. If

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12. "The Coastwise Lights" Rudyard Kipling's Verse, Inclusive Edition 1885-1932, 4th edition, Hodder and Stoughton, London (1933), p.170 (referred to below as: Verse).

13. T.S. Eliot, ed., A Choice of Kipling's Verse, London (1963), p. 5.

14. See Ch. VIII, "Working Tools", SOM., and especially pp. 212 and 218. His early training as a journalist may have contributed to his desire to be accurate (see SOM., p. 205).

anything, he seems to have been more concerned than Stevenson about nautical realism. Ironically, Kipling was to undergo a closer examination of his performance in this area than probably any other sea-story writer before or since. This was partly due to his ambitious attempts to write stories about the intricate technology and professional relationships of the engine-room and the Royal Navy, consequently he had to endure a rigorous and knowledgeable cross-examination conducted by the retired engineers, sailors, Merchant and Royal, of The Kipling Society. A series of articles in The Kipling Journal<sup>15</sup> was prompted by his admission, in Something of Myself, that

I have had miraculous escapes in technical matters, which make me blush still. Luckily the men of the seas and the engine-room do not write to the Press, and my worst slip is still underided. 16

At the same time he was a very flexible writer and, like Stevenson, he was able to write successful sea stories with a minimum of nautical knowledge. Two of these stories, "The Disturber of Traffic" and "The Devil and the Deep Sea", are sufficiently different from his later sea fiction to warrant a separate examination. They illustrate that form of sea story containing large elements of romance.

### III

Many Inventions is the first collection of short stories in which Kipling demonstrates a more than passing interest in sea fiction. There

15. A select list of the letters sent to the Kipling Journal (referred to below as: KJ) appears in "News and Notes", KJ, XXXVI, No. 170 (1969), 2-3. The first and most thorough article on the subject is T.E. Elwell, "Kipling's Queer Sailing Directions", KJ, X, No. 65 (1943), 15-16, and X, No. 66 (1943), 13-14. Kipling did make a number of mistakes over technical matters, though he strove to eliminate them and, in some cases, corrected the collected versions of the stories. A full examination of his accuracy in these matters appears in the relevant volumes of The Reader's Guide to Rudyard Kipling's Works, edited and collected by R.E. Harbord, Canterbury (1969-1972). (referred to below as: Reader's Guide).

16. SOM, p. 212.



are three sea narratives, "The Disturber of Traffic", "A Matter of Fact", and "Judson of the Empire", the first two of which contain elements of fantasy and they are obviously not meant to be regarded as strictly realistic accounts. In many ways they resemble fables because each supports a single generalised statement, in the sense suggested by Bonamy Dobrée in his study of Kipling's work:

Fables are necessarily stories - or they would not please at all; they would merely be tedious sermons. All stories worthy of the name are partly fables, in that they contain an idea - otherwise they are no more than anecdotes. The 'point' of a story is its revelation of, or singling out of, some characteristic of human nature or behaviour; its moral is particular to our daily doings. The 'idea' of a fable goes beyond the local or immediate; its theme is universal. 17

"The Disturber of Traffic" takes up the idea of man's suffering in a hostile environment and "A Matter of Fact" is a fable on the transience of civilisations.

Many Inventions is remarkable for the variety of its subject-matter. There are, among others, three army narratives,<sup>18</sup> a grim slum story in the manner of Arthur Morrison,<sup>19</sup> two humorous stories, and two sea tales. Their form varies from the realistic to the fabulous and they are carefully ordered to produce a climax comprising the two tragedies, "Love o' Women" and "The Record of Badalia Herodsfoot". They are followed by the chanson de geste, "Judson of the Empire", which lowers the tension in preparation for the final, strangely beautiful, supernatural fable, "The Children of the Zodiac". It would appear that, in order to orchestrate this climax, Kipling muted the impact of the earlier narratives which consequently have humorous elements and whose conclusions touch on, but ultimately avoid, the tragic insights stated later. In addition,

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17. Bonamy Dobree, Rudyard Kipling : Realist and Fabulist, Oxford University Press (1967), p. 146.

18. "My Lord the Elephant" (1893); "His Private Honour" (1891); and "The Lost Legion" (1892).

19. "The Record of Badalia Herodsfoot" (1890).

as well as the two climactic stories fulfilling the epigraph of the collection:

Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.

Kipling made an attempt to pick out this theme in other stories.

#### IV

"The Disturber of Traffic" is the first story in the collection and it serves as an ironically literal interpretation of the epigraph. It is narrated by the keeper of the St Cecilia lighthouse, Fenwick, to a writer-figure (who introduces the story) as they sit one night with the light revolving above their heads and the sounds of ships's foghorns in the English Channel clearly audible. The presence of the dramatised narrators recalls Stevenson's work, and "The Disturber of Traffic" employs this device to aid the creation of a serious theme. In general, however, although Kipling habitually employs dramatised narrators in his sea fiction, he is not always quick to exploit them to the full extent and appears content to restrict himself to using them for the creation of atmosphere and a sense of actuality.

Fenwick's tale concerns Dowse, the keeper of a lighthouse in the Flores Straits, who suffers a mental breakdown. As a result he tries to prevent ships passing through the straits by placing buoys between the lighthouse and the opposite shore. He is eventually brought home to England where Fenwick finds him being exhibited by the Salvation Army as a reformed sinner:

"I found him up at Fratton one day, in a red jersey, a-praying before the Salvation Army, which had produced him in their papers as a Reformed Pirate. They knew from his mouth that he had committed evil on the deep waters . . . . He says: 'Fenwick, I'm a-saving of my soul; for I do believe<sup>that</sup> I have killed more men in the Flores Strait than Trafalgar'." 20



He has, of course, killed nobody but his conception of personal sin and his meticulous construction of the wreck buoys fulfils the letter of the epigraph: "they have sought out many inventions".

The story is partly, at least, a fantasy. The humour is strongest in the description of Dowse's conduct after he has suffered his breakdown: the earnest and ingenious construction of the buoys and his recitation of nursery rhymes to the rescuers.<sup>21</sup> His conduct is prompted by an obsession with the "streaky" water which flows beneath the platform and which Dowse stares at through the gaps between the planks. He begins to dislike the streaks and decides that they are caused by the shipping.<sup>22</sup> At first, he shouts at the ships to turn round and go another way. He is helped in his subsequent plans by Challong, a primitive native of the area.

'Dowse took the trouble to come out with Challong in a little prow that they had, - all bamboos and leakage, - and he lay in the fairway waving a palm branch,<sup>23</sup> so he told me, wondering why and what for he was making this fool of himself. Up come the Two-streak boat, and Dowse shouts: "Don't you come this way again, making my head all streaky! . . . Some one looks over the port bulwarks and shies a banana at Dowse, and that's all.'" 23

It is no surprise to learn that Kipling was in a humorous mood when he wrote the story; his daughter remembers him "laughing so much at the names he found in the Admiralty maps he was consulting".<sup>24</sup>

The humour extends to the narrative situation. Fenwick is a caricature of a retired seaman: he is pernickety and speaks in an archaic and childish language. His manner contrasts with the narrator's who is eager to be accepted as an expert in nautical affairs and a man

21. MI, pp. 11-12 and 20.

22. MI, pp. 9-10.

23. MI, pp. 10-11.

24. Reader's Guide, iii, 1189.



with an inside view of the service. He feels that he achieves this: "and then we spoke as men together".<sup>25</sup> One wonders whether Fenwick is spinning an improbable yarn which he knows will be eagerly accepted as the truth by a gullible landsman.

The narration is humorous but it is not without its serious themes. As J.M.S. Tompkins has noted, the sound of the foghorns in the Channel "Keeps in mind the importance of the service that Dowse's obsession dislocated".<sup>26</sup> It is more difficult, however, to say exactly what the larger ramifications of Dowse's conduct are. The key to this problem may lie in the prefatory poem, "The Prayer of Miriam Cohen",<sup>27</sup> whose imagery suggests stress and conflict: "wrath - sword - toil - vex - shining". It implies that if man sees too closely into the workings of the universe he will go mad. What seems to be at issue is Kipling's own debilitating vision of man's insignificance in a hostile universe:

a horror of desolation, abandonment, and realised  
worthlessness, which is one of the most real of the  
hells in which we are compelled to walk. 28

Fenwick, as narrator, does not appear to be aware of the full extent of the reasons for Dowse's madness (which is really a dramatisation of the consequences of Kipling's vision of the spiritual loneliness of man) and the reader feels the force of Dowse's predicament through Kipling's symbolic environment: the smouldering volcano, the vastness of the sea, and the tides rushing through the narrow channel. Nevertheless it is Fenwick's purblindness which marks him out as the ideal labourer in such an environment. At the beginning of the story he is annoyed when a cargo boat begins to panic in the fog: "'Hark, now, to that little fool

25. MI, p. 5.

26. J.M.S. Tompkins, The Art of Rudyard Kipling, London (1959), pp. 104-105.

27. MI, p. 1. The poem appears in Verse with the addition of two stanzas.

28. "Values in Life" (1907), A Book of Words, p. 20.

calling out 'fore he's hurt'."<sup>29</sup> He is a pragmatic man who meets danger as it comes and is the antithesis of Jim, in Conrad's Lord Jim, whose imagination "creates" an emergency before it occurs.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, after Dowse's return to England, Fenwick largely ignores his unfortunate colleague's lingering trauma and guilty conscience:

'A man that thought he'd seen all the navies of the earth standing round in a ring to watch his foolish false wreck-buoys . . . ain't fit to have a soul, and if he did he couldn't kill a louse with it.' 31

Fenwick may not appreciate the terrors that have driven Dowse mad but he sees rightly that, once sane, his conscience and his memories can do little but hinder his ability to work.

## V

Like "The Disturber of the Traffic", "A Matter of Fact" functions as a modern fable. His theme, similar to that of his poem, "Cities and Thrones and Powers", is the transience of civilisations. In line with his limited resources in the field of nautical realism, he avoids the direct and sustained treatment of nautical matters by making the three main characters journalists on a voyage from Capetown to Southampton on board the Rathmines.

One morning, strange things begin to happen to the vessel; the ship loses steerage way and appears to be running downhill. When the log-line, normally towed astern, overtakes it on the port quarter, the current is shown to be running faster than the ship.<sup>32</sup> The Rathmines is overtaken by three huge waves, the stokehold is flooded, and the crew and the journalists are convinced that their hour has come. In the fog which follows the racing seas, both phenomena apparently caused by a

29. MI, p. 3.

30. See Lord Jim, p. 88.

31. MI, p. 22.

32. MI, p. 166.



volcanic eruption on the sea bed, the ship is narrowly missed by a liner, the Pembroke Castle.<sup>33</sup> When the fog clears two sea-creatures, spewed up from the depths below, are visible to the ship's company. One is mortally wounded and they watch its death throes. The narrator, an English journalist, stresses the manner in which it has been unexpectedly destroyed by a natural disaster.

The sun was clear, there was no wind, and we watched, the whole crew, stokers and all, in wonder and pity, but chiefly pity. The Thing was so helpless, and, save for his mate, so alone. No human eye should have beheld him; it was monstrous and indecent to exhibit him there in trade waters between atlas degrees of latitude. He had been spewed up, mangled and dying, from his rest on the sea-floor, where he might have lived till the Judgement Day . . . . 34

As in many sea stories the revelation of suffering and vulnerability has an impact upon the voyagers which functions as a lesson for shore society.

At the beginning the journalists are self-confident because of their professional acquaintance with sensation and horror. This confidence is severely shaken, first, by the events at sea and, secondly, by their realisation that, although their story is obviously true, they will not be able to "sell" it to a newspaper because the public would not believe it. The sea setting is a metaphorical anticipation of this very situation. At first it suggests their confident and assured manner and, later, the sense of the unreal.

The sea was as smooth as a duck-pond, except for a regular oily swell. As I looked over the side to where it might be following us from, the sun rose in a perfectly clear sky and struck the water with its light so sharply that it seemed as though the sea should clang like a burnished gong. 35

When the log-line, which normally records the ship's speed, overtakes them it is as if to suggest that what is about to happen cannot be plotted or

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33. MI, p. 169.

34. MI, p. 174.

35. MI, p. 166.



recorded in the usual fashion. This "prediction" is ironically fulfilled when they are unable to sell their story and the Englishman decides to write the experience up as fiction.<sup>36</sup>

The next phase, the appearance of the sea-creatures, is accompanied by a gradual lessening of the felt authority of man. The captain is awestruck and the crew and the journalists watch transfixed. The status of man, in what rapidly becomes a microcosm of the human situation, is also diminished by biblical references which recall the power of God, the unknown, and the supernatural.

Then we lifted for ever and ever and ever, till  
I heard Keller saying in my ear, 'The bowels of  
the deep, good Lord!' . . . 37

. . . . .  
Then in one spot <sup>the</sup> ~~the~~ sea bubbled and became like  
the pot of ointment <sup>that</sup> ~~the~~ Bible speaks of. 38

The last reference is singularly appropriate; the Authorised Version runs, "He maketh the deep to boil like a pot:/ He maketh the sea like a pot of ointment".<sup>39</sup> It comes from that part of Job beginning "Canst thou draw out Leviathan with an fish hook",<sup>40</sup> which suggests the impotence of man in the face of God and nature.

When the journalists arrive in England they are made aware that their story is unsaleable: English society is seen as too civilised and well-established to entertain accounts of unknown sea-creatures, and American society has had the sensational and fantastic foisted upon it so often that the story would be a damp squib.<sup>41</sup> If the issues

36. MI, p. 181.

37. MI, p. 168.

38. MI, p. 173.

39. Job, XLI. 31.

40. Job, XLI. 1.

41. MI, p. 178.

were left thus, as a parable on the complacency and short-sightedness of man and beast, the story would be much more effective. It would also fulfil the epigraph: man has constructed such a civilisation as to blind him to the true extent of his humble place in the universe.

'That afternoon I walked him [the American journalist, Keller] abroad and about, over the streets that run between the pavements like channels of grooved and tongued lava, over<sup>th</sup> bridges that are made of enduring stone, through subways floored and sided with yard-thick concrete, between houses that are never rebuilt, and by river-steps hewn, to the eye, from the living rock.' 42

. . . . .  
[The creature] had been spewed up . . . . . where  
he might have lived till the Judgement Day. 43

The English journalist is aware of why his story is unsaleable but there is every indication that he has not been perceptive enough to make the connection between the unexpected vulnerability of the sea-creatures and civilisation. His pride in the stability and sophistication of the English way of life asserts itself in his professional rivalry with Keller. He condescendingly explains to Keller, who had been arrogantly sure of his success in selling the story, that he had been deluded simply because he was an American: "'If you had been seven hundred years older you'd have done what I am going to do'." 44 This over-confidence is exactly what the story assails. The story consequently furnishes another example of Kipling's use of the unreliable narrator. It is a particularly ironic feature of "A Matter of Fact" because the narrator, who prides himself on his superior perception, plans to write up his story in a fictional form, hoping thereby to reveal the "Truth" of the affair. 45 It is obvious from his attitude to Keller that he will tell much less than the truth.

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42. MI, p. 180.

43. MI, p. 174.

44. MI, p. 181.

45. MI, p. 181.



It is not only their use of the dramatised narrator which makes "The Disturber of Traffic" and "A Matter of Fact" a natural pair within the body of Kipling's sea fiction. They are vividly and poetically rendered in a fashion which reinforces their serious "message" and marks them out as stories sharing romance elements and techniques. Indeed they are also similar in that they hardly strike the reader as particularly nautical, and it is this which stamps them out as sea stories written by a man with a limited knowledge of ships and sailors. They illustrate how a generalised description of nautical life - a coastal landscape or a voyage - can be used to create a symbolic setting. In addition both narratives show how a writer, free of the burden of providing copious amounts of nautical detail, and liberated from the demands of a strict adherence to "actuality", is in a position to develop his ideas with greater freedom. Nevertheless Kipling was not deaf to the call of realistic detail and the following sections of this chapter investigate both his attitude (in the early 1890's) to realism of this type and the manner in which the sea fables of Many Inventions employ his limited nautical knowledge.

## V

Writing about Treasure Island in his letters, Stevenson bewailed his lack of nautical knowledge and reminded Henley of the attempt he had made to find a seaman who could help him with the nautical chapters.<sup>46</sup> It is possible to infer a similar state of mind at work in Many Inventions. The fifth story in the collection is "The Finest Story in the World" (1891). It records the attempt of an author to draw from a young clerk, who can remember past lives that he lived as a galley slave, as much detail about Norse, Greek, and Roman nautical affairs as the unwilling young man will allow. There is a neat contrast set up between the

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46. See above pp. 61-62.



author, desperate for genuine historical fact, and the clerk, who wants to write trite, romantic verse. The author, hoping to stimulate the clerk's memories, prompts him to read Longfellow's translations of Icelandic sea tales.<sup>47</sup> He cross-checks the accuracy of the accounts he does receive by asking him what it was like to be in a sinking galley as the water topped the bulwarks.

A man of my acquaintance had once gone down with a leaking ship in a still sea, and had seen the water-level pause for an instant ere it fell on the deck.

'It looked <sup>just</sup> like a banjo-string drawn tight, and it seemed to stay there for years,' said Charlie. 48

The story reveals two things about Kipling at this time: it betrays, through the author's frustrating battle to keep the clerk's mind on the job, a sense of frustration as how to reach the facts required to write realistic sea fiction; and it reveals a desire to get as close as possible to factual accuracy; it is the finest story because it records factual evidence. There is further material on this point in Something of Myself.

Take nothing for granted if you can check it. Even though that seem waste-work, and has nothing to do with the essentials of things, it encourages the Daemon. There are always men who by trade or calling know the fact or <sup>the</sup> inference you put forth. If you are wrong by a hair in this, they argue: 'False in one thing, false in all'. Having sinned, I know. 49

His subsequent association with the sea story is a record of his attempt to preserve the standards of realism laid down in this passage.

## VI

Realism of the sort Kipling was demanding of himself requires research, and there is some evidence of this in what is known of the

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47. MI, pp. 108-109.

48. MI, p. 111.

49. SOM, p. 218.

writing of "The Disturber of Traffic". Carrington suggests that it was inspired by a visit Kipling made to a lighthouse on the Isle of Wight in July, 1891.<sup>50</sup> This could have suggested the narrative setting where the author-figure sits with Fenwick in the lighthouse. Kipling describes their surroundings in some detail.<sup>51</sup> This would have been a comparatively simple task and, as such, contributes little more than background detail. The author's relationship with Fenwick, however, makes a more general point about the amateur who attempts to learn from the professional.

[Fenwick] fenced cautiously to find out the little that I knew and talked down to my level, till it came out that I had met a captain in the merchant service who had once commanded a ship in which Fenwick's son had served; and further, that I had seen some places that Fenwick had touched at. He began with a dissertation on pilotage in the Hugli. I had been privileged to know a Hugli pilot intimately . . . . Hereupon he ceased to talk down to me, and became so amazingly technical that I was forced to beg him to explain every other sentence. This set him fully at ease; and then we spoke as men together, each too interested to think of anything except the subject in hand. 52

The passage captures the self-confidence of the expert and the need for the amateur to meet him on his own ground. This demands quick thinking and the ability to bluff; the problem is, of course, that the expert might be exaggerating or spinning a yarn, and the amateur has little chance of distinguishing fact from fiction. Finally we might note that the author-figure holds an exaggerated respect for the expert:

"I had been privileged to know . . . amazingly technical."<sup>53</sup>

The story's narrative framework is conditioned by Kipling's knowledge that he is an amateur. In fact he obviously feels that he must convince the reader that it is authentic in what detail it does contain and, to this end, the journalist is set up as a man "in the know" - he

50. Carrington, Rudyard Kipling, p. 184.

51. MI, pp. 2-3.

52. MI, pp. 4-5. Like the narrator, Kipling knew something about the Hugli pilot-service (see Carrington, Rudyard Kipling, p. 111). See also "An Unqualified Pilot".

53. MI, p. 5.



is actually in a lighthouse, something achieved only by contacts inside the service.<sup>54</sup> More importantly, the actual narrator of Dowse's tale is Fenwick, the lighthouse-keeper. Nevertheless the journalist is putty in Fenwick's hands and consequently the narrative situation anticipates the later sea stories. Pyecroft and McPhee are active narrators, firmly in charge of the author-figure, who is frequently puzzled and bemused as he is towed through a sequence of events he often misunderstands. There are, however, differences in the manner in which the expert is presented. Kipling's later seamen experts are delineated as such not by their surroundings - as Fenwick is - but by their jargon, technical expertise, and their inside knowledge of their profession. Fenwick's tale does not grow from the lighthouse-service and its technology and traditions, but from a writer's appreciation of the symbolic possibilities of a remote setting.

It is known that Kipling used an Admiralty chart to prepare his tale<sup>55</sup> and, thanks to an impromptu piece of checking, it is possible to see the extent of his fabrication. In February, 1939, R.G. Collingwood sailed through the Flores Straits. He wrote to the Times Literary Supplement describing the location.

The Sunda Islands form a discontinuous barrier separating the Indian Ocean from the Pacific; and every one of the numerous gaps between them carries a strong current, by which the tidal levels of those two oceans are adjusted. The most violent of all these currents is that which traverses Flores Strait, a bottle-neck only 300 metres wide at its northern end . . . . 56

Kipling indicates his reliance on the charts by correctly stating the speed of the current but Collingwood's observations mark the extent to

54. MI, p. 1.

55. Reader's Guide, iii, 1189.

56. R.G. Collingwood, "Kipling and the Flores Straits", Times Literary Supplement, 11 March 1939, p. 149 (referred to below as: Collingwood, "Flores Straits").



which Kipling used his imagination (he had never visited the area) to build the setting of his story. The current - crucially "streaky" in the story - was not at all "streaky" but,

flows in eddies and whorls and uprushes due to the unevenness of the coral rock composing the bottom and sides. The surface of the water looks like a diagram of cosmic vortices in an old edition of Descartes's "Principia": just the sort of pattern which Kipling's light-keeper always longed to see by way of change. 57

Another central detail, the screw-pile light, was also invented; in fact there was no such light in the Flores Strait "and never has been".<sup>58</sup>

The only significance of Kipling's reliance upon the chart for the minor details of his story is that it reveals a desire to use an actual location, as though he were missing the background, atmosphere, and way of life he had known so well in India and employed so successfully. Edmund Gosse, for example, advised him in 1891 to "Go back to the far East . . . Disappear!, another Waring and come back in ten years' time with a fresh and still more admirable budget of precious loot out of Wonderland!"<sup>59</sup> It often seems that Kipling's maritime researches were an attempt to provide just such "loot". Like Stevenson and Conrad he needed the raw material with which to nourish his imagination.

## VII

As with all Kipling's Royal Navy stories, we know substantially more of the means by which he gathered his material for "Judson and the Empire" (1893). It apparently grew from his visit to the British Naval base at Simonstown, South Africa, in September 1891, and his friendship

57. Collingwood, "Flores Straits", p. 149.

58. Collingwood, "Flores Straits", p. 149.

59. Edmund Gosse "Rudyard Kipling", in R.L. Green, ed., Kipling: The Critical Heritage, London (1971), p. 124. The article first appeared in the Century Magazine, xlii (1891); 901-910.

with Captain Bayly R.N.<sup>60</sup> The bare details of the plot, set on the coast of Africa, appear to have come from listening to the yarns of Naval officers.<sup>61</sup> The tale itself is to be differentiated from the later Royal Navy narratives because it is separated from them by a decade and is dominated by an officer; the others, up to 1914, involve, as their major character, Petty Officer Pyecroft. In addition, although there is some institutional detail (e.g., Kipling describes the officers' mess and some of the antics of its younger members)<sup>62</sup> the story is not institutional fiction in the manner of the Pyecroft stories.

This is the only sea story before The Day's Work that uses the professional knowledge of a seaman - in this case a Naval officer - as essential background detail and the basis of a plot. It relates a stroke of gunboat-diplomacy, founded upon a neat use of Naval tactics, conducted against the Portuguese empire in Africa. A "twin-screw shallow-draft gunboat . . . designed for the defence of rivers"<sup>63</sup> is sent up a river in Portuguese African territory to relieve the men of a British company, besieged in their compound by the troops of a local governor. The diplomacy consists of relieving the Britons whilst departing on the best of terms with the Portuguese gunboat which they have to immobilise in the course of the action.

The important section is the episode on which the whole story pivots: Judson's defeat of the Portuguese gunboat<sup>64</sup> - a more powerful craft than his own - which enables him to travel up-river and relieve

60. Carrington, Rudyard Kipling, p. 186.

61. There have been various guesses at the identity of Judson. The Reader's Guide concludes that he is a composite portrait (Reader's Guide, iii, 1260-1261). The matter is discussed in Reader's Guide, iii, 1259-1261 and Carrington, Rudyard Kipling, p. 186.

62. MI, p. 334.

63. MI, p. 330.

64. MI, pp. 337-340.



the compound. His tactics are simple but effective. He removes a buoy from a shoal and waits for the foreign gunboat to appear. It sees him and is lured over the shoal, which Judson's craft can negotiate because of its shallow draft; the Portuguese gunboat is consequently stranded.

"Judson and the Empire" is something of an advance upon the early sea stories because of its use of nautical detail; but, in other respects, it is less satisfying. It lacks the serious themes of the fables and it does not contain the social and psychological realism of either Kipling's Army stories or of a number of the later sea stories: Judson is a rather idealised portrait of a Naval officer cast in stereotyped terms. This would be relatively unimportant were it not evidence of Kipling's tendency to rely upon nautical detail for its own sake. Later, he wrote about his researches for Captains Courageous: "I revelled in profligate abundance of detail - not necessarily for publication but for joy of it."<sup>65</sup> Unfortunately he was not always as concerned over the need to include factual detail supported by psychological and social realism. "Judson of the Empire" and the other stories which err on this point have a limited appeal and indeed relevance. The men who knew or are acquainted with Judson's Navy - Naval historians or enthusiasts - enjoy it as a celebration of a type of officer and a fast disappearing world, but the reader looking for literature with a deeper purpose is likely to be disappointed: the story is little more than an entertainment.

Many Inventions includes one more story, "Brugglesmith" (1891), which draws marginally upon maritime material. The narrative is set in London and begins on a ship (Breslau) moored in the Thames. The narrator leaves after dining with the chief engineer McPhee, a man who appears in the later story "Bread Upon the Waters" (1895). It is

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65. SOM, p. 130.



possible that Kipling did maintain such a friendship<sup>66</sup> which helped him to acquire the new knowledge of ships and sailors and which is reflected in the next collection of stories The Day's Work. Certainly Kipling appears to become progressively more interested in maritime matters during the 1890's.<sup>67</sup>

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66. In a letter to KJ, XXV, No. 126 (1958), p. 25, Carrington suggests that Kipling "must have made acquaintance with some ships' engineers in his London period".

67. J.I.M. Stewart, Rudyard Kipling, London (1966), p. 98, refers to a letter (for which no exact reference is given) "written in 1895" which "declares uncompromisingly that 'marine engines and such like' will probably be /Kipling's/ next concern in fiction".

## CHAPTER TWO : The Day's Work

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### I

Between 1894 and 1896 Kipling published a number of stories and poems based upon the world of the Merchant Service. He showed a preference for narratives involving ships' engineers and the machinations of owners. It is not possible to say, at the moment, exactly when these stories were written but this would presumably have been after the publication of Many Inventions. The three sea stories, "Bread Upon the Waters", "The Devil and the Deep Sea", and "The Ship that found Herself", later published in The Day's Work (1898),<sup>1</sup> first appeared in the Christmas (1895) numbers of magazines.<sup>2</sup> The three dramatic monologues were collected in The Seven Seas (1896) bearing dates which presumably refer to when they were written: "McAndrew's Hymn" (1893); "Mulholland's Contract" (1894); and "The Mary Gloster" (1894). The dates and their common subject-matter would seem to imply that these particular stories

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1. It is possible that Kipling entitled the collection The Day's Work because it was a nautical term meaning "The observations and calculations by which a vessel's position was ascertained at least a day . . ." (Parkinson, Portsmouth Point, p. 140). It provides a suggestion of man and his work under assessment. The phrase "day's work" also appears in I Chronicles, xvi, 37.
  2. "Bread Upon the Waters" and "The Devil and the Deep Sea" appeared in the Graphic (London) Christmas Number, 1895. "The Ship that Found Herself" in the Idler (London) December, 1895.



and poems were all completed between 1893 and 1895; it appears a fairly safe conjecture that "McAndrew's Hymn" was the first of the batch to be written.<sup>3</sup> During this period Kipling was living at Vermont and the stories would have been completed after his voyages of the years 1889 to 1892 when he would have come into daily contact with engineers, sailors, and other representatives of the nautical world.

The high standard of maritime knowledge that he displays in these works demands an explanation of how he came by his material. Certainly, he knew enough about marine engines to describe the rebuilding of a pair, in "The Devil and the Deep Sea"; "McAndrew's Hymn" is embellished with references to drinking-houses, brothels, and gambling-dens known to sailors of the 1890's;<sup>4</sup> and "The Mary Gloster" and "Bread Upon the Waters" display a close acquaintance with the world of owners and the big business associated with shipping and shipbuilding. Unfortunately, although the technical accuracy of the stories has been assessed, little is known of the exact sources of Kipling's material. Compared to our knowledge of Conrad's sources the state of similar research in Kipling's life and work is in its infancy.

I have already referred to the implications of the background world of "Brugglesmith" but the only firm information about Kipling's other sources involves "McAndrew's Hymn"; nevertheless the subject-matter is sufficiently close to the prose work to justify a summary of the relevant information. The consensus seems to be that the engineers - McPhee, McAndrew, and Wardrop - Kipling portrays, and the events he refers to are composites of people, stories and events he

3. For the writing of "McAndrew's Hymn", see "News and Notes" KJ, XXX, No. 145 (1963), 2.

4. See Ralph Durand, A Handbook to the Poetry of Rudyard Kipling, London (1914), p. 91.

encountered during his travels and early years in London.<sup>5</sup> It is possible, however, that the run McAndrew describes in the monologue is "the voyage [Kipling] made in the old "Doric" of the White Star Line from Durban to Hobart and Melbourne in October, 1891."<sup>6</sup> T.E. Elwell, who has written a number of articles on Kipling's sea stories, points out that the original text in Scribner's Magazine was accompanied by an extract from a "Private Letter".<sup>7</sup> Its authorship was not stated but Elwell maintains that it "was obviously Kipling's own". The letter reads:

and the night we got in, sat up from twelve to four  
with the Chief Engineer, who could not sleep either  
. . . said that the engines made him feel quite  
poetical at times, and told me things about his  
past life. He seems a pious old bird; but I wish  
I had known him earlier in the voyage. 8

Its relevance to the monologue is obvious: McAndrew is very religious and most "poetical" in his feeling for the engines.<sup>9</sup> Elwell's acceptance of the letter as genuine may, however, be premature. Kipling might have written it purely as a device to convince the reader of the veracity of the engineering content; alternatively, he may have wished to provide a framework which would aid the reader's acclimatisation to the dramatic monologue form - within the poem one learns by implication only that the speaker is an engineer. Nevertheless, the idea of a shipboard conversation with a professionally qualified man is a plausible scenario and fits in with the nature of Kipling's travels.

5. See T.E. Elwell's letter, "'McAndrew's Hymn'", KJ. XXIV, No. 124 (1957), 17; and C.E. Carrington's letter "'McAndrew's Hymn'", KJ XXV, No. 126 (1958), 25 (referred to below as: Elwell, "McAndrew's Hymn"; and Carrington, "McAndrew's Hymn").

6. Carrington, "McAndrew's Hymn", p. 25.

7. Elwell, "McAndrew's Hymn", p. 17.

8. Elwell, "McAndrew's Hymn", p. 17.

9. e.g., "Predestination in the stride o' yon connectin'-rod." (Verse, p. 120); and "Lord, send a man like Robbie Burns to sing the Song o' Steam! / To match wi' Scotia's noblest speech yon orchestra sublime" (Verse, p. 126).



The identity of McAndrew, or at least the source for the engineering knowledge, was raised once again in the Kipling Journal. A ship's engineer claimed to have given Kipling the necessary technical information in a series of long conversations on a voyage from the Cape to England.<sup>10</sup> The claim, which was made not by the engineer but by an acquaintance of his, was unfortunately incorrect as to dates, and even the route did not tally with Kipling's movements in these years. Once again, however, Kipling is portrayed as using shipboard friendships to gather information.<sup>11</sup> Finally, it should be mentioned that there were books available which Kipling could have used for research and the checking of material gathered in conversation.

## II

Of the three sea stories, "The Devil and the Deep Sea" and "Bread Upon the Waters" form a pair - Kipling published them in the same number of the Graphic and they are more serious than "The Ship that Found Herself". The last is closely related to the sea fables of Many Inventions although, unlike them, it is a supernatural story. It describes, in the anthropomorphic mode, the running-in of a new machine, in this case the cargo ship, Dimbula. It illustrates Kipling's love of machinery and his

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10. KJ, XXX, No. 145 (1963), 2.

11. There is a revealing entry on this subject in The Journal of Arnold Bennett, New York (1933) p. 310 which refers to Kipling's travels during the early years of the twentieth century and which paints a less than favourable picture of his methods.

I was responding to Pauline Smith's curiosity about the personalities of authors when Mrs S. began to talk about K. She said he was greatly disliked in South Africa. Regarded as conceited and unapproachable. The officers of the Union Castle ships dreaded him, and prayed not to find themselves on the same ship as him. It seems that on one ship he had got all the information possible out of the officers, and had then, at the end of the voyage, reported them at headquarters for flirting with the passengers - all except the chief engineer, an old Scotchman with whom he had been friendly. With this exception they were all called up to headquarters and reprimanded, and now they would have nothing to do with passengers.



equally strong fondness for demonstrating his technical knowledge. His strategy is simple; he gives each major part of the Dimbula a voice. At first, as it is a maiden voyage, the parts complain and work against each other:

'Ease off! Ease off, there!' roared the garboard-strake. 'I want one-eighth of an inch fair play. D'you hear me, you rivets!' . . .

'Ease off! grunted the deck-beams, as the Dimbula rolled fearfully. 'You've cramped our knees into the stringers, and we can't move. Ease off, you flat-headed little nuisances.' 12

Eventually, once the ship has been run-in, the parts speak with one voice. The whole functions as a celebration of the virtues of teamwork.

The story retains, even today, some of the novelty it had in the 1890's. It was probably quite difficult to research and, although Kipling made a number of mistakes in various nautical matters, it has been judged to be fairly accurate.<sup>13</sup> Such displays of his technical knowledge are present throughout this group of stories and poems. "McAndrew's Hymn" uses the names and functions of engine parts as imagery, and Anthony Gloster, principal character in "The Mary Gloster", is drawn as a man who has helped to exploit, commercially, advances in the design and construction of ships and marine-engines. "The Devil and the Deep Sea", however, overshadows, from a technical point of view, all the others. Kipling set himself a demanding challenge, to describe the rebuilding of a set of marine-engines. The result is not without technical inaccuracy. The Reader's Guide consulted a qualified marine engineer who concluded that it was,

' . . . technically accurate as to the description of the propelling machinery and equipment which would

12. The Day's Work, p. 90 (referred to below as: DW).

13. Reader's Guide, iii, 1354-1361. Henry James, however, was not impressed: "he has come down steadily from the simple in subject to the more simple - from the Anglo-Indians to the natives, from the natives to the Tommies, from the Tommies to the quadrupeds, and from the quadrupeds to the fish, and from the fish to the screws." Unpublished letter quoted in Carrington, Rudyard Kipling, pp.344-345.

be fitted in a ship with compound engines of vintage 1850-1870." 14

On the other hand, the repairs Kipling describes, "would be technically impossible with the primitive facilities available".<sup>15</sup> What is surprising to the layman is that the story contains sufficient detail to warrant an investigation and to enable such a judgement to be made.

### III

"The Devil and the Deep Sea" involves a ship, the Haliotis, which is caught poaching the pearlbeds of a foreign power. The story has a straightforward yarn structure: "But an end came to the Haliotis's tradings and she perished in this manner".<sup>16</sup> The plot opens as she is intercepted somewhere in a remote "semi-inland sea"<sup>17</sup> (the location of the story is entirely fictional, in contrast to "The Disturber of Traffic") by the unexpected appearance of a fast gunboat. The engine-room is wrecked by a warning shell and the crew arrested. They are towed into a port and sentenced to hard labour but, eventually, they are taken inland to fight as pressed soldiers. Later, a fuss is made in the English press and the men are imprisoned in the Haliotis, pending trial. Under the direction of Mr Wardrop, the chief engineer, they repair the ship's engines and escape from captivity; pursued by a gunboat. The ship is deliberately sunk by her crew across the threshold of a harbour; a few months later,

there were a few lines in an English newspaper to the effect that some gunboat . . . had broken her back at the mouth of some far-away harbour by running at full speed into a sunken wreck. 18

The Haliotis has gained her revenge.

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14. See Reader's Guide, iii, 1369.

15. Reader's Guide, iii, 1369.

16. DW, p. 150.

17. DW, p. 151.

18. DW, p. 180.



The first thing that is noticeable about the story is the confidence with which Kipling allows technical detail and descriptions of shipping practice to take pride of place and inform not only the plot but its serious theme as well. He carefully creates the impression that he is an expert on nautical matters. The epigraph, for example, is drawn from a series of Admiralty publications.<sup>19</sup> It is followed by two sides of closely-packed detail on the history of the Haliotis; it is detail which cannot fail to impress the reader with the author's inside knowledge of the shipping world. The fact that the majority of the dealings described are shady and illegal only reinforces this impression. After a short interval, in which the arrest of the crew and the impounding of the Haliotis is described, Kipling renders a detailed account of the damage done by the gunboat's shell.

What follows is worth consideration. The forward engine had no more work to do. Its released piston-rod, therefore, drove up fiercely, with nothing to check it, and started most of the nuts of the cylinder-cover. It came down again, the full weight of <sup>the</sup> steam behind it, and the foot of the disconnected connecting-rod . . . flung out to the right and struck the starboard, or right-hand, cast-iron supporting-column of the forward engine, cracking it clean through about six inches above the base  
 . . . . . 20

This is followed by a description of how Mr Wardrop carefully dismantles some of the essential engine components and hides them in the double bottom of the Haliotis.<sup>21</sup>

"The Devil and the Deep Sea" is an impressive story because of the skill with which Kipling uses his technical knowledge to create an exciting plot and to provide a basis for serious themes. It is also very well planned. The early wrecking of the engines must be compatible

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19. See Reader's Guide, iii, 1370.

20. DW, p. 152.

21. DW, p. 158.



with their later repair, and Wardrop's hiding of the components is linked both with the dishonesty of the foreign officials, who would steal them, and the epigraph which describes the difficulties of obtaining spare parts in foreign ports. More importantly, the technical descriptions play a central role in the more serious aspects of the story. The narrative is essentially an investigation of the emotional relationships that bind a group of men together. They are united not only by their professional ties but by their feeling for the ship which is really an extension of their own skill and ingenuity. In the final analysis this complex of bonds is seen to be of greater value than adherence to any conventional code of morals.

After their spell as soldiers in the jungles of the interior, the men are brought back to the port, where, from the governor's verandah, they view the Haliotis in the harbour below. They lack, at this point, any drive or energy - or even a collective desire for revenge. Brought before the governor they "existed beautifully but simply" in his verandah and, "when he came out they sang at him".

When you have lost seventy thousand pounds' worth of pearls, your pay, your ship, and all your clothes, and have lived in bondage for eight months beyond the faintest pretences of civilisation, you know what true independence means, for you become the happiest of created things - natural man. 22

Kipling's term, "natural man", implies happiness devoid of responsibility, labour, and self-imposed hardship. Naturally this state of affairs lasts only as long as the Haliotis is unseen; as soon as it is a man "bellow/s/ with joy" and his companions crowd to the verandah rail, "kicking aside the long cane chairs".<sup>23</sup> Once on board the men see that it has been stripped of all its fittings; at first they are dispirited:

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22. DW, p. 163.

23. DW, p. 163.

"They ran their fingers hopelessly into the cracks of the starboard supporting-column . . . ." <sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, once they have begun on the seemingly hopeless task of repairing the engines, the machinery itself gives a sign of encouragement. The second engineer strikes recklessly at an engine part,

and a greasy, grey flake of metal flew from under the imprisoned foot of the connecting-rod, while the rod itself fell away slowly, and brought up with a thunderous clang somewhere in the dark of the crank-pit. 25

It is a sign of encouragement because it clearly shows that the engines are not seized-up. Once engaged upon the task of repair the men begin to recover their self-respect.

The relationship between man and machine is explored in the diction and imagery of the story. When the engine-room is wrecked and the ship sequestered, Mr Wardrop sets to work to ensure that no one tampers with what is left of the engines, and that no possibility can be expected that they may be repaired. His labours make the engine-room appear more of a wreck than it actually is. He is described and his work in terms far removed from the mundane:

Mr Wardrop - an artist in his profession - turned to and composed a work terrible and forbidding. His background was the dark-grained sides of the engine-room; his material the metals of power and strength . . . . 26

The diction suggests not only the imagination of the romantic artist but the mysteries of a religious cult: "terrible - forbidding - dark-grained". This impression is reinforced when he conceals the components in the bowels of the ship, as though they were sacred treasures to be hidden from pagans. The grammar adds to the effect: the unusual, but

24. DW, p. 169.

25. DW, p. 169.

26. DW, p. 157.

unmistakeably religious, combination, "metals of power and strength", implies the sort of power found not in marine engines but in deities. Before he is taken away Mr Wardrop showers ash on the engines in the fashion of a religious devotee. At this point the engine-room is described as a cemetery.<sup>27</sup>

When the men return after their captivity, the religious associations are further strengthened. They bend all their efforts to repairing the engines, and the operation is seen in terms of a mystical experience.

It is curious that no man knows how the rods were straightened . . . . There were fires everywhere . . . and the hammers were never still . . . . They remember, too, that for many years voices gave orders which they obeyed with their bodies, but their minds were abroad on all the seas . . . . They remember an intolerable noise in their burning heads from the walls of the stoke-hole, and they remember being savagely beaten by men whose eyes seemed asleep. 28

When the work is completed "Mr Wardrop would go below from time to time and pat the two rods where they lay, and they heard him singing hymns".<sup>29</sup>

The rebuilding of the engines enables the men to escape but it also represents the bond between man and machine. This bond is obviously more complete in the case of the engineers and the engine-room crew; Mr Wardrop is very proud of his efforts and wishes to preserve the ship to show his fellow engineers. The remainder of the crew, however, have not yet entirely "recovered their self-respect"<sup>30</sup> - they demand revenge and are willing to sacrifice the Haliotis to this end. In a sense it is fitting that the ship should be sacrificed in this way because, although

27. DW, p. 159.

28. DW, p. 174.

29. DW, p. 175.

30. DW, p. 177.



repaired, she is a deformed and "gibberin"<sup>31</sup> hulk - the repairs have been makeshift and crude.

[the engines] gave her nearly three knots an hour, and what better could men ask? But if she had been forlorn before, this new purchase made her horrible to see. Imagine a respectable charwoman in the tights of a ballet-dancer rolling drunk along the streets, and you will come to some faint notion of the appearance of that nine-hundred-ton well-decked once schooner-rigged cargo-boat as she staggered under her new help, shouting and raving across the deep. 32

"The Devil and the Deep Sea" recalls the heroic code of the Anglo-Saxons in its celebration of revenge, physical toughness, and group loyalty. It pays no lip service to conventional morality: the crew of the ship are guilty of *stealing* pearls; in their haste to escape, they commandeer a native craft, ransack her stores, take her sail, and leave her crew bobbing in the water;<sup>33</sup> and finally they destroy a gun-boat. "Bread Upon the Waters" is a testimony to a more traditional morality. McPhee is willing to sacrifice his career and financial security for his principles.

#### IV

The dramatic monologues, "McAndrew's Hymn" and "The Mary Gloster", are very close to "Bread Upon the Waters": McAndrew, a Scottish engineer, who is the subject of one monologue and is mentioned in the other, is drawn in similar terms to McPhee; and the shipping world which forms the background of "The Mary Gloster" is essentially the same as that part of "Bread Upon the Waters" which deals with the boardroom struggles which so nearly ruin McPhee.

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31. DW, p. 178.

32. DW, p. 180.

33. DW, p. 179.

"McAndrew's Hymn" relates the life story and opinions of a ship's engineer. A large part of his character is revealed through his relationship with his work from which he gains self-respect.<sup>34</sup> Through his adaptation to the developments in steam technology, he has himself undergone development.<sup>35</sup> His religion - he is a staunch Presbyterian - finds its expression in imagery drawn from the engine-room.

Hand,

From coupler-flange to spindle-guide I see Thy O God -  
 Predestination in the stride o' yon connectin'-rod.  
 John Calvin might ha' forged the same - enormous, certain, slow -  
 Ay, wrought it in the furnace-flame - my "Institutio". 36

The core of the poem relates his temptation, as a young man, by the soft life of the east (the same temptations that Conrad describes in Lord Jim)<sup>37</sup> which offers him atheism and a life away from the hard grind of the engine-room.<sup>38</sup> The association between atheism and laziness is typical of the poem. McAndrew's rejection of the temptation<sup>39</sup> effectively formulates a fresh ideal of conduct later to appear in Conrad's fiction. This conduct is informed by an ideal of community service growing from McAndrew's religion but expressed in the language and imagery of the engine-room. His life, like his scientifically constructed engines, is dominated by:

'Law, Orrder, Duty an' Restraint, Obedience, Discipline!'<sup>40</sup>

34. "'I am o' service to my kind'" (Verse, p. 124).

35. McAndrew had invented a better type of "Deeferential Valve-Gear" but he has realised that he had to choose between monetary success and his duty at sea. "'I found that I could not invent an' look to these [his engines] as well'" (Verse, p. 125).

36. Verse, p. 120.

37. Lord Jim, pp. 12-13.

38. The east is represented by sensual imagery: "By night those soft, lasceevious stars . . . ." (Verse, p. 122). The Christian God by imagery drawn from the engine-room: "' Ye'll not go back to Him again an' kiss His red-hot rod'" (Verse, p. 123).

39. "'An', by Thy Grace, I had the Light to see my duty plain.'" (Verse, p. 123).

40. Verse, p. 126.

This ideal of service makes acceptable the low pay of the engineer: "'No pension, an' the most we'll earn's four hunder pound a year'". More importantly, his code is dominated by an ideal of responsibility and service; a responsibility that demands a professional attitude to the maintenance of his engines, and of service to the lives that God has entrusted him with:

their lives are on my head.

Mine at the last - when all is done it all comes back to me,  
The fault that leaves six thousand ton a log upon the sea. 41

"Bread Upon the Waters" dramatises a conflict between just such a code and the materialism of a shipping company - a conflict that was hinted at in The Wrecker but not exploited by Stevenson, other than in his large-scale depiction of the evils of materialism.

McAndrew and Sir Anthony Gloster are portrayed against a closely detailed maritime community, and this social and institutional realism - we learn of the society the men move in and the nature of the companies they serve - contributes to the very particular constitution of the poems' texture. This world is built up by references to actual places and technical advances which would have been familiar to a seaman of the time. McAndrew refers to well-known brothels: "'Jane Harrigan's an' Number Nine, the Reddick an' Grant Road'"<sup>42</sup> Gloster recalls inventions which made him prosperous: "'For I bought me a steam-lathe patent, and that was a gold mine too'"<sup>43</sup> and,

'They piddled and piffled with iron. I'd given my orders  
for steel!  
Steel and the first expansions. It paid, I tell you, it paid,'<sup>44</sup>

Gloster speaks from his deathbed and the reader gains only glimpses of his rise to power as a shipping magnate. He is a product of the heroic age

41. Verse, p. 124.

42. Verse, p. 122.

43. Verse, p. 131.

44. Verse, p. 131.



of construction and his life is seen to be ultimately related to the world in which he has made his fortune. As a gambler he has gambled on booms in the industry,<sup>45</sup> and as an unscrupulous, even ruthless, businessman, he has stolen the technical secrets of his dead partner's family.<sup>46</sup> He is the antithesis of the responsible, upright professional and, just as McAndrew is a forerunner of McPhee, Gloster corresponds to Holdock and the unscrupulous businessmen of "Bread Upon the Waters".

V

"Bread Upon the Waters" is a triumph of characterisation. Like the soldier stories, "The Disturber of Traffic", and some of the Pyecroft stories, it uses an author figure who meets and listens to an internal narrator - in this case McPhee. His broad Scots accent becomes, in Kipling's hands, a flexible and vivid medium of expression. The world represented has two main aspects: the hard, poorly paid, and unsophisticated environment of the engine-room; and the devious materialistic boardrooms of the shipping companies. McPhee is no businessman or boardroom diplomat, but, through the narrative, the energy and flux of the commercial world emerges. In addition, just as in the dramatic monologue, it is possible to observe not only McPhee's character but facets of the events and the people he is involved with that have escaped him. The story also penetrates beyond the confines of the boardroom and engine-room to give us a glimpse of the social relations of the wives of shipowners and their professional counterparts.

Although the plot develops out of the professional and business relationships of the nautical world, its bones are the salvage laws which decree that a ship, made helpless at sea by fire, storm, or

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45. "'I knew - I knew what was coming, when we bid on the Byfleet's keel - '" (Verse, p. 131).

46. "'I went through his private papers . . . .'" (Verse, p. 132).

mechanical breakdown, and thereafter abandoned, becomes the property of the salvagers. It is as a result of the favourable operation of these laws that, when the story begins and the narrator calls at McPhee's house, he finds the engineer and his wife in possession of £25,000.<sup>47</sup> McPhee then narrates the story of how he came by his fortune. It is an intricate plot with many twists and turns and the reader has to contend not only with elliptical but crucial references but also with McPhee's Scottish expression; consequently it is necessary to spend some space outlining the plot. The Reader's Guide contains a full explanation of the references to marine technology and law; it also makes clear that the story is remarkably free from technical inaccuracies.<sup>48</sup>

It is helpful to know that there are three main parties involved: McPhee; and the two rival shipping firms, Holdock, Steiner, and Chase, and McNaughton and McRimmon, the latter represented by the old man - "'He was wearin' to eighty'"<sup>49</sup> - McRimmon. The story is as much a celebration of McRimmon's business acumen as of McPhee's professionalism.

McPhee, married but with no children, is drawn in strong lines.

He was never a racing engineer, and took special pride in saying as much before the Liverpool men; but he had a thirty-two years' knowledge of machinery and the humours of ships. One side of his face had been wrecked through the bursting of a water-gauge in the days when men knew less than they do now; and his nose rose grandly out of the wreck, like a club in a public riot. There were cuts and lumps on his head, and he would guide your forefinger through his short iron-gray hair and tell you how he had come by his trademarks. He owned all sorts of certificates of extra competency. 50

This short description marks out the main characteristics of the hero, characteristics which lead directly into the plot. In many ways he is

47. DW, p. 285.

48. Reader's Guide, iii, 1405-1424.

49. DW, p. 290.

50. DW, p. 280.

a type made familiar by popular literature and the cinema:<sup>51</sup> the "iron-gray" hair, denoting a tough, uncompromising, and experienced individual; and the looks of a man with a knowledge of the "man's" world, "A club in a public riot". Straightforward and blunt, with an assertive personality, there is little of the diplomat about him; this latter characteristic makes inevitable the clash between him and the company board. Kipling's method is also in evidence; the reference to the Liverpool men is merely a recognition of the fact that Liverpool was the home port of the crack Atlantic liners, demanding racing engineers. The explanation is unnecessary because the manner of expression makes it evident that the Liverpool engineers were noted for their racing abilities; at the same time the narrative gains atmosphere and authenticity.

McPhee's other qualities, his regard for human life (except in the case of foolhardy sailors)<sup>52</sup> and his professionalism, set the plot rolling by putting him at odds with the board of the company which he serves, Holdock, Steiner and Chase. A reorganisation has led to demands for retrenchment and higher profits;<sup>53</sup> consequently the timings for the company freighters were made shorter (therefore putting the engines under greater stress) and false economies demanded (such as making fewer repairs).<sup>54</sup> McPhee is furious when his own estimates for running repairs are rejected; he predicts a breakdown, is proved correct; and refuses to run the new schedule because of the risk it would entail. Summoned before the board he is fired before he can resign: "'an' they nodded me out o' the Line after twenty years - after twenty years."<sup>55</sup>

51. For a study of the conventions of popular literature, see John G. Cawelti, Adventure, Mystery and Romance : formula stories as art and popular culture, Chicago (1976).

52. DW, p. 281.

53. DW, p. 287.

54. DW, pp. 288-289.

55. DW, p. 289.



The conflict between McPhee and the board is essentially that between the professional, aware of his responsibilities and the weaknesses of machinery, and the entrepreneur, who runs a business for the sake of profit alone. In the events following McPhee's sacking the weaknesses of professional servants are clearly demonstrated. McPhee, for example, can enjoy the luxury of defiance only because he has no children to look out for and enough savings to tide him over temporary unemployment. Bannister, his captain under Holdock and Co., cannot follow his example because he does have children.<sup>56</sup> These issues are made plain in the dry-dock-scene<sup>57</sup> which follows McPhee's dismissal. Holdock and Co.'s big freighter, the Grotkau, is in dry dock with a "red weepin' crack"<sup>58</sup> in her tail-shaft. Bannister, wary of dismissal and unemployment, assures McPhee that it is but "'a superfecial flaw'".<sup>59</sup> The engineer is convinced that the Grotkau will be disabled at sea through the loss of her propeller: "'Man, it was an awful crack'".<sup>60</sup> Steiner is listening - "'Ye know how a dry-dock echoes'"<sup>61</sup> - and the ensuing confrontation is typical of their mutually contrasting natures and abilities: McPhee chasing his ex-employer up the stairs, and Steiner threatening to prosecute him for libel.<sup>62</sup> Bannister is silent.

Subsequent events are ostensibly a triumph for McPhee. Working for a rival shipping firm, McNaughton and McRimmon, his ship, the Kite, follows the Grotkau out of Liverpool and, just as McPhee had predicted,

56. DW, p. 294.

57. DW, pp. 293-295.

58. DW, p. 294.

59. DW, p. 294.

60. DW, p. 294.

61. DW, p. 294.

62. DW, pp. 294-295.

her tail shaft snaps.<sup>63</sup> McPhee, who rather unrealistically (the captain would normally be in charge) dominates the action, uses his knowledge of the salvage laws to gain the maximum financial benefit from the disabled Grotkau's plight. He realises that to tow the Grotkau home with her crew on board will pay a smaller dividend than if the Kite salvages an abandoned ship.<sup>64</sup> The Kite waits until the Grotkau is abandoned before McPhee swims to her with a line and effects the salvage.<sup>65</sup> In the best traditions of the adventure story, the incident is beset with drama. Bell, the master of the Kite, is afraid that another ship will beat them to the post and, when a liner appears and the Grotkau signals for assistance,<sup>66</sup> his fears seem justified. McPhee, however, knows that a liner carrying mails cannot render assistance other than rescuing life.<sup>67</sup> The crew are taken on board and the Kite is left with the salvage.

The real victor of the story, to whom the seamen are little more than puppets, is McRimmon, McPhee's new employer, and the man who had restrained McPhee in the dry dock. This timely action is representative of his place in the story: he creates the conditions under which he can ruin his rivals, Holdock and Co., and McPhee can gain his revenge. It is McRimmon's business genius and his reading of character that prove the most potent forces in the story. McRimmon is notable for personal characteristics which are symbolic of his part in the plot: an old man, he is known as the "Blind Deevil" because he has some sort of nervous debility affecting his eyelids but, as McPhee states, "'forbye he's onythin' but blind, an' no deevil in his deelin's wi' me'";<sup>68</sup> nevertheless,

63. DW, p. 303.

64. DW, p. 303.

65. DW, p. 306.

66. DW, p. 304.

67. DW, pp. 304-305.

68. DW, p. 289.

his genius is not immediately apparent either to the other characters - or, indeed, to the reader.

McRimmon is a great reader of character. He meets McPhee after his dismissal and engages him on an impulse; nevertheless, he is a thorough businessman and pays less than Holdock and Co.<sup>69</sup> The dinner at Radley's restaurant is McRimmon's stroke of genius.<sup>70</sup> He has McPhee and Bell entertain the Grotkau's officers at his own expense. The ploy effectively dissipates any ill feeling between McPhee and his late colleague, Bannister, and establishes a feeling of mutual solidarity between the sailors of the rival firms. McRimmon's men also learn of the widespread disaffection in the firm - "'Now mark ye how false economy ruins business'"<sup>71</sup> - information which later enables McPhee to bank on some "inside" help when the Grotkau is in trouble and the Kite is standing by.

If McPhee and Bell were bemused by McRimmon's generosity in providing a free dinner at Radley's they are even more puzzled when McRimmon lays up his one big freighter for painting and misses a short boom in South American freights.<sup>72</sup> The rival Grotkau, meanwhile, soaks up all the increased business. McRimmon's conduct is masterly; when the Grotkau's tail-shaft snaps she is worth more as salvage. The episode is a justification of his faith in McPhee's professional judgement.

It is remarkable that a complex and subtle plot should be narrated in colloquial speech. In fact the story gains considerably from the forceful language. McPhee's natural use of biblical phrases - "'an' there they sat, the damned deevidend-huntin' ship-chandlers, deaf as

69. DW, p. 290.

70. DW, pp. 296-297.

71. DW, p. 297.

72. DW, p. 298.



the adders o' Scripture'"<sup>73</sup> - strengthens the morally satisfying atmosphere and plot of the tale. McPhee's technical language not only characterises him as a sailor-engineer but, more importantly, demonstrates his professional abilities. The crack in the tail-shaft of the Grotkau performs a related function. Simple to understand, vivid - "'a red weepin' crack'"<sup>74</sup> - it is representative of the rift in Holdock and Co.'s relations with their men and suggestive of criminal negligence. The professional jargon and technical detail are thus not a mere virtuoso performance on Kipling's part but an essential feature of a story rooted in a working environment.

Kipling's insights are consequently those which are valued among a professional and business community.<sup>75</sup> Although the story is unlikely, perhaps overdramatising a mundane world, we can appreciate why McRimmon is a millionaire, and why McPhee, a first-class engineer, is (when the story begins) a poor man. The reader moves and responds in a commercial world in which men speak directly and confidently, assuming on the part of their listeners a working knowledge of a world they know and understand intimately. This may prove difficult for the reader but it was presumably important to Kipling that the world he was depicting should be shown naturally and without excessive explanation. In a significant way he was making a move towards fulfilling an important function: the celebration, through close and natural depiction, of one type of working

73. DW, p. 288.

74. DW, p. 294.

75. C.S. Lewis, "Kipling's World" in Kipling and the Critics, ed., Elliot L. Gilbert, London (1965), pp. 99-117 assesses Kipling's significance as a poet and short-story writer involved in the working-world. He also answers the charge that Kipling "swamp/s/ the human interest in his mass of material and technical detail". He continues: "The detail is there for the sake of a human interest but that human interest is one that no previous writer had done justice to. What Kipling chiefly communicates . . . is the peculiar relation which men who do the same work have to that work and to one another . . . ." (p. 104) (referred to below as: Lewis, "Kipling's World").

life. Through the story Kipling demonstrates the knowledge, skill, principled conduct, and sensitivity - as well as the deceit - extant in such an environment.

"Bread Upon the Waters" is notable for another feature. Most of Kipling's short sea stories use an author-figure alongside a protagonist, usually an accomplished seaman - Dowse, McPhee, and, in the Navy stories, Pyecroft. Kipling does not always exploit this relationship (other than in using the professional-novice situation to highlight the skills of the former), but in "Bread Upon the Waters" he does. As we have seen, McPhee is not the most perceptive actor in the drama: McRimmon is the puppet-master. In fact McPhee's limitations restrict his perception of the events, for, although he is ready to encounter skulduggery from the commercial parties, he is unwilling to countenance the suggestion that a professionally qualified man has been guilty of a grossly dishonest act. His comparative innocence in these affairs is illustrated in his ironic comment to McRimmon on the importance of principle: "'What's her virginity to a lassie?'"<sup>76</sup> McRimmon's is a puzzled reply:

"The warld an' a'", says he. "My God, the vara warld  
an a'! But what ha' you or me to do wi' virginity,  
this late along?"<sup>77</sup>

It is a remark of a man well versed in the inevitability of the corruption of morals: innocence is associated with youth; in McPhee innocence is, by implication, ignorance. McPhee is consequently unable to entertain the idea that an officer flooded the engine-room of the Grotkau, thus enabling the crew to justify abandoning ship and McPhee to salvage her. When McPhee tells the story he glosses over the incident but the narrator is suspicious and questions him as to who was responsible.<sup>78</sup> At the end

76. DW, p. 291.

77. DW, p. 291.

78. DW, pp. 307-308.

of the tale McPhee returns to the point and admits that he had been suspicious of Calder, the ship's engineer, but, because Calder had been angry at the suggestion, he had rejected it as a possibility.<sup>79</sup> McPhee's decision flies in the face of the circumstantial evidence: at Radley's Bannister and Calder had shaken hands on a "bond to be revenged on the Board at any reasonable cost this side o' losing their certificates".<sup>80</sup> There is no hint that they would balk at betraying the code of their profession; indeed they were being unprofessional in not resigning (like McPhee) over the new timings. It is plain, therefore, that McPhee has misread the situation and misjudged McRimmon (whom he absolves from implication in the incident) who had given the dinner at Radley's to prepare the ground for just such a betrayal.

This interest in the sailor who is unaware of the fragility of man's ideals unites Kipling's sea fiction with Conrad's. Both set this theme within institutional sea fiction and express it in the terms of a professional code of conduct and an act of betrayal which strikes at the heart of that code. In choosing to ignore his colleagues' unprofessional conduct McPhee is similar to the French Lieutenant in Lord Jim who will not for one moment believe that Jim's betrayal is anything other than an isolated act of cowardice.<sup>81</sup> Unfortunately, within his sea fiction at least, Kipling was neither to pursue this theme nor the subtle use of narrative structure; to this extent his following sea novel, Captains Courageous, is a disappointment.

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79. DW, p. 315.

80. DW, p. 297.

81. Lord Jim, pp. 147-148.



### CHAPTER THREE : Captains Courageous

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#### I

At first reading, Captains Courageous (1896-7) seems to be a distinct contrast to "Bread Upon the Waters" and "The Devil and the Deep Sea". The last two were stories in which the reader was plunged head-first into the shipping world whereas, in the novel, the reader's passage is eased because the boy-hero, Harvey Cheyne, is himself a complete novice and quite lost in the world of the fishing-schooner, We're Here. Kipling is therefore employing a time-honoured device employed by Melville, in Redburn (1849) and Moby Dick (1851), R.H. Dana in Two Years Before the Mast (1840), and used in the work of many minor novelists, of introducing the reader to a world of which he is probably ignorant by having a character who must learn new skills and routines - a process which enables the reader to adapt; as Harvey learns so does the reader. Most of Harvey's learning is done in Chapter Three where he is taught how to row a dory, is introduced to the lead, shown how to reef a foresail, and manages to land a halibut. Later on, in Chapter Five, he is introduced to the crude navigational skills of the fishermen.

The fundamental contrast, however, lies in Captains Courageous's romance elements. The novel can best be described as a children's

romance in which the unlikely crew of a fishing-schooner, including an idiot and two boys, make the quickest haul of cod off the Grand Banks of Newfoundland in competition with a fleet of fellow-American schooners. The seamen are stereotyped characters and their schooner a friend rather than an inanimate object. The stereotypes are vividly drawn, the sea-scapes are evocative, and the homely, cosy life on board the We're Here - the smells of cooking and paraffin lamps as well as the creaking, gurgling sounds of the sea washing against the hull - come across very strongly. This atmosphere is heightened and has the effect of making parts of the novel very much like a pleasant daydream. Most important it is the songs which give the early parts the air of a fantasy; they are appropriate and often beautiful, and encompass a variety of emotions from convivial happiness, in the shipboard concert,<sup>1</sup> to sadness and melancholy, in the French dirge.<sup>2</sup>

At the beginning the novel is quite clearly identified as a children's romance, or even fantasy, when Harvey falls overboard a liner:

Then a low, gray mother-wave swung out of the fog, tucked Harvey under one arm, so to speak, and pulled him off and away to leeward; the great green closed over him, and he went quietly to sleep. 3

When he comes to he has been picked up by a dory (small boat) from the We're Here. He is a spoilt boy, the over-indulged son of a millionaire, and demands that the schooner captain, Disko Troop, take him home immediately.<sup>4</sup> Disko, who has one aim, reaching the fishing grounds, refuses; Harvey is obstreperous and he is knocked to the deck.<sup>5</sup> As C.A. Bodelsen has commented, his conversion, into a more likeable and

1. Captains Courageous, pp. 96-101 (referred to below as: CC).

2. CC, p. 189.

3. CC, p. 10.

4. CC, p. 21.

5. CC, p. 26.



useful youth, occurs almost immediately.<sup>6</sup> The conversion is not a major theme in the novel; Kipling is interested in the impact of death on a young mind. The theme is modestly presented through incidents which bear more relation to romance than realism.

When Harvey is taken on board the We're Here she is one hand short. Otto, a "Dutch man" (or foreigner), had been lost earlier on the voyage, swept overboard. Harvey is too selfcentred and Disko's reference to the incident too toughminded for the idea of death to make an impact.<sup>7</sup> The early sea-going chapters, characterised by the singing and the boys' relationship, carefully create the impression of a world that is dangerous when men are careless of their skills or their morals. This idea of a scrupulously-just natural world is slightly modified by the seamen's superstition which is the subject of a shipboard conversation in Chapter Four. What clearly emerges is that death is rarely the result of a malicious natural world. It is as though the sea is an instrument of justice; of the men who die, Abishai<sup>8</sup> is a drunkard with a sinister reputation, and the Frenchman a murderer.<sup>9</sup> The wreck of the Jennie Cushman<sup>10</sup> is slightly different: in this case men suffer as the result of criminal neglect.

The first death which affects Harvey is the wreck of Abishai's schooner.<sup>11</sup> The incident has the starkness of a nightmare, and Abishai the appearance of a demon straight from hell, shouting curses and defying God. His schooner sails past the We're Here and is then "pooped"

6. Rudyard Kipling, Captains Courageous, with an Afterword by C.A. Bodelsen, The New American Library of World Literature, Inc., New York (1964), p. 163 (referred to below as: Bodelsen, Captains Courageous).

7. CC, p. 24.

8. CC, p. 110.

9. CC, p. 192.

10. CC, p. 164.

11. CC, pp. 112-115.

(swamped by a following sea) - a result of his reckless sailing. It is a clear case of the justice of life at sea and serves to isolate Harvey from the full horror of the incident. Salters reinforces this idea in his mind:

'You think on that fer a spell, young feller. That was liquor.' 12

Harvey is also protected by his own immaturity:

Harvey could not realise that he had seen death in the open waters, but he felt very sick. 13

The next episode involving death also involves the loss of a schooner, the Jennie Cushman. The incident reaches a little closer into Harvey's consciousness because, at the beginning of the novel, when he was on board the liner, he had said about a fishing-schooner: "'Say, wouldn't it be great if we ran down one?'"<sup>14</sup> This is what happens to the Jennie Cushman. The We're Here picks up her skipper, Jason Olley, who believes that his son has been drowned. At this moment Penn, a preacher, who has suffered amnesia and become deranged after a flood disaster in which he lost his family,<sup>15</sup> regains his senses. He reassumes the role of preacher and minister and takes charge of the griefstricken father:

. . . and he said in a strong voice: 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord! I was - I am a minister of the Gospel. 16

His sudden assumption of this role is very powerful but it is powerful in a way characteristic of the romance: the incident is highly coloured and dramatically striking. Jason Olley rolls to the bulwarks, as though

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12. CC, p. 116.

13. CC, p. 116.

14. CC, p. 5.

15. CC, pp. 66-69.

16. CC, p. 165.

he were a character in an opera and, singing a snatch from a hymn,<sup>17</sup> we are reminded of a world where good men suffer at the hands of the "cruel sea". It is but a moment, however, and the skipper's son is miraculously found by another fishing-schooner; nevertheless, this time, death, as a real presence in the world, has moved closer to Harvey.

When the We're Here arrives on the Grand Banks there is a spate of rough seas and a Frenchman is killed on board a schooner when a wave breaks his back over the bowsprit. At first Harvey is once again isolated:

Harvey saw the funeral through Disko's spy-glass.  
It was only an oblong bundle slid overside. 18

Events, however, continue to bring the full impact of death upon his consciousness. The next day there is an auction of the dead man's belongings and Dan and Harvey row over to the schooner. Dan, who is contemptuous of superstition, buys a knife cheaply because the French crew will not purchase a dead man's belongings.<sup>19</sup> He gives it to Harvey as a present. His friend is pleased with the gift and is careless of the fact that the knife, as it was rumoured, had been used to kill a man. Soon after the sale the boys are fishing and they hook the Frenchman's body and heave it unwittingly to the surface:

The hook had caught him under the right arm-pit,  
and he swayed, erect and horrible, head and  
shoulders above water. His arms were tied to  
his side, and - he had no face. 20

The incident is significant because it nullifies the earlier notion that death was somehow controllable. This is achieved by making superstitious fear a very real force: death consequently becomes more of a mystery and therefore more of a threat.

17. CC, p. 166.

18. CC, p. 189.

19. CC, p. 191.

20. CC, p. 193.



The Memorial Day Service episode<sup>21</sup> is the climax of the novel in which death in all its starkness is fully brought home to Harvey. The episode is a sustained, and indeed, powerful treatment of the theme of death at sea. On this occasion the format consists of singing, speeches, collections, and, finally, the reading out of the names of those lost at sea in the preceding year. The songs reflect the contrast between man's religious intuitions and his questioning of the reason why suffering should exist. When the names are read out, the widows, who are present through custom, are visibly griefstricken.

27th September - Orvin Dollard, 30, married,  
drowned in dory off Eastern Point.

That shot went home, for one of the widows  
flinched where she sat, clasping and unclasping  
her hands. 22

When Harvey's predecessor's name is read out he is made suddenly aware of the proximity of death:

10th May - Schooner We're Here /the blood  
tingled all over him/. Otto Svendson, 20, single,  
City, lost overboard. 23

Harvey faints and is tended by his mother, a neurotic woman who is indignant that the ceremony should take place at all. On the other hand, Dan gives him some sound advice: "'Don't scrowge, Harve'".<sup>24</sup> It is a fishing metaphor: to "scrowge" is to fish with five or six hooks, a practice frowned upon by the Grand Banks men as it gives an unfair advantage.<sup>25</sup> Dan is advising Harvey not to soak up someone else's grief. The other advice Harvey is offered is represented in Disko's attitude to death. When he had told Harvey of Otto's death

21. CC, pp. 267-277.

22. CC, p. 274.

23. CC, pp. 275-276.

24. CC, p. 276.

25. See CC, pp. 179 and 181.

he had merely said:

Otto he went overboard on Le Have. I mistrust  
he lost his grip in a gale we f'und there. Anyways  
he never come back to deny it. 26

This manly attitude, which is one of the main themes of The Nigger of the "Narcissus", is echoed by the narrator who comments, when Mrs Cheyne asks if Harvey is "better, darling",

That made Harvey very properly ashamed. 27

The theme of death is modestly revealed and adapted to the needs of boys' romance; nevertheless, it clearly demonstrates that Kipling, a writer who had little direct experience of life and work in a dangerous occupation, had observed the attitude of the fishermen correctly. The proof is in Conrad's The Nigger of the "Narcissus" where Conrad's sea experiences inform a novel which insists that the only possible attitude in a dangerous environment is one of a toughminded disregard for the unpleasant facts of injury and death.

## II

Sea fiction is inevitably concerned with man's relationship to his work although each writer explores this theme to a greater or lesser degree. The Wrecker, for example, concentrates less on the psychology of man at work than on the commercial aspects of maritime life (which form the basis of its plot). It is true, however, that Stevenson used his new-found knowledge of seamanship in a limited way to construct a situation in which Nares's nautical expertise could help solve the mystery of the Flying Scud's disappearance.<sup>28</sup> Kipling's "Bread Upon the Waters" and "The Devil and the Deep Sea" move more directly into the relationship of man and work and their plots employ Kipling's research into the maritime life of his time with the same flair as Stevenson.

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26. CC, p. 24.

27. CC, p. 277.

28. See above, pp. 93-94.

C.A. Bodelsen, in an afterword to his edition of Captains Courageous, sees the novel's main theme as work:

Instead of the conversion theme, Kipling chose another to make the story cohere: the way in which Harvey gradually learns the skills that a fisherman must possess in order to survive, until he ends by being accepted by the crew as one of their own. 29

He continues by maintaining that it is not really "about the protagonist, but about an environment into which he is initiated".<sup>30</sup> For Bodelsen the sea-world is an environment where "one is exposed to the naked forces of Nature: it is a world where no one can survive without expert skill and hard work shared with others . . . ." <sup>31</sup> The two sections following are an examination of work in Captains Courageous with particular reference to Bodelsen's claims.

In respect of the novel's subject-matter it is obvious that it is as much about men at work as about adventure on the high seas; in fact the plot is remarkably low key. The teacher-pupil relationship struck up between Harvey and the crew of the We're Here ensures that the characters are seen in the terms of their work: Salters and Penn are poor fishermen and consequently rank low in Harvey's opinion as well as in the hierarchy of the vessel; Manuel, Tom Platt, and Long Jack gain kudos from their abilities. Disko is the best sailor and the natural leader of the crew. He is famous for his ability to find cod and his appearance reflects his skill:

So Disko Troop thought of recent weather, and gales, currents, food supplies, and other domestic arrangements, from the point of view of a twenty-pound cod; was, in fact, for an hour, a cod himself, and looked remarkably like one. 32

29. Bodelsen, Captains Courageous, p. 163.

30. Bodelsen, Captains Courageous, p. 163.

31. Bodelsen, Captains Courageous, p. 164.

32. CC, p. 58.



His skill is consummate and, later, when faced with a failure to find the cod he is confident, despite Long Jack's opinion to the contrary, that there will be a change of weather which will enable the schooner to shift her position.<sup>33</sup> He is proved correct:

And yet, half an hour later, as they were dressing down, the Bank fog dropped on them, 'Between fish and fish,' as they say. It drove steadily and in wreaths, curling and smoking along the colourless water. The men stopped dressing down without a word. Long Jack and Uncle Salters slipped the windlass brakes into their sockets, and began to heave up the anchor; the windlass jarring as the wet hempen cable strained on the barrel. Manuel and Tom Platt gave a hand at the last. The anchor came up with a sob, and the riding-sail bellied as Troop steadied her at the wheel. <sup>34</sup>

There is no doubt that we are watching sailors at work in contrast to men who happen to wear sailor's clothes ashore and speak in nautical jargon - as <sup>in</sup> some of Kipling's Royal Navy stories.

The background to the writing of the novel shows that Kipling made a special effort to learn about the work of the fishermen. He seems to have regarded part at least of it as "reporterage".

Yet the book was not all reporterage. I wanted to see if I could catch and hold something of a rather beautiful localised American atmosphere that was already beginning to fade. Thanks to Conland I came near this. <sup>35</sup>

Dr. Conland, an American friend of Kipling's, had served in the fishing fleet as a boy.<sup>36</sup> Significantly the book is set in the time when Conland was young, rather than when Kipling visited Gloucester, Mass., and Boston Harbour in 1896. He spent a total of ten days at the two fishing ports and most of the time he spent ashore:

My part was the writing; his the details. This book took us . . . to the shore-front, and the

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33. CC, p. 70.

34. CC, pp. 70-71.

35. SOM, p. 131.

36. SOM, p. 129.

old T-wharf of Boston Harbour, and to queer meals in sailors' eating-houses, where Conland renewed his youth among ex-shipmates or their kin. We assisted hospitable tug-masters to help haul three- and four-stick schooners of Pocahontas coal all round the harbour; we boarded every craft that looked as if she might be useful . . . . Charts we got - old and new - and the crude implements of navigation such as they used off the Banks . . . . And Conland took large cod and the appropriate knives with which they are prepared for the hold, and demonstrated anatomically and surgically so that I could make no mistake about treating them in print. 37

Something of Myself reveals not only this pride in the attention he took but also his enthusiasm for his task.

His research was obviously limited; he would have required a lifetime to learn the skills. There is very little detail, for example, about the actual handling of the We're Here and nothing to approach the descriptions of intricate handling in The Wrecker, The Ebb Tide and "The Secret Sharer" - or, indeed, comparable to the technical density of "The Devil and the Deep Sea". In a sense this must have meant that Kipling had to concentrate on the two boys: by showing them working in the dory he is less likely to be accused of technical error, simply because he is not attempting to describe the skilled actions of a professional. The teacher-pupil relationship is conditioned in a similar fashion. Kipling avoids the depiction of a skilled man imparting his skills to a novice - a very difficult task for a writer. The result is that he concentrates on the importance of Harvey's obedience to the authority of the skilled men. This substitute theme is not entirely satisfactory, considering that the narrative was intended to appeal to boys:

There is not much gear to a seventy-ton schooner with a stump-foremast, but Long Jack had a gift of expression. When he wished to draw Harvey's attention to the peak-halyards, he dug his knuckles into the back of the boy's neck and kept him at gaze for half a minute. He emphasised the difference between fore and aft generally by rubbing Harvey's

nose along a few feet of the boom, and the lead of each rope was fixed in Harvey's mind by the end of the rope itself. 38

In contrast, Treasure Island exudes an energy and commitment to what is essentially a boy's daydream which contrasts strongly with the adult insistence of Captains Courageous that the young must learn to be obedient. When Harvey learns the parts of the We're Here through being beaten with a rope, the spectacle might give an adult a sense of satisfaction; it hardly appeals to a boy. 39

### III

The environment which Kipling creates as a backcloth to the work of the fishermen is of a particular kind. It is carefully drawn to emphasise the beauty and the pleasure of life at sea; it reflects the triumph of man's skill over nature and although death and injury form a threatening background it is one which is not allowed to make too forceful an impact on the novel. This muted impact is plain when Mrs Cheyne says, "'I've come to hate the sea as if twuz alive an' listening'";<sup>40</sup> coming before the Memorial Day Service, and accompanied by a reference to members of her family lost at sea, her remarks are appropriate, but they do not square with the reader's impression of the nautical chapters. In them the sea has been a just force, testing man's skills and destroying evil.

Stephen Reynolds's documentary classics, A Poor Man's House (1909) and Alongshore (1910), point the contrast. Reynolds was a graduate who lived and worked with a fisherman's family in Sidmouth, Devon, for a number of years. He worked in the men's boats, ate their food, and

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38. CC, p. 76.

39. Kipling had read and obviously enjoyed, Treasure Island. See "How Rudyard Kipling Read Treasure Island", KJ IX, No. 63 (1942), 7.

40. CC, p. 244.



later became a campaigner and fisheries officer on their behalf.<sup>41</sup> He had originally intended to write a novel of working class life, but later turned his observations into documentary studies.<sup>42</sup> Reynolds's work is an attempt at social and technical realism and his purpose is therefore quite different from Kipling's in Captains Courageous. In a much more detailed fashion than his contemporary he describes the techniques of fishing, boat handling, and net repair. He is also concerned with rendering the manner in which the fisherman was a victim of his environment. Reynolds's visual effects sustain the idea of an environment which is more powerful than the fisherman's skills. The following passage is quoted at length because Reynolds's work is not easily available.<sup>43</sup>

To fishermen who are compelled by lack of harbourage to keep their boats and gear upon a lee shore, the beach is almost more than home itself. From it they shove off, saying, 'Just fitty for mackerel, this,' or 'Us ought to hae a catch o' herrings this here logie [calm, dull] night'. To it they return, sometimes hardly caring whether they have caught anything or not, half perished with cold, and almost too tired to climb the crunching gravel on their way to bed. Upon it they are fleeced by fish-buyers who have spent their night snug. A fisherman will seldom wander far from his beach, and when he is away from home it is thoughts of the beach which bother him; how far up the sea is running, and whether, if it comes on to blow, someone will think to haul his boats higher. His life is not imperilled there, except when a big boat takes way upon it and rushes from top to bottom, but his means of living are. For there his whole property is. It is upon the beach that a chance wave may beggar him, or, worse than that, may sweep away or stove in the savings of a lifetime. Men who no longer go to sea spend their days, and frequently their

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41. See Peter J. Keating ed., Into Unknown England : 1866-1913, Fontana, London (1976), p. 257 (referred to below as: Keating, Into Unknown England).

42. See Stephen Reynolds, A Poor Man's House, London, 2nd Edition (1909), Preface, p. ix (referred to below as: Reynolds, A Poor Man's House).

43. Keating, Into Unknown England, pp. 257-259, reprints a short extract ("A Devonshire Kitchen") from A Poor Man's House.

nights too, in stumping from house to beach and back again into house. They cannot rest away from the beach . . . .

From the beach, too, men look out to sea as a mother gazes at her child, noting every movement, every expression, every shadow, and wondering what the future may have in store, with pleasure and misgiving mingled. 44

. . . . .

. . . A stiffish breeze had been blowing the day before, but at peep o' day the sea, though still leaden and troubled, as it always is after strong winds, was not too rough for launching a small boat. Just before six, however, a lobster-potter was nearly capsized by three huge ground swells that suddenly rose and broke outside his boat. Thereafter the swell from the Western Ocean came hurling in, broad and swift rather than high, flecked with foam - great bodies of water carrying secondary waves on their backs. They began sweeping the shore, running up it not so much with violence as with power. In a few minutes boats and gear were awash all across beach. Men bundled out from their beds, hauling up-over where they could, but perforce leaving the boats down where there was no room, between the wall and the surf, to push them back for placing the shoots under their bows. Then the owners could only steady them with ropes, and wait helplessly. Looking across beach, under a lowering sky which seemed to flatten everything, one could see busy blue men jumping about among brown boats that lay no longer in orderly ranks, bows upwards, but were askew and even broadside on, between the unmoving wall and the vicious land-licking surf that darted upwards like hungry flames. Sometimes boats moved in jerks: that was men hauling. Then they glided: that was the sea had hold of them. Oars, ways, boxes, and gear galloped alongshore<sup>n</sup> the wash. 45

Reynolds's lee-shore dominates the men's lives completely: the sea chases them up the shore, or, in quieter times, the men are seen "stumping" - as though they were injured or maimed - backwards and forwards to watch the tides. In the second half of the extract their essentially peasant existence is caught in the sky, "which seemed to flatten everything", and the confusion among the boats as the sea storms the shore. It is

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44. Stephen Reynolds, Alongshore, London (1910), pp. 13-14 (referred to below as: Reynolds, Alongshore).

45. Reynolds, Alongshore, pp. 18-19.

not that Kipling was incapable of such effects but that his purpose was different. Indeed, in one section, describing the rough seas on the Grand Banks, he matches Reynolds's talent for evoking the power of the sea;<sup>46</sup> the overriding impression, however, is quite dissimilar.

Despite the presence of Penn and Salters, who are not really fishermen at all,<sup>47</sup> the crew of the We're Here are seen to be masters of their destiny; they are heroes in an exciting contest between man and the sea, and the novel is neatly rounded off with a race for home with the holds brimful of cod.<sup>48</sup> Disko successfully outmanoeuvres the fishbuyer, Wouvermann;<sup>49</sup> Reynolds's fishermen are fleeced by rings of buyers. The general tone of Captains Courageous is celebratory and this is appropriate in a work which was something of a farewell to a disappearing way of life. This is particularly apparent in Kipling's description of the dressing-down operation on the We're Here when the men gut the cod and salt them below:

The shadow of the masts and rigging, with the never-furled riding-sail, rolled to and fro on the heaving deck in the moonlight; and the pile of fish by the stern shone like a dump of fluid silver. In the hold there were tramlings and rumblings where Disko Troop and Tom Platt moved among the salt-bins. Dan passed Harvey a pitchfork, and led him to the inboard end of the rough table, where Uncle Salters was drumming impatiently with a knife-haft. A tub of salt water lay at his feet.

'You pitch to Dad an' Tom Platt down the hatch, an' take keer Uncle Salters don't cut yer eye out,' said Dan, swinging himself into the hold. 'I'll pass salt below.'

Penn and Manuel stood knee-deep among cod in the pen, flourishing drawn knives. Long Jack, a basket at his feet and mittens on his hands, faced Uncle Salters at the table, and Harvey stared at the pitchfork and the tub.

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46. CC, pp. 185-189.

47. Salters is a farmer. See CC, pp. 67-68.

48. CC, pp. 198-206.

49. CC, pp. 207 and 232.



'Hi!' shouted Manuel, stooping to the fish, and bringing one up with a finger under its gill and a finger in its eye. He laid it on the edge of the pen; the knife-blade glimmered with a sound of tearing, and the fish, slit from throat to vent, with a nick on either side of the neck, dropped at Long Jack's feet.

'Hi!' said Long Jack, with a scoop of his mittened hand. The cod's liver dropped in the basket. Another wrench and scoop sent the head and offal flying . . . .<sup>50</sup>

The emphasis is upon the skill of the men and the evident pleasure they derive from their labours. Kipling obviously saw this skill as remarkable and yet part of a way of life that was fast disappearing as the age of factory ships and mechanisation approached. It was this emotional involvement which conditioned the form of the story. The deck scene includes atmospheric effects which are carefully chosen to bolster an evocation of what was an essentially remembered way of life. The scene is moonlit with deep shadows, the fish shine "like a dump of fluid silver". The men and the scene are symbols of values and strengths of a swiftly vanishing way of life.

Reynolds's characters are realised quite differently:

Tony put out the lines: tangled two of them, got in a tear, as he calls it, snapped the sid, bit the rusty hook off, spat out a shred of old bait, brought the boat's head too far into the wind, cursed the flapping sail and cursed the tiller, grubbed in his pockets for a new hook, and made tiny knots with clumsy great fingers and his teeth. 'An't never got no gear like I used tu,' he complained, and then, standing upright, with the tiller between his legs and a line in each outstretched hand, he unbuttoned his face and broke into the merriest of smiles. 'What du 'ee think o' Tony then, getting in a tear fust start out? Do 'ee think he's maazed-or obsolete? But we'll catch 'em if they'm yer. Yu ought to go 'long wi' Uncle Jake. He'd tell 'ee summat - and the fish tu if they wasn't biting proper!' 51

Whereas Kipling was concerned only with producing stereotypes, Reynolds is creating a closely observed characterisation. Tony Widger is skilled

50. CC, pp. 49-50.

51. Reynolds, A Poor Man's House, p. 63.

but men in a hurry swear and make mistakes. These mistakes and his rueful awareness of the narrator's presence make him appear human. His dialect words and strong regional accent were of deep interest to Reynolds because they revealed the fisherman not as an ignoramus or curiosity but as a man of sensibility and feeling closely in touch with and responsive to his environment.

The poor man's vocabulary, like the poet's, is quite inadequate to express his thoughts. Both, in their several ways, are driven to the use of unhackneyed words and simile and metaphor; both use a language of great flexibility . . . . 52

There is something of a similar observation in Disko's propensity to think in practical, solid images - "'Tighter'n a screw in a keg-head'"<sup>53</sup> - but in general the varying accents of Kipling's American sailors are an exercise in journalistic virtuosity. Reynolds's studies of fishermen, however, reveal that he is primarily interested in the sort of human being who puts the fish on the dinner table. Kipling's sailors, on the other hand, are consciously idealised: they have impeccable manners, for example, whereas the Widger family eat with their fingers, live in a cramped, dirty house, and suffer from fleas - "Tommy makes his mother undress him in the middle of dinner to find one" because fleas "flourish in beaches, boats, and nets".<sup>54</sup>

Reynolds's work recalls the social and psychological realism of Kipling's Army stories and the slum tale "A Record of Badalia Herodsfoot". These similarities ought to underline the fact that Captains Courageous was designed to make a different impact upon a more youthful audience. It is better to recognise this than to make unjustifiable claims for seeing it as a strictly realistic account of life at sea in a fishing-schooner. On the other hand, the Royal Navy stories, which were written

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52. Reynolds, A Poor Man's House, p. 85.

53. CC, p. 109.

54. Reynolds, A Poor Man's House, pp. 93 and 94.

some time after the completion of Captains Courageous, and which have attracted similar claims, cannot be excused on the grounds of authorial intention: to a certain extent they must stand or fall on the quality of their observations of Service life.



## CHAPTER FOUR : The Royal Navy, Short Stories 1897-1910

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### I

To write fiction about the contemporary Royal Navy might appear to be only a short step for a man who had been writing about the Merchant Service. In fact the emphasis in the former was to be of quite a different order, a change that was partly the result of contrasting traditions and day-to-day routine. Kipling's Army narratives offer the closest point of contact to the Navy stories and one cannot help thinking that the latter attempt to repeat the successes of the former. The Army narratives, and later the Merchant Service fiction, offered the reader an inside view of their respective worlds. In the Royal Navy stories Kipling repeats once again a narrative situation common to the early Service tales, in which a reporter bribes his way into a close-knit circle of servicemen who yarn about past experiences or involve themselves in fresh episodes of action and adventure. There is, however, an essential difference: the relationship between reporter and servicemen in the Army stories had developed into a sophisticated and highly effective means of portraying human and social relationships;<sup>1</sup> the Navy stories generally lack such sophistication and, in any case,

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1. See J.H. Fenwick, "Soldiers Three", in Kipling's Mind and Art, ed. Andrew Rutherford, Edinburgh and London (1964), pp. 235-236.

all but one are farces. There are more general contrasts which result from the nature of the institutions he was describing. Kipling was writing about a peace-time Navy which saw little active service, in sharp contrast to the active Indian Army; his sailors, unlike his Army privates in narratives such as "In the Matter of a Private" (1888),<sup>2</sup> are well fed and under little strain; and the men he chooses to write about are not the equivalent rank of an Army private; his group includes a Petty Officer, Pyecroft, an engineering artificer, Hinchcliffe, and a sub-lieutenant, Moorshed - men drawn from the middle ranks of the service. Nevertheless, like the Army stories, which had often been based on a trio of soldiers, Mulvaney, Ortheris, and Learoyd, the Navy stories revolve round Pyecroft, Hinchcliffe, and Moorshed, with variations in two of the stories.<sup>3</sup>

Kipling's brief association with the Navy illustrates two general points: the stories are themselves evidence of the continual struggle of the sea-story writer to master the accurate presentation of nautical life; and there is evidence to show that Kipling conformed to something of a tradition in the sea story: its use as reforming instrument.<sup>4</sup> The former brought Kipling new problems; he had still to contend with the accurate presentation of nautical detail but he had an additional task:

2. Soldiers Three (1888).

3. Pyecroft appears in: "The Bonds of Discipline" (1903); "Their Lawful Occasions" (1903); "Steam Tactics" (1902); "Mrs Bathurst" (1904); "A Tour of Inspection" (1904); "The Horse Marines" (1910); and "The Harbour Watch" (a one-act play, never published but performed in 1913). The first four stories listed are collected in Traffics and Discoveries (1904) (referred to below as: TD). "A Tour of Inspection" appeared in Windsor Magazine, December 1904, pp. 3-14 (referred to below as: "A Tour", Windsor Magazine). It was not collected in the Uniform Edition. "The Horse Marines" was collected in A Diversity of Creatures (1910).

4. William Clark Russell and E.T. Bullen used the sea story to campaign for improved conditions for sailors. R.H. Dana's Two Years Before the Mast was written to achieve the same object for American sailors. Kipling was less concerned with the life of the bluejacket (as R.N. sailors were called) than with the efficiency of the Navy as a strong fighting force. In this Kipling was following the practice of the "invasion" novelists.



the close delineation of the Royal Navy as an institution with a clear career-structure and particular codes of behaviour.

The Pyecroft stories have never been popular with the critics;<sup>5</sup> in comparison with his soldier stories most of them appear lightweight, almost trivial, narratives. In fact it is not easy to discover exactly what Kipling meant to achieve in them. The following sections acknowledge the place of all but "Mrs Bathurst" (1904) as farces but also set out to demonstrate their more serious aspects: some of them contain material critical of the Navy; and throughout the whole series Kipling appears to have striven to make them accurate in respect of seamanship, the nomenclature of ships and nautical technology, and Naval jargon. This limited surface-realism is, of course, in evidence in Captains Courageous. At the same time - and this also recalls his remark on capturing the atmosphere of the fishing-fleet<sup>6</sup> - he asserted that, if he was at times inaccurate on small points of detail, then "I have got the spirit all correct".<sup>7</sup> This was doubtless a means of defusing expert criticism but the claim deserves consideration. His stories do succeed in capturing the fervour of professionalism wedded to patriotic endeavour, and this spirit was certainly in evidence - even if it was not so widespread as Kipling believed - in the Navy of his time.

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5. Angus Wilson, The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling, London (1977), p. 210, comments: "As artistic productions, they are among his worst." (referred to below as: Wilson, Kipling).

6. SOM, p. 131.

7. "Steam Tactics" was first published in the Windsor Magazine, December 1902, pp. 3-17 (referred to below as: "Steam Tactics", Windsor Magazine). It was prefaced by a letter addressed to the main character of the tale "P.O. Emanuel Pyecroft". It was not included in the collected version. In the letter Kipling advances that, "there may be much that is not technically true; but Hinchcliff [in later editions Hinchcliff gained an 'e'] says I have got the spirit all correct" (p. 3).

In his recent study of Kipling Angus Wilson speculates that,

The truth is<sup>that</sup> Kipling did not know the life of  
the man he was describing and so he cast him  
in careful, arranged farce, often on shore. 8

This "shore solution" is often a feature of the work of a writer lacking nautical information, and much of what is set out below substantiates Wilson's basic point by using modern social studies of the Victorian Navy as well as material - fictional and non-fictional - from Kipling's time. Nevertheless Kipling knew enough of Army life to sense much about the Navy that was unglamorous and "Mrs Bathurst" manages to convey something of what Wilson criticises the stories for lacking: "the sadness, the tension and the reduction of humanity".<sup>9</sup>

The following sections demonstrate once again the constraints that the sea story imposes upon a writer who is mindful of a duty to be realistic. Kipling is shown to be using devices which suggest to the reader that the stories are accurate: they contain narrators who are sailors; they capitalise on the generally accepted expertise of the Naval correspondent; and the narratives as a group were originally given a framework which implied they were the record of an actual friendship.<sup>10</sup> Conrad was employing a related device when he introduced the figure of Marlow as narrator. Finally, it might be noted that to set an extravagant farce against a plausible background and incorporate realistic characters is one method of using a limited amount of realistic material.

8. Wilson, Kipling, p. 210.

9. Wilson, Kipling, p. 210.

10. The letter in "Steam Tactics", Windsor Magazine, p. 3 serves to sustain the idea of a continued friendship. In it Kipling informs Pyecroft that much of what they have experienced together has been put into "six Number One tales". He mentions the events which occur in "The Bonds of Discipline" ("About Antonio . . ."), "Their Lawful Occasions" ("and about No. 267"), and the second motoring story "A Tour of Discipline". See also, below p. 190.

The farcical elements ensure that the fiction is not judged too seriously as an accurate description of an actual state of affairs.

## II

In September, 1891, Kipling struck up a friendship with a Captain Bayly.<sup>11</sup> Bayly was to be important for his research into the Navy because he introduced Kipling to Naval society in Simonstown and was, much later in the decade, to help Kipling further. The immediate upshot was, as we have seen, the story "Judson and the Empire". In 1896 Kipling returned to England from America and rented a house at Maidencombe, near Torquay, where he was close to Dartmouth and the officer training ship Britannia.<sup>12</sup> He subsequently renewed his friendship with Bayly and secured two trips with the channel fleet on manoeuvres in 1897 and 1898.<sup>13</sup> He sailed with Bayly's command, the cruiser H.M.S. Pelorus, and enjoyed himself immensely; Carrington speaks of the 1898 trip as a "personal triumph"<sup>14</sup> and records that Kipling was carried shoulder-high at a ward-room party.<sup>15</sup> The ward-room is the mess set aside for commissioned officers below the rank of commanding officer, and one wonders how close he was to the lower-deck (the non-commissioned men). There is an illuminating paragraph on this subject in an article by Admiral Ballard who had met Kipling on the 1898 manoeuvres.<sup>16</sup> Later, during the Great

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11. See Carrington, Rudyard Kipling, p. 186, and above pp. 132-133.

12. Carrington, Rudyard Kipling, p. 246.

13. See: Rudyard Kipling, A Fleet in Being : Notes of Two Trips with the Channel Squadron, Macmillan, London (1898) (referred to below as: AFB); and Reader's Guide, iv, 1701.

14. Carrington, Rudyard Kipling, p. 273.

15. Carrington, Rudyard Kipling, p. 190.

16. Admiral G.A. Ballard, C.B., "Rudyard Kipling as I Knew Him", KJ, XIII, No. 79 (1946), 3-5 (referred to below as: Ballard, "Kipling as I Knew Him").



War, Kipling was Ballard's guest on the East coast patrol of which the Admiral was commander.

He would have liked to mix with the men forward, and I told him he might if he wished, but that I doubted they would talk with complete freedom to anybody they knew to be a semi-official guest in the Admiral's quarters. He quite saw that point and decided to remain aft. 17

His polite acquiescence - somewhat unexpected from a journalist - is evidence that Kipling was perhaps less interested in the men of the lower-deck than in the role of the Navy as a political force for the good of the world and the safety of the English in particular:

This is no ideal world but a nest of burglars, alas; and we must protect ourselves against being burgled. 18

This change of emphasis may have been prompted by the difficulties of mastering his subject and even of gaining access to the men - perhaps Admiral Ballard was out to discourage him.

Friendships and acquaintances were particularly important for Kipling's association with the Navy. In 1897 he met the sculptor, Hamo Thorneycroft, brother of the owner of the torpedo-boat construction company Thorneycroft, and later received an invitation to attend the trials of a 30-knot destroyer.<sup>19</sup> He described the trip to Conland, his American friend:

It was like a nightmare. The vibration shook not only your body but your intestines and finally seemed to settle on your heart. The breeze along the deck made it difficult to walk. I staggered aft above the twin-screws and there saw a blue-jacket, vomiting like a girl . . . I felt my false teeth shaking in my head! The pace was too good for her to roll . . . .

The wake ran behind us like white hot iron; the engine-room was one lather of oil and water . . . . 20

17. Ballard, "Kipling as I Knew Him", p. 3.

18. Unpublished letter quoted in Carrington, Rudyard Kipling, p. 268.

19. Carrington, Rudyard Kipling, p. 252.

20. Carrington, Rudyard Kipling, p. 253.

It was this trip that furnished details for "Their Lawful Occasions" (1903). Kipling might also have met Naval experts at his clubs in London. He belonged to the Savile, of which H.O. Arnold Forster, a noted writer on Naval affairs, was a member, and the Athenaeum. More importantly, Kipling belonged to the Navy League, a pressure-group formed to ensure that Britain maintained a strong fleet. It had a journal which was a mine of information on nautical affairs; Kipling wrote a long letter to it in 1904 on the subject of "The Army of a Dream (1904)."<sup>21</sup> He was sufficiently interested in the work of the League to form a Navy League Rifle Club at Rottingdean (where he lived from 1897 to 1902). He described its activities in a letter to the Spectator<sup>22</sup> in which he mentions two coastguards who were evidently ex-bluejackets.<sup>23</sup> He also knew Theodore Roosevelt, the American President, who was an authority on the world's Navies. During the period 1900 to 1908 he spent each winter in South Africa and came to know the Naval base at Simonstown "like the inside of my own pocket".<sup>24</sup>

Kipling would also have had access to many published sources of information. He seems to have prepared for his two spells of manoeuvres by a course of reading. Foremost among the books referred to in the published account of his experiences in 1897-1898, A Fleet in Being (1898), are Marryat's novels, a contemporary collection of Navy stories and poems by G.S. Bowles, A Gunroom Ditty Box (1898), and Melville's White-Jacket.<sup>25</sup> Kipling must have found Marryat useful in describing

21. "The Navy and Army of the Future", The Navy League Journal, August 1904, pp. 216-218 (referred to below as: "The Navy and Army of the Future"). This is a longer version of the letter published in the Daily Mail, 6 August 1904.

22. "A Village Rifle Club", Spectator, 22 June 1901, pp. 912-914 (referred to below as: Kipling, "Rifle Club").

23. Kipling, "Rifle Club", p. 913.

24. SOM, p. 96.

25. AFB, pp. 5, 1, and 52 respectively.

the traditions of the service:

All Marryat's immortals are there [on board the  
Pelorus], better fed, better tended, better  
educated, but at heart unchanged. 26

Commenting on the loneliness of command, he later refers to Melville who  
"has it all in White-Jacket, but it is awesome to see it with bodily  
eyes".<sup>27</sup>

There was another type of Naval literature which makes its  
appearance in "The Bonds of Discipline" (1903) a story in which a French  
spy stows on board the British cruiser, Archimandrite, famed for its  
team spirit.<sup>28</sup> The crew's theatrical abilities are put to use when  
they discover his presence and decide to give him a false idea of the  
Navy. They act out scenes suggestive of inefficiency and rank barbarity  
- including a summary execution for insolence.<sup>29</sup> Antonio is completely  
fooled and returns to France and publishes a study of the Royal Navy  
based upon his experiences. The narrator, a collector of contemporary  
Naval studies, comes across Antonio's. He is puzzled and travels to  
Portsmouth to discover what had really happened. He takes with him  
the account, "based on the absolutely unadorned performances of one of  
our well-known Acolyte type of cruisers".<sup>30</sup> His investigation leads  
him to Petty Officer Pyecroft of the Archimandrite and party to most

26. AFB, p. 5. Pyecroft may well owe something to Marryat's Peter Simple (1833-34) and the boatswain, Gentleman Chucks, in particular. Both Chucks's and Pyecroft's speech is characterised by imperfectly learned Latin tags and a superficially learned vocabulary. In Steam Tactics, for example, Pyecroft unwittingly commits a malapropism. The motoring party is searching for a lost part of the car; "'Look like etymologists, don't they?'" Pyecroft comments (TD, p. 190). In common with Gentleman Chucks, Pyecroft takes great delight in beginning a dressing down politely only to end it with a storm of invective (e.g., TD, p. 71).

27. AFB, p. 52.

28. TD, p. 51.

29. TD, pp. 69-70.

30. TD, p. 39.



of what happened on the ship. Antonio's account is then compared with Pyecroft's version of the hoax.

A Gun-Room Ditty Box, from which Kipling quotes in A Fleet in Being,<sup>31</sup> also includes a short story, "Leader o' the Line",<sup>32</sup> which might have inspired "Their Lawful Occasions". Like some of Kipling's stories, but not "Their Lawful Occasions", Bowles's story is narrated to an author-figure by two seamen. This may have been the influence of Kipling's Army stories, which were extremely popular in the 1890's, showing itself in Bowles's work. In addition the verse in A Gun-Room Ditty Box certainly has the air, although not the mastery, of Barrack Room Ballads (1892). Nevertheless, Bowles was writing about a world he knew closely: he was a retired sub-lieutenant, and his book would have provided Kipling with hard information, atmosphere and Navy attitudes. These aspects are all present in "Leader o' the Line". The two sailors at the centre of the narrative had been on a torpedo-boat under the command of a popular officer. Under strict orders to be ready to depart for the annual manoeuvres, he goes ashore on a social occasion. Unfortunately, while he is away, sailing orders arrive. The seamen sail without him and make such a favourable impression that they win their officer promotion by "sinking" the opposing flagship. This story bears an obvious similarity to "Their Lawful Occasions" in which Torpedo-boat 267, acting contrary to orders, "sinks" two large cruisers. In both stories young officers rely heavily upon their subordinates: Bowles's officer risks court-martial and is saved by his men; Moorshed relies on the superior expertise and greater experience of his subordinate, Pyecroft.

At the same time the stories are something of a tribute to youthful enthusiasm and élan, and a criticism of a Navy dominated by older men:

31. AFB, p. 1.

32. G.S. Bowles, A Gun-Room Ditty Box, London (1898), pp. 98-116 (referred to below as: Bowles, Gun-Room).

'The youngsters doesn't get 'arf a chance to do nuthin' at all, an' the others is too old. They only thinks o' messin' about an' gettin' their sea-time in. But its the youngsters as done the work, an' always will be. Their ain't a hadmiral going cud run a bloomin' beef-trip . . . .' 33

Pyecroft is not a young sailor,<sup>34</sup> but he is portrayed as a man who has his wits about him - in sharp contrast to the Admiral who commands Blue Fleet (to which 267 is attached). The officer concerned, "The Right Honourable Lord Gawd Almighty Admiral Master Frankie Frobisher, K.C.B.,"<sup>35</sup> is obviously showing signs of his age: "Knowin' Frankie's groovin' to be badly eroded by age and lack of attention . . . ." <sup>36</sup> He had reprimanded Moorshed and dispensed with his services because 267, through no fault of its commander, had broken down;<sup>37</sup> subsequent events are, however, a triumph for 267 against larger ships under the command of senior officers. Both stories extol the virtues of happy small ships as opposed to the larger more impersonal vessels and value individuality and resourcefulness higher than the rigid discipline of the battleship.

### III

If Kipling had hoped to repeat his Army successes - a popular friend of the private soldier, a service celebrity, and a respected authority - he must have soon realised that the task was immeasurably different and certainly more difficult. To appreciate this, it is necessary to look more closely at the Royal Navy and the public in 1898.

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33. Bowles, Gun-Room, p. 103.

34. He would have to be in his late thirties to remember the "Elphinstone an' Bruce" election campaign which took place in 1874. See TD, p. 71 and Reader's Guide, iv, 1722.

35. TD, p. 107.

36. TD, p. 108.

37. TD, p. 113.

The Army, when Kipling first started writing about it in the 1880's, had been neglected, but not so the Navy; this was especially true in 1898, the year of the first German Naval law which set off twenty years of intense and tragic rivalry. The Royal Navy had the largest and most powerful fleet in the world and stood in the forefront of Naval technology. It had an unbroken and unchallenged supremacy stretching back to Trafalgar. Nevertheless, <sup>not</sup> all was <sup>as</sup> well as the great Naval reviews (Spithead, 1889, and the Diamond Jubilee, 1897) suggested. There were influential voices both within and outside the Navy calling for larger ships, a more powerful fleet, and a more efficient service.<sup>38</sup> The First Sea Lord from 1904-1919, Fisher, campaigned from within the service on many of these issues and he was supported from outside the Navy by journalists and the Navy League. The Navy was, in fact, constantly in the public eye.

The press (Kipling published A Fleet in Being in the Morning Post as a series of special correspondent dispatches)<sup>39</sup> and imaginative literature were highly involved. The fears of a German, French, or Russian invasion were sustained by a host of novels and short stories imagining future invasions from abroad - a genre known as invasion literature. The genre is the subject of I.F. Clarke's Voices Propheying War (1966); he dates it from The Battle of Dorking (1871). In novels of this type large Naval battles are envisaged as being fought off the coasts of Great Britain. Their sensational texts frequently appeared in the major newspapers of the day. Far from being amateurish in their strategic, tactical, and technical content, they were often written by Naval experts who "tested" and enlarged upon their theories in an imagined series of wars. W.H. Clowes, A.H. Burgoyne, F.T. Jane, and Lionel Yexley were invasion novelists and Naval experts. Their stories

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38. See A.J. Marder, From Dreadnoughts to Scapa Flow, i: The Road to War, 1904-1914, London (1961), 6-13 (referred to below as: Marder, Road to War).

39. They comprised six articles published on 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 November 1898. Fisher leaked information to newspapers to gain support for his reforms. See: The Observer and J.L. Garvin 1908-1914. A Study in Great Editorship, Alfred M. Gollin, London (1960), p. 31.



were printed in large numbers but are mostly of a low literary standard. The most famous, and a minor classic in its own right, is Erskine Childers's The Riddle of the Sands (1903).

Within the Navy, too, things were beginning to change and the lower-deck was finding a voice of its own. It is in this respect that the life and work of Lionel Yexley (1861-1933) is important. Although many of the men were not interested in his work<sup>40</sup> he is a significant figure in the social history of the Navy:

His campaigns on behalf of the working class in the Navy belonged in spirit as well as in time to the next century. In a sense, Lionel Yexley was the first man on or from the lower-deck to make the mental transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. <sup>41</sup>

His own life is partly the subject of his study of the lower-deck, The Inner Life of the Navy (1908). He was a lower-deck sailor for eighteen years from 1879 to 1897 when he left the service to work for lower-deck reforms through a small magazine Hope or the Bluejacket and Coastguard Gazette which he edited from 1897 to 1902. In later years he was to become founder editor of the Fleet (a lower-deck newspaper). The Bluejacket contained yarns - satirical, humorous, and serious - written by the sailors themselves. Yexley started a collection of the best of these in a series of paperbacks called Told at One Bell (1903-11). His

40. See Henry Baynham, The Men from the Dreadnoughts, London (1976), p. 21 (referred to below as: Baynham, Dreadnoughts). At the other end of the naval hierarchy, Fisher gave information to Yexley and sought his help on lower-deck affairs. See: Fear God and Dread Nought: The Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone, Selected and edited by Arthur J. Marder, ii, Years of Power 1904-1914, London (1956), 22, 258, and 290.

41. John Winton, Hurrah for the Life of a Sailor! Life on the lower-deck of the Victorian Navy, London (1977), p. 262. For a summary of Yexley's career see pp. 258-262 (referred to below as: Winton, Victorian Navy). Yexley's real name was James Wood.

studies of Navy life,<sup>42</sup> his magazines, and his collection of yarns have been invaluable in assessing Kipling's knowledge of the life of the lower-deck; but Yexley's career places Kipling's attempt to write Navy stories in a fresh perspective.

Yexley's knowledge of Navy life is reminiscent of Kipling's acquaintance with Indian Army life in the 1880's. Both men were aware of the necessity for reform: Kipling was able to give Lord Roberts details on the living conditions the ordinary soldiers endured and to publicise their lives in his soldier stories;<sup>43</sup> Yexley campaigned for a fairer disciplinary code, better promotion prospects, and an improved victualling system. Like Kipling, and perhaps because of his example, Yexley used fiction as a means of achieving his ends. If Yexley did draw inspiration from Kipling's example, it is ironic that Kipling could not hope to assume a role as spokesman for the lower-deck given the presence of Yexley and the contributors to his magazine.

Kipling was not only concerned with the lower-deck. He was interested in the new marine technology and was committed to maintaining Britain's strong Army and Navy. In 1904 he wrote a futuristic story of how he wanted the armed forces to develop called "The Army of a Dream". His letter to The Navy League Journal in 1904 explained his ideas still further. It is argued below that two of the Pyecroft stories are used as <sup>a</sup> means of exposing the shortcomings of the Navy. Nevertheless he was still a layman writing about professionals, more importantly, he was not a lone writer but one among a substantial group who numbered among its members a host of Naval experts. His public was

42. e.g., Lionel Yexley, The Inner Life of the Navy, London (1908) referred to below as: Yexley, Inner Life).

43. See SOM, pp. 56-57. Kipling's Army stories and poetry are examined in the context of social history in P.J. Keating, The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction, London (1971), pp. 142-148 and 161-166.

similarly knowledgeable:

and certain it is that at that time the public knew more about the Navy than ever they had before or, indeed, have ever known since. Every magazine ran feature articles on the Service; boys' papers gave details of possible careers at sea; every newspaper carried detailed reports, down to the minutest particular, of the annual manoeuvres, and the most intricate nautical technicalities became matters for discussions in clubs, drawing-rooms and public houses throughout the country. <sup>44</sup>

The stories reflect Kipling's lack of information because they rely so heavily on his limited acquaintance with the Navy: his two trips with the cruiser H.M.S. Pelorus (H.M.S. Archimandrite in "The Bonds of Discipline" is a cruiser) and his experience of torpedo-boat trials (used in "Their Lawful Occasions"). A number of stories hardly concern Navy life at all and, of those that do, "Mrs Bathurst" draws upon his knowledge of service life in the Army as well as the Navy; the standards and requirements of discipline and the disadvantages of service life do not differ much from one force to another and Kipling was very familiar with life in the Army. "The Bonds of Discipline" is in fact a neat solution to his own ignorance; Antonio is deceived by a generally false picture of the Navy: the captain drunk,<sup>45</sup> Naval discipline subverted,<sup>46</sup> bridge procedures flouted.<sup>47</sup> He had, in fact, constructed a plot which would allow for - indeed necessitate - inaccuracy and exaggeration. Furthermore, in all the stories the reader is deliberately confused and put off-balance by a number of devices: Pyecroft's service jargon, the elliptical reference to seamanship given in dialogue, and, in "Their Lawful Occasions", a narrator who is himself confused.

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44. Geoffrey Penn, Up Funnel - Down Screw!, London (1955), p. 124 (referred to below as: Penn, Up Funnel).

45. TD, pp. 59-60. For an actual instance see Yexley, Inner Life, pp. 48-49.

46. TD, pp. 69-70.

47. TD, p. 62.



In A Fleet in Being Kipling makes a promise: "Some day, when I know more, I will write about engine-rooms and stokers' accommodation - the manners and customs of Naval engineers and their artificers";<sup>48</sup> years later he makes an admission of defeat. He is writing to Admiral Ballard about himself:

he was attracted by the little that he had heard about life in the Navy in Victorian days but never had the chance to be sufficiently acquainted with it to use it properly in literature. <sup>49</sup>

Victoria's reign was a long one (1837-1901) but the nature of the Pyecroft stories surely makes them the subject of his remark. They are set more frequently on land than at sea; Hinchcliffe is portrayed working with cars rather than ships (Kipling possessed a car as early as 1900<sup>50</sup> and would have been more at home describing an engineer at work on one); and Pyecroft is rarely seen handling men in a normal shipboard situation.

#### IV

The narratives, examined as a group, contain evidence of Kipling's need to convince his public that the stories came from within the Navy. Prime among the devices used was a narrative situation which presupposed a special bond between an author or journalist and a masterful, respected, and knowledgeable lower-deck figure - Petty Officer Pyecroft, accompanied in all but one of the stories by his friend, Henry Salt Hinchcliffe, Engine Room Artificer.<sup>51</sup> In the first of the published stories, "Steam Tactics" (1902) Kipling's imaginary letter creates a purposefully

48. AFB, p. 74.

49. Ballard, "Kipling", p. 3. He returned to the Victorian Navy in the late story "A Naval Mutiny" (1931), Limits and Renewals (1932).

50. There is a photograph of Kipling in his first car, a "Locomobile Steamer", in Wilson, Kipling (illustration n. 67).

51. Of Chief Petty Officer status. See Reader's Guide, iv, 1730.

tantalising glimpse of a whole sequence of episodes of which only a small number are to be revealed.

'To P.O. Emanuel Pyecroft,  
'Cape Station: H.M.S. Postulant

'Dear Pyecroft, - This should reach you about the time you turn over to the Hierophant at Zanzibar, and I hope finds you as fit as when we parted.

'I always thought, as you said three years ago, that it would be a sin and a shame not to make a story out of some of the things that have happened between you and Hinchcliff and me, every time we met.' 52

He then makes some obscure references to a number that were either never written or never published. The letter provides a common background for the stories and, in addition, there are references within them which help to maintain this impression. "The Bonds of Discipline" is set up as a record of Pyecroft and the narrator's first meeting.<sup>53</sup> The author, it will be remembered, is looking for somebody who knew about the events on board the Archimandrite involving Antonio. He is directed to a Portsmouth public house where he meets Pyecroft. In "Their Lawful Occasions" and "Steam Tactics" they meet accidentally but are portrayed as renewing an acquaintance; in "A Tour of Inspection" (1904) their meeting is that of old friends.<sup>54</sup> One thing is plain: the relationship between the author, Pyecroft, and his friends is broadly similar to that between the author and the three soldiers, Mulvaney, Ortheris, and Learoyd. In both sets of narratives the impression created is of a select group yielding inside information on a particular service.

The idea of an inside view is also sustained by the Naval jargon that Kipling's characters habitually use. This was one of the earliest observations that he included in A Fleet in Being. The jargon is

52. "Steam Tactics", Windsor Magazine, p. 3.

53. "'I asked if he [the Publican] could produce any warrant or petty officer of the Archimandrite.'" (TD, p. 41).

54. "A Tour", Windsor Magazine, p. 3.

specifically that of the lower-deck:

Their speech is soft (if everyone spoke aloud you could not hear yourself think on a cruiser), their gestures are few (if a man swung his arms about he would interfere with his neighbour), their steps are noiseless . . . . Their slang borrows from the engine-room, the working parts of guns, the drill-book, and the last music-hall song. It is delivered in a tight-lipped undertone; the more excruciatingly funny parts without a shade of expression. 55

Many contemporary Navy writers were to comment on this language.

"Bartimeus", writing in 1914, thought it was partly due to the home dialects the men brought into the service with the addition of foreign words picked up on their travels;<sup>56</sup> Pyecroft, for example, employs a number of South African phrases.<sup>57</sup> Although "Bartimeus" mentions the men's swearing,<sup>58</sup> Kipling makes little comment and his sailorese is pristine: the censorship rules of the day were doubtless responsible. Other writers were concerned that the jargon and manner of speaking should be preserved in print. Lionel Yexley, editor of The Bluejacket, made two appeals in his magazine: first, for stories written by the men themselves; and, secondly,

that they are told in the lingo of the lower-deck. Our object is to get Sailor's stories told in Sailor's language, and we must trust that a great number of our readers will send in each month. 59

Arnold White wrote in a preface to a collection of these yarns, Told at One Bell (1903)

The dialect of the lower deck, being a living language, is always in a state of flux. The lay

55. AFB, pp. 4-5.

56. "Bartimeus" (Sir L. Ritchie), Naval Occasions, London (1915), p. 202 (referred to below as: Naval Occasions).

57. See below p. 193 n. 66.

58. Naval Occasions, p. 203.

59. Hope or the Bluejacket and Coastguard Gazette, January 1900, p. 372 (referred to below as: Bluejacket).



reader will learn much of the personality and inner mind of the human beings who are portrayed in these pages. 60

There is no evidence that Kipling had read either the stories or the comments but in delineating the language he was advertising his knowledge of the service and making his stories realistic.<sup>61</sup>

Pyecroft's speech varies from ~~marrative~~ narrative and from magazine to collected edition. The collected editions contain amendments which usually involve toning down the language and restoring aspirates - doubtless to make the stories more intelligible.<sup>62</sup> There are some grammatical changes - "'I'll teach you'" instead of "'I'll learn you'" and "'Blighted'" and "'Blighter'" are dropped perhaps because they occur too often.<sup>63</sup> In "Steam Tactics" the changes have the effect of emphasising the differences between the policeman and the sailors and, in effect, make the sailors more dignified. In addition Kipling's conception of Pyecroft's language appears to have changed as he wrote the stories. It would seem that he found his original version of the jargon too inflexible; to be forced into using an intrinsically humorous mode of speech to convey serious ideas is obviously undesirable. In the early story, "The Bonds of Discipline", Pyecroft's speech contains a high incidence of jargon and is very funny. At one point he describes to the author how he picked up Antonio's pocket book:

'Not 'altin' for the obstacle, nor changin' step,  
I shuffles it along under the ball of the big toe

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60. Told at One Bell, ed. Lionel Yexley, 2nd series, Rye (1903), Preface (referred to below as Told at One Bell).

61. Kipling's rendition of this jargon is highly praised by the Reader's Guide, iv, 1701: "the absolute verisimilitude of the conversation". A quick check with any one of the Bluejacket stories, however, shows that his vocabulary (of sailor slang) was limited.

62. For a study of these emendations see: A.E. Caddick, "A Note on 'Steam Tactics'", KJ, IV, No. 51 (1939), 33-37 (referred to below as: Caddick, "Steam Tactics").

63. Caddick, "Steam Tactics", p. 35.

to the foot o' the hatchway, when, lightly stoopin',  
I catch it in my right hand and continue my evolutions  
in rapid time till I eventuates under 'Op's lee. 64

His metaphors are drawn from the drill-square and the movements of ships. Humour is appropriate to "The Bonds of Discipline" but "Mrs Bathurst" is a tragic story and jargon and metaphor (of the type illustrated above) are less in evidence.

Given that Pyecroft's speech is not consistent it is possible to identify particular elements. It is both Navy and working class: he drops aspirates; syncopates terminal "g's" and "d's" ("lookin'", "an'"); misses out medial consonants ("- on'y" and "stric'ly"); and mispronounces vowels ("Carthlic" and "dook").<sup>65</sup> He also employs South African words probably acquired at Simonstown.<sup>66</sup> Of course he uses many specifically Navy words: old man (captain), spit-kid (spittoon), cheero-party (ship's picnic party), snotties (midshipmen), beef-boat (supply cutter), matlow (sailor), jaunty (master-at-arms), and "you an' me 'll part brass rags" (fall out).<sup>67</sup>

Another device that maintains the illusion of an inside view was the figure of the journalist or special correspondent. This figure is introduced into "Their Lawful Occasions" and is present in the other stories because, as we have seen, Kipling consciously sustained the idea of the group as the record of a friendship. In the last-named story the journalist is a guest of the Navy, present to report on the planned manoeuvres. It is difficult today to appreciate the importance that the Navy League, political parties, and the public placed upon the annual manoeuvres involving virtually the entire Home Fleet. They were in fact

64. TD, p. 48.

65. TD, pp. 45 and 47.

66. e.g., Kapje (sunbonnet) TD, p. 363, and mafeesh (it is finished) "A Tour", Windsor Magazine, p. 3.

67. TD, pp. 59, 57, 57, 143, 181, 45, 197, and 49.

regarded as demonstrations of our strengths and weaknesses and the reports by the special correspondents held prominent positions in the national newspapers during late July or August. The reports were accompanied by maps and diagrams.<sup>68</sup>

In 1888 the manoeuvres were the cause of a political row when an "enemy fleet" escaped a blockade and "captured" coastal towns: the Liberal leader, Campbell Bannerman, an opponent of heavy arms expenditure, thought the episode was a plot to frighten the public into paying for more ships.<sup>69</sup> The correspondent was, therefore, an important figure occupying a privileged position and the public was ready to accept his judgements and observations. In addition, the correspondents were not always passive figures; in the 1888 manoeuvres, for example, a Daily Telegraph correspondent had been put ashore by the blockading fleet to spy on their opponents.<sup>70</sup> He did so and returned with valuable information. The idea, therefore, of a journalist playing a part in the manoeuvres, as in "Their Lawful Occasions", would not have been regarded as abnormal or unrealistic. Furthermore, hints of the operation of a Naval censorship would have rung true with a public used to the complaints of the special correspondents that Admiralty censorship of their reports

68. Popular interest ran high: the Times 10 August 1888, p. 10 spoke of many thousands of people watching the "bombardment" of Liverpool and Birkenhead, and, on 13 August, reported that "some thousands of visitors are flocking to coast towns". In 1901 the Times had two correspondents at sea: one with 'B' Fleet and one with 'X' Fleet. Some sailors, however, were less than enthusiastic. Yexley, writing about the Navy of the early 1890's calls them "those senseless mimic battles" and later claimed that neither he "nor anyone else ever took the slightest interest in them" (Yexley, Inner Life, pp. 201-202 and 263-264).

69. See his letter to the Times, 14 August 1888, p. 10.

70. Times, 7 August 1888, p. 9.



was too rigorous.<sup>71</sup> In the letter attached to the magazine version of "Steam Tactics" Kipling implies that "The Bonds of Discipline" and "Their Lawful Occasions" have been censored and their publication delayed.<sup>72</sup>

V

Much of the previous section shows that Kipling was interested in creating a realistic background for his Navy fiction. R.D. Merriman, writing in The Kipling Journal, claims that Kipling was interested in portraying the life of the lower-deck.

[The Pyecroft stories] appeared about the turn of the century. They were written round a fictional character named Pyecroft, through whom Kipling aimed at portraying the Royal Navy as seen from the lower deck . . . . 73

Carrington makes a similar inference in his biography of Kipling.<sup>74</sup> This idea needs to be carefully qualified, because the stories give no comprehensive idea of the lower-deck - the frequent corruption, the poor food, the harsh discipline, and the boredom of service life.<sup>75</sup> Kipling never claimed that he had given a full picture, although he did assert that he had the "atmosphere" of the Navy right. In fact he made a number of

71. See the Times 15 August 1901, p. 8; 19 August 1901, p. 8; 1 October 1901, p. 5. The correspondents were forbidden to give precise details of evolutions and tactics, and results were given in the broadest terms so as to protect the officers' careers and their standing with the men. Furthermore, Pyecroft's remarks in "The Lawful Occasions", "'An' what manner o' manoeuvres d'you expect to see in a blighted cathedral like the Pedantic? I know 'er . . . . Manoeuvres! You won't see more than 'Man an' arm watertight doors' in your little woollen undervest'", suggest that the correspondents saw little that was valuable in the way of "inside" information. Yexley, Inner Life, p. 260 suggests that the average correspondent was largely ignorant of Naval affairs.
72. Kipling hints at some sort of censorship in the letter originally prefaced to "Steam Tactics". See "Steam Tactics", Windsor Magazine, p. 3, and below p. 206.
73. Commander R.D. Merriman, R.I.N., "The Pyecroft Stories" Part I, KJ, XXIX, No. 141 (1962), 28.
74. Carrington, Rudyard Kipling, p. 416.
75. The two most recent and the fullest accounts of lower-deck life at this time are: Boynham, Dreadnoughts; Winton, Victorian Navy; and John Fabb and A.P. McGowan, The Victorian and Edwardian Navy from Old Photographs, London (1976).

elementary mistakes over the middle ranks of the service. In A Fleet in Being he brackets Warrant Officers, who were commissioned and discouraged from associating with non-commissioned officers, with Petty Officers (who were non-commissioned).<sup>76</sup> He does the same in "Mrs Bathurst" where Mr Vickery, a Warrant Officer, maintains a friendship with Pyecroft, a Petty Officer. This may appear to be hair-splitting, but it does reveal Kipling's limited knowledge of the Navy. A man who wanted to speak for the lower-deck or write authoritatively about it would have to be aware of these divisions for, to the men concerned, they were extremely important, and the occasion of some bitterness. A capable Petty Officer faced real barriers to any further promotion and the Warrant Officer seems never to have been regarded as a "real" officer.

The Pyecroft stories are not concerned with the lowest ranks of the service and this effectively cuts his fiction off from one of the pre-eminent preoccupations of the lower-deck; the disciplinary codes governing life on board ship. The Bluejacket contains a large number of stories of feuds between the ship's police and the men.<sup>77</sup> One punishment which was particularly disliked was the punishment known as IOA; under a spell of IOA a man's grog was stopped, he was not allowed to smoke, and he had to eat under supervision and apart from his friends. His spare time would be occupied in boring duties such as holystoning decks and filing stanchions; alternatively he might spend hours facing the paintwork. It was used for the most trivial offences; a man could receive a spell of IOA for not having his cap straight.<sup>78</sup>

76. AFB, p. 60. For a note on the relative status of Warrant and Petty Officers see Reader's Guide, iv, 1861-1862.

77. e.g., "Birdie and the New Joss", collected in: Told at One Bell, 2nd Series, pp. 123-127. The responsibility for discipline on board ship fell upon the Ship's Police. Yexley is highly critical of them, asserting that they were recruited from men who were poor seamen although, once in the Ship's Police, they were ranked as 1st Class Petty Officers and took precedence over all other Petty Officers on the ship. See Yexley, Inner Life, pp. 132-135.

78. See Baynham, Dreadnoughts, pp. 89-93.

Kipling obviously cannot be blamed for omitting this aspect of lower-deck life but his delineation of Hinchcliffe raises a more fundamental issue. Hinchcliffe is an E.R.A. (Engine-Room Artificer) and of a rank equivalent to Chief Petty Officer. If Hinchcliffe were concerned with further promotion, and we are not led to believe otherwise, he would be painfully aware of the discrimination engineering officers laboured under: like the Warrant Officers they were regarded as inferior to the executive branch. Geoffrey Penn, in his book on the Naval engineer, Up Funnel - Down Screw!, points out that by the early part of 1902 the engineers were so aggrieved at the treatment they were receiving that "The boiler was reaching bursting point . . . ." <sup>79</sup> There was a sharp decline in the number of applications to the Royal Naval Engineering College. <sup>80</sup> It is strange that Kipling did not use this as a theme - or even make a passing reference to it - because it was a major issue at the time he was writing the Pyecroft stories. It is possible that Kipling wanted to avoid any theme which would detract from the image of a service he admired so much, but he did criticise the Navy on other points.

Kipling's omissions are significant because they illustrate his limited picture of life on the lower-deck. At the same time he did create the impression - for the lay reader - that he was an expert, or at least a man in the know. The prefatory letter to "The Bonds of Discipline" implies that the author maintains a close friendship with a Petty Officer, and this idea is sustained throughout the later stories.

Once it is accepted that he lacked the knowledge to make his Navy stories anything other than limited accounts of lower-deck life it is possible to see them for what they are. The Navy detail is used sketchily. The personal backgrounds of the men are not drawn in close

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79. Penn, Up Funnel, p. 133.

80. Penn, Up Funnel, p. 125.



detail: "Leading stoker Grant, said to be a bigamist, an ox-eyed man smothered in hair . . . ." <sup>81</sup> The important elements are the plots and these maintain a particular atmosphere. They demonstrate the good humour existing between the men, and the efficiency and self-confidence of Pyecroft and Hinchcliffe; "The Bonds of Discipline" illustrates the esprit de corps existing among a ship's company and indeed celebrates communal events and activities: the squee-jee band, gunnery competitions, and football matches. <sup>82</sup>

"Their Lawful Occasions" is one of two stories set at sea (the other is "The Bonds of Discipline") and the more realistic of the two. There are parts of the plot which could be regarded as improbable: the use of paint stencils in the "attack" upon the cruisers; and the very idea of a small torpedo-boat "sinking" two cruisers (up to 1900 the rules of manoeuvres stipulated that no ship could sink a larger). <sup>83</sup> Nevertheless the basic idea is plausible within the terms of the majority of readers' experience. Torpedo-boat . 267, sails from Weymouth to Torbay on manoeuvres and "sinks" two opposing cruisers lying at anchor in the bay. There is plenty of purely nautical detail: the description of the journey, conditions on board ship, the difficulties of navigation, the meeting with the Brixham trawler, and the general description of being at sea in a small craft on a foggy night. The actual reading of the story, however, is quite difficult, because a basically simple plot is presented from the point of view of somebody (the narrator) who is confused as to what is actually happening. The ultimate effect is to make the reader conscious of the complexity of Naval life. This effect is particularly evident in three episodes: the circumstances of the narrator's enlistment;

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81. TD, p. 129.

82. TD, p. 51.

83. For this and other rules see the Times, 1 October 1901, p. 5.

the meeting with the Cornish trawler, Agatha; and the attack upon the cruisers.<sup>84</sup>

The narrator of "Their Lawful Occasions" is a Naval correspondent who travels to Portland to join the annual manoeuvres as a guest of Blue Fleet; however, he is delayed, and when he arrives, Portland is occupied by the opposing Red Fleet, and Blue Fleet is at sea. He accepts the offer of a berth with Red Fleet and travels to Weymouth to collect his kit. In a chemist's in Weymouth he meets Pyecroft - disguised - who persuades him to rejoin Blue Fleet and 267.<sup>85</sup> This is complicated enough but further confusion is spread when Pyecroft explains why 267 is not at sea with Blue Fleet. The reason is simple: 267 had broken down and the Admiral had reprimanded Moorshed, her commander, and dismissed his ship from the manoeuvres. Pyecroft's explanation,<sup>86</sup> however, is approximately three hundred words long and contains a substantial amount of sailorese and digression. Once he has explained this he launches into a similar explanation<sup>87</sup> of exactly how 267 is planning to attend the manoeuvres. Once again the explanation is simple but is rendered in a complex fashion: 267 is to be disguised as a Red Fleet destroyer and is to attack two Red Fleet destroyers delayed by engine defects in Torbay.

Even if the reader manages to decipher the plot to the point where 267 leaves Weymouth, in order to travel West across the bay to Torbay, there are further difficulties. On the way she collides with a trawler, Agatha, to whom they offer a tow to Brixham which is South of Torbay.

84. TD, pp. 105-112, 131-136, and 137-148.

85. TD, pp. 106-108.

86. TD, pp. 109-110.

87. TD, pp. 114-115.

The Agatha is in fact being deceived and when she realises this<sup>88</sup> there are long negotiations conducted upon the one side by Moorshed and Pyecroft and on the other by the trawler-men (who speak in broad Cornish). It later transpires that 267 wants the trawler as a cover when they reach Torbay.

The attack upon the two cruisers is similarly confusing. Obviously a torpedo-boat on manoeuvres cannot fire torpedoes but the reader is given little guidance as to what substitute is being used. A dinghy is launched close to the cruisers and the narrator accompanies the seamen as they row towards them. The only clue given to what is happening is the narrator's reference to the smell of wet paint and a "raspy sound" as the seamen work.<sup>89</sup> Pyecroft speaks knowingly of "vaccination"<sup>90</sup> but it is not until much later that the episode is explained: the sides of the cruiser have been stencilled with Moorshed's initials.

One can see what Kipling's aims are. First, he has engineered a climax which would surprise even a Navy reader who would expect the cruisers to be "attacked" by the burning of a blue colson light. Secondly, he has written a celebration of the camaraderie of the men of the service and a justification of youthful high spirits and energy. Thirdly, the story has humorous elements: Pyecroft's sailorese, his ridiculous disguise in the chemist's shop,<sup>91</sup> his acid comment on the abilities of admirals, and the outrageously broad Cornish of the trawler-men. Finally, he has set the narrator up as a man not only acquainted with the Navy but party to special goings-on. As a special correspondent he has not seen the manoeuvres from the decks of a large cruiser and repeated the

88. TD, p. 134.

89. TD, p. 140.

90. TD, p. 139.

91. TD, pp. 106-107.



official accounts of the action in his reports, but has seen something of the life beneath the official gloss: the lower-deck view of admirals and the poor mechanical condition of some ships. The story is, however, unsatisfactory. The Naval expert can only be disappointed that so little is seen and heard of the lower-deck and the general reader is discouraged by the obscurity of the narrative presentation.

## VI

Kipling is a great humorous short-story writer in his own right.<sup>92</sup> Service life offers a potentially rewarding environment for a humorist like Kipling, who specialises in disorder and chaos. The disciplined nature of the life with its readymade set of rules was an ideal environment, and the very idea of manoeuvres, for example, which were a sort of adult game, provided an opportunity for deception, disguise, one-upmanship, and high spirits. In "The Bonds of Discipline" the humour is effective because the normal rules and regulations of the service are subverted. The spy, Antonio, has been a lieutenant in the French Navy and the men of the Archimandrite seize the opportunity to get their "revenge" on a member of the officer class:

'an' 'Op got in one sixteen-inch kick which 'oisted  
'im /Antonio/ all up the ladder. 'Op ain't really  
vindictive, an' 'e's fond of the French, especially  
the women, but his chances o' kicking lootenants  
was like the cartridge - reduced to a minimum.' 93

The all-male service society, high-spirited and unselfconscious, is a good medium for practical jokes and impossible schemes, and Kipling is known to have enjoyed the lighter side of mess life.<sup>94</sup> At the same

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92. See C.A. Bodelsen, Aspects of Kipling's Art, Manchester University Press (1964) (referred to below as: Bodelsen, Kipling's Art).

93. TD, p. 71.

94. See Admiral Sir Henry Pelly, 300,000 Sea Miles, London (1938), p. 58. (Pelly was the First Lieutenant of the Pelorus during Kipling's visits in 1897 and 1898.) See also Kipling's own description of "one of the most comprehensive rags he had ever seen" (SOM, p. 96).

time he took a serious view of the Navy and the point of "The Bonds of Discipline" and "The Horse Marines" (1910) is that the true test of discipline is the ability to be undisciplined at the appropriate time.

Kipling's humour also follows the pattern of the nautical metaphor applied to the sailor in a situation dissociated from any specifically nautical context. At its simplest this is revealed in the language of the sailors. In "Mrs Bathurst", Pyecroft explains Vickery's nickname. He was known as "Click" because he wore a faulty pair of false teeth:

'Because of an ammunition hoist carryin' away,' said Pyecroft. 'And it carried away four of 'is teeth - on the lower port side, wasn't it, Pritch? . . . When he talked fast his false teeth used to click a little on the bed-plate. 'Ence, 'Click'. 95

Kipling's "Steam Tactics" is a sustained nautical metaphor. The narrator, Pyecroft, Hinchcliffe, and the narrator's chauffeur are accosted by a traffic policeman who maintains that they were speeding. The companions maintain otherwise and bundle him into their car and take him on a long journey; he is finally deposited in a safari park. The term "Steam tactics" is a Naval phrase used to describe "the manoeuvres needed to practise flag officers and captains in handling ships in a fleet when steam had superseded sail".<sup>96</sup> Like the ships in manoeuvres the narrator's steam car moves at speed in a bewildering (for the policeman) series of journeys. Every opportunity is used to introduce nautical language and terminology. The right is referred to as "starboard" and a stationary cart as, "'Cart at anchor on port bow'".<sup>97</sup>

One might think, because of W. Clark Russell's strictures, that such metaphorical extension would be frowned on by sailors. The collection of Naval short stories from The Bluejacket, Told at One Bell,

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95. TD, p. 347.

96. Reader's Guide, iv, 1757.

97. TD, p. 185.

however, contains a narrative by an anonymous sailor which conforms more strongly to the tradition. The tale, "Wiggie is rated a 'Jimmy the One'",<sup>98</sup> concerns a sailor, Wiggie, who appears in a number of narratives. His nickname is a common one in the Navy and is usually applied to a sailor with a good crop of hair. A "Jimmy the One" is a first lieutenant. Wiggie takes a friend to his home in a small village. They decide to restock the house with coal and to do it in true Navy fashion. A "lighter" (horse cart) is brought "alongside" the house and, with members of his family detailed off as sailors, the coal is winched through an upstairs window as though a cruiser were being refuelled. Although unimportant from a literary point of view, it provides evidence that the idea of sailors continuing to act and speak in a nautical fashion on land was something of a popular convention; indeed there are other stories in this tradition among the Told at One Bell collection.<sup>99</sup> Strangely enough very few of these narratives deal with sailors at sea, and the majority are about service life: quarrels with the ship's police, or sailors in scrapes ashore.

## VII

In the 1890's and early 1900's sea fiction was employed, as we have seen, to make the public aware of the dangers of invasion from abroad. "Taffrail"<sup>100</sup> and "Bartimeus" used Naval fiction as a means of demonstrating the esprit de corps extant in the Navy and evidence of the justice inherent in Naval discipline. They both stressed the

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98. Told at One Bell (2nd Series), pp. 95-102.

99. e.g., "The Naval Mounted 'Orse", Told at One Bell (2nd Series), pp. 159-164.

100. Pseudonym for Captain Henry Taprell Dorling, D.S.O., R.N. (Retd.), (1883-1968). A serving officer from 1897 to 1929 he wrote fiction and non-fiction about the sea. One of his early novels, Pincher Martin, O.D. A Story of the Inner Life of the Royal Navy (1916), contains valuable material on lower-deck life in the service, despite its tendency to idealise both the men and the Navy.



place of tradition in Naval life. On the other hand, certain stories in Told at One Bell are critical of Naval discipline and the victualling system;<sup>101</sup> this is to be expected of a magazine edited by a noted lower-deck reformer. Outside the realms of the Royal Navy W. Clark Russell, like R.H. Dana before him, used sea fiction as a means of highlighting the plight of the seaman in an industry where exploitation was widespread.<sup>102</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, to find material in "Their Lawful Occasions", "The Bonds of Discipline", and "A Tour of Inspection", which is critical of the Navy.

The early years of the twentieth century saw Kipling involved in a number of public issues. During the South African war he published his poem "The Islanders" (1902) which caused something of a row because it was a strong plea for conscription. Conscription is also a theme in "The Army of a Dream" and Kipling was eager enough for its message to be fully understood that he first published it in the Morning Post<sup>103</sup> and then, as we have seen, he wrote two explanatory letters to the national press.<sup>104</sup> The letter in The Navy League Journal is the longer of the two (bibliographies make no distinction between them) and it is essential reading for any student of Kipling's ideas and of "The Army of a Dream" in particular. It advocates the total assimilation of military life into the community. His actions were not limited to this single theme; in October 1901 he wrote a letter to the Spectator on the appointment of Generals Buller and Wood to command the First and Second Army Corps. He considered their appointment as a mistake and did not mince his words. He argued

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101. See, in particular, "The Case of the 13.6", Told at One Bell, 2nd Series, pp. 147-155, which deals with discipline, and includes a short digression (p. 152) on the subject of poor food in the Navy.

102. See above p. 8.

103. The Morning Post, 15, 16, 17, 18 June 1904.

104. See above p. 181 n. 21.

that the nation had a right to an army handled "by fit and proven leaders", he continued:

The step suggests a revival of certain impenitent and unlearned methods which they have been many times assured the nation has abandoned forever. It seems to indicate that, in spite of the pledges of the Government, the whole Army machine is to be hauled back as soon as may be to the old ruts of impotence, pretence, and collapse. 105

Later in the decade he became more politically active: "From 1909 until 1914 he threw himself into party activity on the extreme right wing".<sup>106</sup>

Given Kipling's public activity during the period 1900 to 1914 it seems fair to assume that he was ready to comment publicly on service - Army or Navy - matters and that, in view of "The Army of a Dream" and his political poems, he was ready to involve his fiction. It is true that his letter to The Navy League Journal advocates trusting the admirals on certain matters - "faulty boilers, defective gun-sights . . . ." <sup>107</sup> - but this is by way of a plea that the public should concern itself with large issues such as conscription and the unification of the Army and Navy into one force.

The "letter" he wrote to Pyecroft as a preface to "Steam Tactics", the first published Pyecroft story, has already been referred to.<sup>108</sup>

Its main purpose seems to have been to create the idea of the stories offering an inside view of the Navy but other issues are involved.

There are a number of sizeable hints, for example, that Kipling had had problems in getting his stories into print: "Of course, I ought to have stuck to what I knew would go down quietly . . . ." <sup>109</sup> Again this

105. Spectator, 5 October 1901, p. 476.

106. Carrington, Rudyard Kipling, p. 404.

107. "The Navy and Army of the Future", p. 218.

108. See above p. 195.

109. "Steam Tactics", Windsor Magazine, p. 3.

may have been an attempt to create a realistic atmosphere, although it has also been argued that the letter serves to explain why "Steam Tactics" appeared in The Windsor Magazine before "The Bonds of Discipline", in which Pyecroft and the narrator meet for the first time.<sup>110</sup> This is a reasonable argument because the letter does not appear in Traffics and Discoveries where the stories occur in the correct, chronological order. It is strange though that of the three stories containing material critical of the Navy, two, "The Bonds of Discipline" and "Their Lawful Occasions", are mentioned as posing problems that call for delay:

P.S. - Since writing the above there has been a hitch about the Antonio tale and the proceedings of No. 267; it being freely alleged that Antonio won't go down, because it is a bit too thick (this shows how much people know), and 267 would be subversive to discipline, as well as likely to annoy admirals. 111

It is impossible to divine the truth; it hardly seems likely that a publisher would refuse (and then accept) "The Bonds of Discipline" as being too far-fetched - "a bit too thick". The only material that could be objected to is the criticism of the Navy, and, significantly, the third tale, "A Tour of Inspection" was not collected. The letter's effect is to create an atmosphere of subterfuge and deception - only added to by his promise that Pyecroft and Hinchcliffe's real names and ranks would remain hidden. In the paragraph before the postscript announcing the delay over the two stories Kipling suggests that the stories are more than farces.

Hence I am writing freely, and though accused of extravaganzas by some people, can rest confident that there is much more in these literary efforts of mine than meets the casual eye. 112

He is surely referring to the material that they contain which is critical of the Navy.

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110. Reader's Guide, i, 21.

111. "Steam Tactics", Windsor Magazine, p. 3.

112. "Steam Tactics", Windsor Magazine, p. 3.



One important grievance of the lower-deck, and one likely to cause problems of a serious nature, was status and promotion.<sup>113</sup> The effect of the poor status of engineers was, as we have seen, to lower recruiting figures. In "A Tour of Inspection" Pyecroft and the narrator discuss,

the new naval reforms. Pyecroft's criticisms would have been worth votes to any Government. He desired what he called "a free gangway from the lower deck to the admiral's stern walk" - the career open to the talents.

"An' they'd better begin now," he concluded, "for to this complexion will it come at last, 'Oratio. Three weeks after war breaks out, the painstakin' and meritorious admirals will have collapsed . . . takin' with them seventy-five per cent of the ambitious but aged captains. 114

The "career open to talents" was Kipling's own platform; he uses the phrase and advocates the scheme in his letter to The Navy League Journal.<sup>115</sup> Pyecroft was, however, more optimistic, he predicted "petty an' warrant officers" commanding cruisers.<sup>116</sup> "A Tour of Inspection" itself records one of Pyecroft's triumphs. As a result of his intelligence, genius for handling men, and natural qualities of leadership he is mistakenly thought to be a high ranking Admiralty inspector visiting some important cement works. He manages to avert a crisis involving a barge full of dynamite. The story neatly proves the need for a "career open to talents"; unfortunately it is a land story. Pyecroft is, as we have seen, very critical of admirals in "Their Lawful Occasions".<sup>117</sup>

113. Winton, Victorian Navy, pp. 224-226.

114. "A Tour of Inspection", Windsor Magazine, p. 3.

115. "The Navy and Army of the Future", p. 218.

116. "A Tour", Windsor Magazine, p. 3.

117. See above p. 184 ; TD, p. 108; and "A Tour", Windsor Magazine, p. 3.

"Their Lawful Occasions" is openly critical of the Navy. Pyecroft once again is the natural leader and effective commander of 267 (formally commanded by the inexperienced Moorshed). The most significant aspect of the story, however, is that the plot publicises, and indeed grows out of, the poor condition of the nation's ships. 267 is dismissed from the manoeuvres because of a breakdown. Her prey, the two cruisers berthed in Torbay, are also victims of mechanical failure. They are in Torbay, an unsuitable place, vulnerable to attack, because the Admiralty wants to conceal their sad state of disrepair from the newspapers and the public.<sup>118</sup> Kipling was in fact drawing upon an actual state of affairs for his material; the state of the Reserve fleet had become something of a national scandal at this time and Fisher, as First Sea Lord, had made an attempt to reduce the breakdown rate in the Navy.<sup>119</sup>

"The Bonds of Discipline" is a more subtle attempt to highlight the deficiencies of the Navy. The crew's gulling of Antonio, the spy, is ostensibly an attempt to deceive him into believing that the service was inefficient, and barbarous in its discipline.<sup>120</sup> Many of the deceptions are outrageous, but a number bear an interesting correspondence to the faults of the British Navy at the time. At one point the Captain orders a gun drill but the shells have had their charges reduced so that "the shell trundled out maybe fifty feet an' dropped into the deep Atlantic".<sup>121</sup> Pyecroft draws attention to this incident at the close of the story:

'Well, I don't see anything comical - greatly - except here an' there. Specially about those redooiced

118. TD, p. 123.

119. See Marder, Road to War, pp. 9-10.

120. Many believe that it was. Marder, Road to War, p. 9, comments: "Discipline was based on the St Vincent principle that it must rest on fear and that fear was to be instilled by fierce punishment." It is difficult to know whether Kipling would have carried his criticism this far.

121. TD, p. 64.

charges in the guns. Do you see anything funny  
in it?' 122

The remark refers to the practice of reducing charges during firing practice so as to preserve the appearance of a ship's paintwork - the smoke from the guns obviously dirtied it. It was not unknown for ammunition to be thrown overboard with the same object in view.<sup>123</sup>

### VIII

This final section aims to draw attention to Kipling's use of the Royal Navy as an institution. Conrad was also to create what I called earlier institutional fiction<sup>124</sup> out of his Merchant Service material and the defining characteristics are evidenced in each writer's work. The plots are made out of institutional preoccupations: the promotion ambitions of the characters; the idea of a clear code of conduct; the formal procedures of the court martial or its equivalent; and the effect of institutional life upon the individual. Kipling's two sailors, Pyecroft and Hinchcliffe, are clearly delineated as men who are wedded to the Royal Navy and devoted to its causes. Kipling's Army stories belong to a similar type of fiction, though they are of a more serious nature and have been judged far more successful. The majority of the Navy stories, notwithstanding their serious aspects, are farces, whereas the Army narratives are complex studies portraying the private soldier in relation to the boredom and injustice of Army life. Mulvaney and his companions enjoy little permanent success and are well acquainted with personal failure and frustration in their military careers. It is significant, therefore, that the one completely serious Navy story, "Mrs Bathurst", should share these preoccupations with the Army stories.

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122. TD, p. 73.

123. See Marder, Road to War, pp. 8-9, and Yexley, Inner Life, pp. 37-39 and 306-312.

124. See above p. 23.



"Mrs Bathurst" is the best of the Navy stories. An accidental meeting between a group of men leads to a discussion about desertion in general and, more particularly, of the desertion of a Warrant Officer called Vickery who had quit his ship. His defection was surprising because he had only eighteen months to serve before he collected his pension.<sup>125</sup> The four men who discuss Vickery are Pyecroft, his friend Pritchard, a sergeant in the Marines, an author-figure, and his friend, Hooper, of the railways. The meeting takes place in a railway wagon on a coastal siding near Simonstown. Each man knows something of Vickery's story but no one knows everything; the story is pieced together at the meeting. This was a technique Kipling had used earlier in "The Bonds of Discipline" where Pyecroft's version of the events on board the Archimandrite is supplemented by Antonio's written account.

Pritchard supplies most of the information on Mrs Bathurst, a widow who ran an hotel for "warrants and non-coms" close to Auckland, New Zealand.<sup>126</sup> Pritchard is very concerned to show that she was a wonderful woman; friendly and trusting, that she had been a universal favourite of the servicemen.<sup>127</sup> Pyecroft, who knew of her, had served in the same ship as Vickery, the Hierophant, four months previous to the meeting in the siding. He had spent a Christmas with Vickery in Cape Town on shore leave. Vickery had taken him on five successive nights to see a cinematograph show and then indulged in mammoth drinking bouts.<sup>128</sup> It gradually transpired that Vickery had fallen in love with Mrs Bathurst and that he went to the show only to see a clip of Mrs Bathurst arriving at Paddington station in London.<sup>129</sup> Her movements are a mystery to

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125. TD, p. 345.

126. TD, p. 349. "Non-Coms" are Non-Commissioned Officers.

127. TD, pp. 349-352.

128. TD, p. 358.

129. TD, p. 358.

everybody - especially to the sailors in the audience<sup>130</sup> - but Vickery maintained that she was looking for him and even hinted that she was in love with him.<sup>131</sup> The show, which was attached to a circus, had, however, to leave town and Pyecroft anticipates trouble from Vickery who has become addicted to the film. Nevertheless Vickery obtained permission from the captain of the Hierophant to go on Naval business to Bloemfontein<sup>132</sup> - this would enable him to see the show - but he is not seen again. Hooper, who has been on duty up-country, adds a final twist: he has found the remains of Vickery and another person alongside a railway line - both apparently struck by lightning<sup>133</sup> It is not said whether the second person is Mrs Bathurst.

The story is shrouded in mystery. No one knows why Vickery was allowed to travel up-country, although, after the interview, the captain had emerged wearing his "court martial" face.<sup>134</sup> Mrs Bathurst's reasons for being in London are unknown. Some critics feel that the narrative offers no answers because Kipling took his careful pruning, described in Something of Myself, too far and left the reader with inadequate clues.<sup>135</sup> The story has had many interpretations but nobody has yet attempted to link its theme with the other service stories.

It is one of the merits of the Army stories that soldiers were realistically portrayed free of sentimentality and idealisation. "Mrs Bathurst" comes close to doing this for the Navy. Pyecroft,

130. See TD, p. 356: "'Christ! there's Mrs B.!'"

131. TD, p. 359: "'Yes! lookin' for me Vickery!' he said, an' he went on very softly an' as you might say affectionately'".

132. TD, pp. 360-361.

133. TD, p. 364.

134. TD, p. 360.

135. Lewis, "Kipling's World", p. 100. On the other hand Elliot L. Gilbert, The Good Kipling, Manchester (1972) argues that "nothing essential is omitted" (p. 96).



Vickery, and the other sailors are shown, for example, to be hard drinkers and womanisers:

'Some women'll stay in a man's memory if they once walk down a street, but most of 'em you can live with a month on end, an' next commission you'd be put to it to certify whether they talked in their sleep or not, as one might say. 136

The Boy Niven episode,<sup>137</sup> in which a seaman called Niven persuaded Pyecroft, among others, to desert ship in British Columbia, gives Pyecroft a solid and realistic background. In the same fashion, Vickery and Pyecroft had nearly come to blows during their drinking bouts and during the narration in the railway carriage Pritchard is aggressively angry with Hooper.<sup>138</sup>

Into this background Kipling manages to introduce a romantic theme. Vickery's passion, and indeed Pritchard's idealisation, for Mrs Bathurst is completely plausible because they stem from the nature of the serviceman's life as Kipling observed and portrayed it. The story is packed with references to commissions or voyages taking the sailor from port to port. Vickery, like all sailors, could hardly have seen much of his wife; Pritchard saw Mrs Bathurst only twice in five years,<sup>139</sup> and the discussion of women in general emphasises the transitory nature of sailor romances. Mrs Bathurst, a woman who was not particularly attractive, was a favourite with the sailors because of her sex-appeal<sup>140</sup> and her consideration for them. She would have been a prize for any man but more especially for Vickery - an ugly man and something of a butt in the service.

Travel is in fact important in the story. The four men who reconstruct the tale only meet through a series of coincidences produced

136. TD, p. 352.

137. TD, pp. 343-344.

138. TD, pp. 347-348.

139. He saw her first in 1896 and returned in 1901 (TD, p. 350).

140. See Pyecroft's remarks p. 352.



by Navy and railway movements. When they do meet it is in passing - a fact emphasised by the condemned railway wagon they sit in. After Vickery had deserted he had stayed close to the railway and Inspector Hooper explains that this is a characteristic of all deserters,<sup>141</sup> but one might add that it is as though sailors cannot escape the dislocating effects of their chosen profession. In contrast, Mrs Bathurst was a personification of continuity. Her "blindish" look,<sup>142</sup> which is captured in the film, is a mark of her freedom from the entanglements of any one man; she had the same aspect for everyone. This explains why Pritchard is so ready to absolve her from any blame in the affair:

'You can say what you please, Pye, but you don't make me believe it was any of 'er fault. She wasn't that!' 143

Of course if she had become intimate with Vickery her charm would have been tarnished. In fact, when she appeared on the screen in the circus<sup>144</sup> it was against the background of a railway station; she had ceased to be a permanent fixture in the sailor's world. The sailors in the audience respond immediately: "'Christ! there's Mrs B!'"<sup>145</sup> The description of her walking,

'on and on till she melted out of the picture - like  
- like a shadow jumpin' over a candle . . . . 146

has been taken as indicative of her death;<sup>147</sup> certainly she had ceased to be a symbol of permanence and continuity.

141. TD, p. 346.

142. TD, p. 358.

143. TD, p. 349, and a similar remark later, p. 362.

144. TD, p. 356.

145. TD, p. 345.

146. TD, p. 356.

147. See Bodelsen, Kipling's Art, pp. 134-135.

Pritchard's and Pyecroft's responses to the mystery are interesting because, until the meeting, both have idealised her; nevertheless, once Vickery's death is revealed the situation is difficult for them because in one way she was responsible for Vickery's death: Vickery had been destroyed by her, albeit unwitting, sex-appeal. Pritchard is deeply affected:

Pritchard covered his face with his hands for a moment,  
like a child shutting out an ugliness. 148

Pyecroft evidently believes that Mrs Bathurst and Vickery were very close but one seems meant to deduce that she was completely oblivious to Vickery's passion. The epigraph attached to the story comes from a play called "Lyden's Irenius"<sup>149</sup> and includes the following lines:

she that dammed him to death knew not that she did  
it, or would have died ere she had done it. For  
she loved him. 150

This appears to imply that Mrs Bathurst was intimate with Vickery but an alternative gloss is that she loved - in a Platonic sense - all the men who frequented her hotel. The Boy Niven episode,<sup>151</sup> in which Pyecroft and his companions deserted a ship, suggests that Vickery's passion for her was a "wild-goose chase" - that she was unaware of it. In the Niven incident the deserters had been deceived by Niven who had told them, quite falsely, that he had an uncle running a farm in Newfoundland;<sup>152</sup> they had finished up travelling in circles before they were finally caught. Under the influence of his passion Vickery acts very similarly: he deserts the service; becomes virtually mad, "The man was a dumb lunatic";<sup>153</sup> and believes Mrs Bathurst is in love with him.

148. TD, p. 365.

149. A "fragment" written by Kipling. It has the same characters as his unfinished play Gow's Watch. See Reader's Guide, iv, 1780.

150. TD, p. 338.

151. TD, pp. 343-345.

152. TD, p. 344.

153. TD, p. 358.

Vickery's actions parody the effect of service life upon a man; he wanders the earth searching for some lasting relationship which will never exist for him. The inevitable proposition is that sailors do not form lasting relationships because of the nature of their life. This bleak idea is underpinned by a number of images suggesting sterility: the Niven episode; the condemned railway carriage in which the tale is told; the very sailorlike, aimless, wandering drinking bouts Pyecroft and Vickery indulge in; the death of Vickery's wife in childbirth;<sup>154</sup> and Pyecroft's description of Vickery's face, "'White and crumply . . . previous to birth as you might say'",<sup>155</sup> - just as his love is stillborn. At the same time the iron hand of the service is never forgotten: the deserters had been arrested and court martialled.<sup>156</sup> Vickery also was a man whose life had been blighted by the service and this is represented by his nickname, "Click". It will be remembered that he had lost his teeth in a service accident and, because his false teeth did not fit and he made clicking sounds when he spoke, he was nicknamed "Click",<sup>157</sup> humiliating enough for any man.

"Mrs Bathurst" develops out of a particular attitude to women forced on men by service life. It draws its imagery from the world of active service and the life of seamen ashore in foreign ports. It successfully captures the sense of male comradeship engendered by the services. The interpretation offered above discounts the possibility of Mrs Bathurst following, as she thought, Vickery to London or even, as some critics have it, to the veldt.<sup>158</sup> It is, on the contrary,

154. TD, p. 362.

155. TD, p. 355.

156. TD, p. 343.

157. See above p. 202.

158. See Reader's Guide, iv, 1806-1807.



important that Vickery is deluded in believing that she cares for him. However, whatever interpretation is put upon her motives and movements, the story still shows the destruction of a man through service life. It is a success because it portrays tough, unromantic, indeed sceptical, men realistically concerned about romantic love. This is no mean achievement.

The story is famous for its inconclusiveness: this may not be a weakness but a strength. If service life is the subject then this inconclusiveness is appropriate because, even more so than land life, that was the nature of service life. Each of the men present at the meeting has a piece of a jig-saw but his knowledge, like the final version, is not, in itself, total. Sailors, at that time living in an age of primitive communications, inhabited a world of fleeting glimpses and unfinished yarns. It is ironic that the one modern form of communication present in the story, the newsreel film, conveys a potent sense of the unfinished. In addition the captain of the Hierophant who possibly holds, with Mrs Bathurst, the final key to the affair, is cut off from his subordinates by his elevated status. In effect "Mrs Bathurst" recreates the impression which a sailor might receive of an incident and, like their life, it offers only a frustratingly incomplete perspective. In this case Stevenson was wrong, art had imitated life which was "monstrous, infinite, illogical, abrupt and poignant . . . ." <sup>159</sup>

## IX

Stevenson is not often compared with Kipling and yet Kipling admired Stevenson's work <sup>160</sup> and both had a genius for writing children's fiction. More importantly, they both managed to write serious adventure stories by employing romance techniques in conjunction with the use of realistic

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159. "A Humble Remonstrance", Pentland, ix, 166.

160. Carrington, Rudyard Kipling, p. 213.

surface detail. Kipling, of course, is the more highly respected of the two authors and it is probable that Stevenson's low critical standing - which has been only partly redressed in recent years - has obscured the manner in which they share like concerns: the dangerous undercurrents at work beneath civilisation; the strength of the ties which bind men in a common endeavour; and the loneliness of the human condition. Nevertheless there are good reasons for differentiating between their work and prime among these is Kipling's emphasis on institutional sea fiction and his interest in the hero as opposed to the adventurer.

Kipling and Conrad, as I have mentioned before, are united by their preoccupation with professional codes and the working life of institutions.<sup>161</sup> This is not to imply that their sea fiction has limited horizons: "Mrs Bathurst" may draw its subject matter and its imagery from the now distant world of the late Victorian Navy but its lessons are timeless. Conrad was to achieve a similar combination of the particular and the universal. Of course Kipling wrote less nautical fiction and in only three tales - "Bread Upon the Waters", "The Devil and the Deep Sea", and "Mrs Bathurst" - does he transcend the main difficulty - his limited knowledge of the sea and sailors - which beset his sea narratives. Conrad did not face this last disadvantage and he was to employ his nautical experience to greater effect.

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161. See above pp. 23-24.

**PART THREE : JOSEPH CONRAD**



## **CHAPTER ONE : Introduction**

### PART THREE : JOSEPH CONRAD

#### CHAPTER ONE : Introduction

##### I

Conrad is only infrequently considered as a writer of sea stories,<sup>1</sup> a state of affairs which would have obviously gratified him;<sup>2</sup> nevertheless, we should at least be aware of his position as the major British author of the form. His work confronts the same problems faced by Kipling and Stevenson during the period 1881 to 1917 and in many respects his response to these challenges was similar but he was also to produce fresh solutions and advances.

Conrad himself recognised many of the problems which have already been identified. It is plain, for example, that he had no wish to write adventure narratives in which the main purpose was to entertain the simple

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1. Only one full length study exists: C.F. Burgess, The Fellowship of the Craft : Conrad on Ships and Seamen and the Sea, Port Washington N.Y. (1976) (referred to below as: Burgess, Fellowship of the Craft). Burgess's purpose is different from my own; his study attempts "to determine exactly what Conrad thought [and] felt about the sea, about ships, about men who go to sea and about the subtle, unspoken and unseen tie which binds all worthy seamen in what Conrad calls 'the fellowship of the craft'" (p. xi). It can be almost described as a catalogue of Conrad's opinions and, as such, is not particularly concerned with the interpretation of the fiction or the relations of Conrad's nautical characterisation and knowledge to the impact of the tales.

2. See above p. 2.

responses of excitement and fear. In 1896, when wrestling with the business of making The Rescue a serious novel, he wrote to Edward Garnett<sup>3</sup> about the options facing him:

You see I must justify - give a motive - to my yacht people . . . . I must do that - or have a Clark Russell puppet show which would be worse than starvation. 4

I have already stressed his concern with "Truth" as opposed to "Actuality"<sup>5</sup> but it is pertinent at this juncture to stress the point once again. Writing of The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' (1897),<sup>6</sup> one of his early sea stories, he claimed, "I tried to get through the details at the essence of life".<sup>7</sup>

At the same time he was very much aware of the need for sea fiction, whether serious or trivial, to be dramatic and colourful, and the fact that The Nigger only became exciting towards the latter half obviously worried him.<sup>8</sup> While it was being serialised in the New Review he read Henry James's The Spoils of Poynton (1897). His comments reveal his concern that serious fiction should entertain:

It's just a trifle too long. Personally I don't complain as you may imagine, but I imagine with pain the man in the street trying to read it! 9

Like Stevenson's maritime narratives his own are invariably exciting and, indeed, his ideas on this matter recall Stevenson's "A Humble Remonstrance"

3. Reader for the publishers T. Fisher Unwin. For his career see: Carolyn Heilbrun, The Garnett Family, London (1961), pp. 65-162.

4. Letters from Joseph Conrad 1895-1924, ed., Edward Garnett, Indianapolis (1928), p. 63 (referred to below as: Garnett, Letters).

5. See above p. 11.

6. In the text below referred to as: The Nigger.

7. G. Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad : Life and Letters, 2 vols., London (1927), i, 200 (referred to below as: Aubry, Life and Letters).

8. See Aubry, Life and Letters, i, 201.

9. See Garnett, Letters, p. 89.



(1884).<sup>10</sup> The consequences for the development of Conrad's sea fiction are important: at first he turned towards the exotic and wrote stories of Malayan tribes and European adventurers; later he used the dramatic events of the Cutty Sark<sup>11</sup> and Jeddah affairs.<sup>12</sup> He often reminds us that the seaman's life was frequently a boring and inconsequential one,<sup>13</sup> and this may have delayed his debut as a sea-story writer. On the lack of incident in The Nigger he wrote (to Edward Garnett):

well - it's life. The incomplete joy, the incomplete sorrow, the incomplete rascality or heroism - the incomplete suffering. Events crowd and push and nothing happens. You know what I mean. The opportunities do not last long enough. Unless in a boy's book of adventures. Mine were never finished. They fizzled out before I had a chance to do more than another man would.      14

The reference to the boy's book of adventures is interesting; it is as though Conrad felt that such fiction made his own experiences seem more mundane than they actually were. This feeling must have increased as

10. See above p. 46.

11. See Norman Sherry, Conrad's Eastern World, Cambridge (1966), pp. 253-269 (referred to below as: Sherry, Eastern World). Professor Sherry has thoroughly investigated the factual basis of Conrad's tales. In "The Secret Sharer" Conrad used his knowledge, obtained through "gossip and newspaper reports" (Sherry, Eastern World, p. 253), of an actual murder on the famous clipper Cutty Sark in September 1880 as the bare bones of his plot. There is an account of the murder in: Basil Lubbock, The Log of the 'Cutty Sark', Glasgow (1925), pp.191-197 (referred to below as: Lubbock, Cutty Sark).

12. See Sherry, Eastern World, pp. 41-65 and 299-311. The Jeddah was abandoned by her white officers also in September 1880, leaving 1,000 pilgrims on board. One of the officers, A.P. Williams, would appear, from Sherry's researches, to be the basis of the character Jim, in Lord Jim (referred to below as: LJ).

13. See "Author's Note" to Within the Tides, pp. vii-viii; and Garnett, Letters, p. 15.

14. Garnett, Letters, p. 80. Confirmation of the frequently boring life led by sailors can be gained by reading the diary of a late nineteenth century officer: see Jack Churchouse, "The Diary of a Second Mate", Mariner's Mirror, 60 (1974), 423-430.

his own fiction revealed itself as unpopular with the larger reading public.<sup>15</sup>

Conrad also met and solved problems of a more technical nature in pursuit of his desire to write serious sea fiction. Comment has already been made on Kipling's and Stevenson's liking for dramatised narrators,<sup>16</sup> and Stevenson's use of a broken time-scheme in The Wrecker (1892).<sup>17</sup> Conrad was to apply these devices far more extensively than either of his contemporaries, indeed his sea fiction can be divided on the basis of his use and development of these techniques. He employs the simplest type of broken time-scheme, a first-person narrator looking back on an earlier period of his life, which he narrates in an unbroken and chronologically united sequence of events, in "Youth" (1898),<sup>18</sup> "The Secret Sharer" (1910) and The Shadow Line (1917). Other stories, notably "The End of the Tether" (1902), Lord Jim (1900) and Chance (1913), use more complex broken time-schemes incorporating "flashbacks" which swing the narrative from past to present quite frequently. "Falk" (1903), like The Wrecker, stands between these two types because the narrative is split into two: first, a "present-time" sequence of events, involving a problem; second a remembered narrative which solves the problem set up in the first half of the tale. His narrators also fall into various types. The group of first-person narratives is particularly interesting because the first-person perspective combined with a simple time-scheme

15. For the critical and popular reception of Conrad's work see Norman Sherry, Conrad : The Critical Heritage, London (1973) (referred to below as: Sherry, Critical Heritage). He only became a "popular" author with the publication of Chance in 1913 (see Sherry, Critical Heritage, p. 1).

16. See above pp. 56, 96, 121, 127-128, 130-131, and 149.

17. See above p. 96.

18. It seems reasonable to include "Youth" in this category despite a number of short references to "present" time during Marlow's narrative.



ensures that suspense is maintained; the group may be linked to the similarly dramatic omnisciently-narrated "Typhoon" (1902). Conrad was probably encouraged to conceive his stories in this manner not only by his desire to entertain his readership but also by Kipling's example. He admired Kipling's work - "Those masterpieces of our time"<sup>19</sup> - and could not fail to be impressed by a writer who rendered "Truth" as well as any man living.<sup>20</sup> Conrad once called his contemporary's stories "ebauches",<sup>21</sup> or rough sketches, and the term adequately describes the direct force of much of Kipling's work. On the other hand he may also have learnt from the narrative-sophistications of the sea stories in Many Inventions (1893) and The Day's Work (1898).<sup>22</sup>

Conrad's interest in recreating the ambiguities of human conduct and the complexities of human relationships were doubtless the major influence on his use of broken time-schemes and dramatised narrators. His broken time-schemes mean that we view his narratives very much as we reflect upon experience ourselves, and his narrators appear not as omniscient presences who see everything but as human beings with the accompanying limitations. On the other hand, Kipling, as we have seen, employs narrators to give, among other things, an air of nautical veracity to his sea stories; Stevenson uses a broken time-scheme and dual narrators in The Wrecker to make his story "inhere in life".<sup>23</sup> Doubtless

19. Joseph Conrad's Letters to R.B. Cunninghame Graham, ed., C.T. Watts, Cambridge (1969), p. 48 (referred to below as: Watts, Letters).

20. Watts, Letters, p. 45.

21. Watts, Letters, p. 48.

22. Given his high opinion of Kipling's work it would appear obvious that Conrad would have read these two collections; nevertheless he incorrectly describes The Day's Work as a novel in a letter of 1898 (Aubry, Life and Letters, i, 264).

23. Pentland, xii, 459 and above p. 79.



there is much of both motives behind the form of Conrad's fiction, but, given his desire to write dramatic stories, he had to be careful with the sophistication of his narrative techniques. Stevenson had solved the problem, of combining serious themes and melodramatic subject-matter, in The Wrecker by making it into a "police novel"<sup>24</sup> in which the mystery of the Flying Scud's disappearance was not solved until the final chapters, and "Falk" also displays this technique. Nevertheless Conrad's main method of reducing the melodramatic potential of his subject-matter is his technique of building up a realistic picture of the Merchant Service and its officers. The result is that the mundane - the routine work, the narrow-minded ambitions of the officers and men - balances the extraordinary - cannibalism in "Falk", murder in "The Secret Sharer", and desertion in Lord Jim.

The following chapters are an attempt to see Conrad's sea narratives within the terms laid down in the General Introduction. First, the serious themes underlying his nautical fiction have been investigated. This is obviously a huge undertaking and it has been found necessary to concentrate discussion on those issues which relate most directly to maritime fiction. Thus his treatment of the theme of manliness (the subject of Chapter Three) strikes at the very heart of the conventional hero of the nautical-adventure tale as well as directly relating to the work of Kipling and Stevenson. Furthermore, the theme provides additional material for the subject of Chapter Two, "Conrad's Officers" which deals with the second objective of the thesis: the examination of the sailor in sea fiction. It demonstrates the development of Conrad's skill in portraying his major sailor-characters as fully-realised human beings in a complex working environment. In addition, it investigates Conrad's and Kipling's common interest in the career of professional sailor.

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24. Pentland, xii, 459.

Chapters Four and Five are primarily studies in Conrad's technique. Chapter Four describes the contribution which the ships, the life, and the work of the Merchant Service play in sustaining the characterisation, drama, and ideas extant in his sea fiction. Chapter Five examines a number of the romance stories and elements in narratives such as "To-morrow" (1902), "Freya of the Seven Isles" (1912), and "A Smile of Fortune" (1911).

The present chapter sets out to demonstrate (albeit briefly) the extent of Conrad's sea experience, and<sup>to</sup> indicate the manner in which his career at sea fostered his imagination. In addition the chapter establishes the main periods in which he was engaged upon writing sea narratives and, furthermore, attempts an explanation of why a man, whose references to the sea story were, more often than not, deprecatory, should expend so much energy in becoming a master of the form.

## II

Conrad's sea years, as one of his biographers calls them,<sup>25</sup> have been extensively documented.<sup>26</sup> We know the ships he sailed in and the dates he signed-on and was paid-off. More significantly, the autobiographical and historical basis of his sea fiction has been exhaustively investigated. As this is in stark contrast to our present knowledge of Kipling's and Stevenson's use of their nautical experiences and gleanings my treatment of this aspect of his sea fiction is much more brief.

Conrad was very much a career officer and worked his way up the promotion ladder: he passed his second mate's examinations in 1880, first mate's in 1884, and master's in 1886.<sup>27</sup> If this profession did

25. Jerry Allen, The Sea Years of Joseph Conrad, London (1965) (referred to below as: Allen, Sea Years).

26. See Allen, Sea Years and Sherry, Eastern World. Sherry, in particular, has examined the way in which Conrad's experiences fuelled his imaginative fiction.

27. See Jocelyn Baines, Joseph Conrad, London (1960), pp. 64, 78, and 83 (referred to below as: Baines, Conrad).



not give him the financial security he always appeared to have wanted,<sup>28</sup> then it did bring him a sense of purpose with which to combat his pessimism, and the sense of belonging and brotherhood which is celebrated in his sea fiction. The type of skills sought by his seamen and exercised in their commands also grow from his own career as an officer; his master's struggle with the larger problems of shiphandling and the conflicts between superior and subordinate. Much of this type of work may appear glamorous to the uninformed reader but, like his fellow officers, Conrad faced more mundane and humiliating obstacles to his ambitions. In June, 1880, after passing his second mate's examinations he had to search for three months before finding a berth,<sup>29</sup> and, in 1891, he joined the Torrens as chief mate although he was a qualified master and had earlier commanded the Otago.<sup>30</sup>

The career pre-occupations of the serving officer are indeed present in his sea fiction. His spell of unemployment in 1880 is, for example, reflected in the early pages of Chance.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, he uses the contrast between the elation of passing examinations and the subsequent realisation that examinations do not necessarily bring work, as representative of the difference between a young man's dreams and the lessons of experience.<sup>32</sup> In a more general fashion these preoccupations give his sea fiction a particular colour; for example, it is a characteristic of his chief mates that they are jealous of their superiors and even when they are not - as in the case of Baker, chief mate of the Narcissus - they are deeply disappointed at their failure "to get on".<sup>33</sup>

28. He was nearly always short of money; see Baines, Conrad, pp. 212, 220, 268, 286, 289, 316, 320, 347, and 359.

29. Baines, Conrad, p. 66.

30. Baines, Conrad, p. 127.

31. Baines, Conrad, pp. 64-65 and Chance, pp. 6-7.

32. See Chance, p. 6 (referred to below as C).

33. The Nigger of the 'Narcissus', p. 167 (referred to below as: NN).



It is important, therefore, to understand the extent to which Conrad fashioned for use in his fiction his memories of the men and the Merchant Service he knew in his years at sea. The ships' companies he describes are probably more harmonious than was usual at the time and he seems to have played down much of the endemic violence of the fore-castle.<sup>34</sup> The larger ports of the Western world were noted at the end of the nineteenth century for vice and criminal activity,<sup>35</sup> but he scarcely touches upon the subject. It must be said also that his own emphasis on a service ethos of professionalism and obedience to duty is, to a certain extent, idealised and ignores his own complaints about the professional and personal faults of some of the masters he sailed under; he called Monroe, master of the Europa, in which he sailed in 1879, a "mad man",<sup>36</sup> and he left the Riversdale in 1884 after a quarrel with the master.<sup>37</sup> This is not to say that there are not weak and unprofessional masters and mates among his fictional portraits but that the emphasis is upon men who struggle for excellence.

Conrad's stories generally concentrate on particular periods of his life: Norman Sherry, for example, has demonstrated the homogeneity of his Eastern novels and short stories.<sup>38</sup> Of course he draws piecemeal from all aspects of his years at sea: "To-morrow" uses his early coasting

34. This is plain from factual accounts of life at sea; see e.g., David Bone, The Brassbounder, London (1910), and Lubbock, Cutty Sark (in particular Chapter Five, "A Hell Ship Voyage", pp.179-244).

35. See Stan Hugill, Sailortown, London (1967). Hugill traces the growth of "sailortowns" (or those areas of coastal cities frequented by sailors).

36. See Conrad's Polish Background : Letters to and from Polish Friends, ed., Zdzislaw Najder, London (1964), p. 62 (referred to below as: Najder, Polish Background).

37. See Allen, Sea Years, pp. 161-163.

38. See Sherry, Eastern World.

experiences with the Skimmer of the Seas;<sup>39</sup> and he employs names and personalities from most of the ships he sailed in. Jerry Allen argues that one voyage in particular, the 1880 Loch Etive journey, made a particular impression.<sup>40</sup> To this voyage may be attributed the Danish brig episode of The Mirror of the Sea<sup>41</sup> and the Cutty Sark and Jeddah affairs which occurred in that year. Apart from the Otago group<sup>42</sup> we might mention the Palestine voyage, which inspired "Youth",<sup>43</sup> the Narcissus and Tilkhurst voyages which fuelled The Nigger<sup>44</sup> and the Vidar period which supplied much of the background-material for the Malay stories, the early Almayer-Lingard novels, and the steamship narrative "Typhoon".<sup>45</sup>

### III

There are a number of reasons for regarding the time March, 1896, to July, 1902, that is between the publication of An Outcast of the

39. "Tomorrow" has a central character called Captain Hagberd, retired master of the Skimmer of the Seas (see Typhoon, p. 265 (referred to below as: T)). The story draws on the atmosphere of coastal towns and the attitudes of coasting sailors as contrasted with deep-sea men.

40. Allen, Sea Years, pp. 117-121.

41. Allen, Sea Years, pp. 118-119.

42. "Falk", "The Secret Sharer", "A Smile of Fortune", and The Shadow Line, all of which draw upon Conrad's experiences as a master on board the Otago from 1888 to 1889. Thus the delays Conrad experienced in Bangkok when he assumed command of the Otago in 1888 are reflected in "Falk" and The Shadow Line (see Sherry, Eastern World, pp. 228-245), and some frustrating headwinds in the Gulf of Siam during the subsequent voyage in The Shadow Line. Much of the inspiration for "The Secret Sharer" was gained from newspapers and conversations but the final tacking manoeuvre of the story may have been based on an incident during his command of the Otago (see Sherry, Eastern World, pp. 264-269 and The Mirror of the Sea, p. 19). The autobiographical basis of "A Smile of Fortune" is discussed in Baines, Conrad, pp. 95-98. Of course Conrad's experience as a master contributes to his insights into the rigours of leadership and seamanship displayed in his fiction as a whole.

43. See Sherry, Eastern World, pp. 16, and 297-298.

44. Allen, Sea Years, pp. 164-169.

45. Sherry, Eastern World, pp. 16, 29-31, and 107-110.



Islands (1896) and the beginning of his work on Nostromo (1904), as a self-contained period of importance in the development of Conrad's art. During these six-and-a-half years he worked for long spells on "The Rescuer"<sup>46</sup> and wrote the sea stories The Nigger of the 'Narcissus', "Youth", Lord Jim, "Typhoon", "Talk", "Tomorrow", and "The End of the Tether". After this last tale he would not write another sea story until the end of 1909, when he began work on "The Secret Sharer". Although it has long been recognised that the period marks a transition from apprenticeship to mastery, it is not so frequently noted that, more than at any other time in his life, Conrad was concerned primarily with the sea and his own experiences as a sailor.

The work of this period which cannot be classified as sea fiction is, nevertheless, linked to his ideas and observations of life at sea. Only "The Return", "An Outpost of Progress", "The Idiots", and "Amy Foster" have nothing to do with maritime life, whereas the two Malay short stories, "Karain" and "The Lagoon", draw upon the amphibious Malay tribes for background and colour. In addition "Karain" is a narrative set on board a Western schooner engaged in gun-running. "Heart of Darkness" not only has a master for its narrator but also tests the strength of the mariner's code of conduct and his ability to survive in a hostile world. Seraphina, on which Conrad collaborated with Ford Madox Hueffer,<sup>47</sup> has as its basic plot the trial, for piracy, of an American, Aaron Smith.

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46. "The Rescuer" ms., (British Library, Ashley 4787) is an early draft of The Rescue. Like Thomas Moser, "'The Rescuer' Manuscript: a key to Conrad's Development and Decline", Harvard Library Bulletin, 10 (1956), pp. 325-355 (referred to below as: Moser, "'Rescuer ms.'"), I have used the original title ("The Rescuer") to distinguish the manuscript from the completed novel, though Conrad changed the title to The Rescue in mid-1897. It was not published until 1919 (for the chronology see below pp. 230-232).

47. Later Ford Madox Ford (1873-1939) novelist and critic; author of The Good Soldier (1915). Conrad and Ford collaborated on Romance: a novel (1903) and The Nature of a Crime (1924).



The links between this period and the previous two years of Conrad's career as an author emphasise its marine nature. Tom Lingard, the hero of The Rescue, was developed from the influential figure of Almayer's Folly (1895) and An Outcast of the Islands into a full-blown character study of an adventurer and master mariner. One commentator at least believes that Lingard was a prototype of Jim in Lord Jim.<sup>48</sup> At the same time Conrad was laying the foundations of maritime fiction which would only emerge in later years. The Shadow Line was based upon an early sketch, "First Command", mentioned in a letter dated 14 February, 1899.<sup>49</sup> In the same letter he refers to a sketch, "A Seaman", which has never been identified. It is a reasonable conjecture that, in working over his personal experiences as a master - as he was then doing in "Falk" and "First Command"<sup>50</sup> - he was also thinking along the lines of "The Secret Sharer".

Leaving aside "The Black Mate", which is possibly Conrad's earliest work of fiction,<sup>51</sup> it is correct to say that he began his public career

48. Moser, "'Rescuer ms.'" pp. 342-344.

49. Joseph Conrad, Letters to William Blackwood and David S. Meldrum, ed., William Blackburn, Durham, North Carolina (1958), p. 54 (referred to below as: Blackburn, Letters).

50. See Sherry, Eastern World, pp. 211-249.

51. Although Almayer's Folly is undoubtedly Conrad's first published work, "The Black Mate" is possible the first imaginative fiction he wrote. Later published, revised, in the London Magazine (April, 1908) and collected in Tales of Hearsay (1925) the exact original date of publication is not known with any certainty. The story was apparently written for a prize competition in a magazine in the late 1880's (see Aubry, Life and Letters, ii, 264). Jocelyn Baines found such a competition announced in Tit-Bits 1 May 1886 (Baines, Conrad, p. 85) with the caption "SPECIAL PRIZE FOR SAILORS". The question as to how much the published version of the story reflects the original is equally, if not more, problematical. Conrad wrote in Richard Curle's copy of the privately printed edition of "The Black Mate" "written some time in the late eighties and retouched later". (Baines, Conrad, p. 84). Jessie Conrad, however, was adamant that the story was based upon an idea of her own (Baines, Conrad, p. 84) in which case the story could not have been written in the 1880's. There is not enough evidence to justify treating the tale as Conrad's earliest sea story.

as an author with Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands, novels in which the sea is only a marginal presence. Once established as an author he was quick to assume "longshore life". He was married in March, 1896, and spent the following six months on honeymoon in Brittany. Although he was to make sporadic attempts to return to the sea,<sup>52</sup> the six years of his apprenticeship saw him firmly established as a writer. Once installed at Pent Farm, Kent, to which he moved in 1889, he was in contact with a literary circle which included H.G. Wells, Kipling, Hueffer, and Henry James. At this time he also met Shaw, Gissing, and Cunninghame Graham.

Of his literary acquaintances Stephen Crane,<sup>53</sup> Hueffer, and Cunninghame Graham appear to be the most significant. In addition April, 1897 saw the beginning of his association with Blackwood's Magazine (Maga) which both he and later critics have seen as important in the development of his fiction.<sup>54</sup>

In March, 1896, on Edward Garnett's advice, Conrad abandoned the 10,000 words he had written of a story entitled "The Sisters"<sup>55</sup> and announced plans for a novel "The Rescuer" which, however, was not published until 1919 (as The Rescue). By June, 1896, Part I of "The Rescuer" was completed<sup>56</sup> but work on the manuscript became increasingly difficult and he took time off to write, fairly quickly, "An Outpost of Progress".<sup>57</sup>

52. See Baines, Conrad, pp. 213-214.

53. Stephen Crane (1871-1900), author of The Red Badge of Courage (1895). See also Conrad's essay "Stephen Crane", Notes on Life and Letters (1921) pp. 49-52 (referred to below as: NLL).

54. See Lawrence Graver, Conrad's Short Fiction, Berkeley and Los Angeles (1969), pp. 16-41 (referred to below as: Graver, Conrad's Short Fiction); and below pp. 240-243.

55. Baines, Conrad, p. 167.

56. At the end of Part I ("The Rescuer" / <sup>ms., "</sup> p. 103) Conrad wrote: "Sent off to London on the 11th June 1896". See also Moser, "'Rescuer ms.'" p. 329. Part I of "The Rescuer" is therefore the earliest extant example of the prolonged portrayal of white sailors in a working maritime situation.

57. Sent to Garnett, 22 July (Baines, Conrad, p. 177).



By mid-August he had again started and given up "The Rescuer" and was writing "The Lagoon".<sup>58</sup> Once this was finished he took up The Nigger which was probably begun in September, 1896, and finished in mid-January, 1897.<sup>59</sup> By the time he had restarted "The Rescuer" in June, he had written "Karain".<sup>60</sup> The pattern was to be repeated twice in the following years: slow progress, frustration, and depression attending his work on "The Rescuer" broken by sudden success in writing other stories.

His second period of work on "The Rescuer", June, 1897, to April, 1898, was a depressing time. His art seemed to stagnate and even his completed story, "The Return", was judged unsatisfactory.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless at the end of May, 1898, he announced ambitious plans to Garnett for a number of short tales".

I think Jim (20,000) Youth (13,000) A seaman (5,000) Dynamite (5,000) and another story of say 15,000 would make a volume for B[lackwoods] here and for McC[Clure] there. <sup>62</sup>

"Jim" is what would later become Lord Jim, "Youth" was apparently already written, and "Dynamite" later became part of Chance.<sup>63</sup> It is possible that the unidentified "A Seaman" exists as a The Mirror of the Sea portrait. It is certain, however, that by this time he had begun

58. Baines, Conrad, pp. 176-177.

59. Baines, Conrad, pp. 179-180. The Preface was written a few months later (Baines, Conrad, p. 187).

60. Baines, Conrad, p. 189.

61. Garnett, Letters, p. 26.

62. Garnett, Letters, p. 138. McClure was Conrad's American agent.

63. See Baines, Conrad, pp. 210 and 382 (and ns. 28 and 29), and Aubry, Life and Letters, ii, 18. "Dynamite" was first thought of in 1898, written some years later, and incorporated in Chance between 1906 and 1910.



"Tuan Jim : A Sketch",<sup>64</sup> though he later returned to "The Rescuer" for the period July to December, 1898. In December, by which time he had written Part III of "The Rescuer", he began "Heart of Darkness", which was finished by the first week of February, 1899.<sup>65</sup>

From February Conrad worked at Lord Jim, which was planned as a 20,000 word short story for Maga and finished as a 140,000 word novel.<sup>66</sup> It was completed in late July, 1900, and was written in some eighteen months. With "The Rescuer" apparently forgotten, he took a short holiday and began "Typhoon".<sup>67</sup> This short story, which was finished in early January, 1901, had been in his mind for some time under the title "Equitable Division".<sup>68</sup> "Falk" was begun soon after and completed towards the end of May;<sup>69</sup> it was followed by "Amy Foster", written in June.<sup>70</sup> After a spell of collaboration with Hueffer on "Seraphina" (later Romance) Conrad wrote "To-morrow" before the middle of January, 1902.<sup>71</sup> Only one more sea story belongs to these years; "The End of the Tether" was written between March and June, 1902, and published in Maga.<sup>72</sup> Ironically enough the period ends as it began with Conrad working on "The Rescuer"; nevertheless he soon gave up and started work

64. Baines, Conrad, p. 212. For a full history of the earliest draft of the novel see Alexander Janta, "A Conrad Family Heirloom at Harvard", Ludwik Krzyzanowski ed., Joseph Conrad : Centennial Essays, New York (1960), pp. 85-109. The core of the article is reprinted in: Joseph Conrad : Lord Jim, ed., Thomas Moser, New York (1968), pp. 276-283.

65. Baines, Conrad, p. 223.

66. Aubry, Life and Letters, i, 259 and Baines, Conrad, pp. 240-241.

67. Baines, Conrad, p. 256.

68. Graver, Conrad's Short Fiction, p. 94. It had a second title "Skittish Cargo".

69. Baines, Conrad, p. 261.

70. Baines, Conrad, p. 265.

71. Baines, Conrad, p. 268.

72. Baines, Conrad, pp. 278-279.

on Nostromo. "The End of the Tether", as Baines suggests, effectively ended Conrad's career with Maga<sup>73</sup> and the writing of Nostromo heralded a new period in his writing life.<sup>74</sup>

Conrad returned to the sea story during the period 1909 to 1916. Of these later narratives, four, "The Secret Sharer", "The Partner" (1911), "A Smile of Fortune", and "Freya of the Seven Isles" were written in close proximity between November, 1909 and February, 1911.<sup>75</sup> "The Secret Sharer", however, has little affinity with its companion stories ("A Smile of Fortune" and "Freya of the Seven Isles") in 'Twixt Land and Sea, and, like The Shadow Line, written in 1915, it bears a close relation with the fiction of the period 1896-1902. This is also true of some of the maritime chapters of Chance which, as we have seen, were based on the story "Dynamite". The remainder of Chance was written between 1909 and 1913. "Because of the Dollars" (1914) was completed in 1913,<sup>76</sup> and "The Tale" (1917), which has a similar theme, and indeed plot, to Kipling's "Sea Constables" (1915) was written in 1916.<sup>77</sup>

#### IV

It is generally assumed that Conrad wrote sea stories as a matter of course. Given his life and experiences this may seem an obvious inference, and yet perhaps the reverse is true. His first two novels were land novels with exotic settings and he always disliked being classed as a sea-story writer. In fact his friends, especially Cunninghame Graham, Hueffer, and G.F.W. Hope,<sup>78</sup> as well as the influence

73. Baines, Conrad, p. 281.

74. Baines, Conrad, p. 293.

75. Baines, Conrad, pp. 354-355, 373, and 375.

76. Baines, Conrad, pp. 391-392.

77. Baines, Conrad, p. 406.

78. See below p. 237.



of Maga and the reviewers, may have played a large part in making Conrad a sea-story writer.

Baines has drawn attention to and verified Hueffer's claim that he helped to write The Mirror of the Sea (1906) and A Personal Record (1912) (both factual accounts of Conrad's sea experiences) in early 1904.<sup>79</sup>

In fact his friendship with Conrad went back as far as 1898 when he was approached as to the possibility of collaboration on

"Seraphina".<sup>80</sup> Hueffer wrote of his own part in encouraging him to compile the two autobiographical volumes in Return to Yesterday:

The Mirror of the Sea and A Personal Record were mostly written by my hand from Conrad's dictation. Whilst he was dictating them, I would recall incidents to him - I mean incidents of his past life which he had told me but did not come freely back to his mind because at the time he was mentally ill, in desperate need of money, and, above all, sceptical as to the merits of the reminiscential form which I had suggested to him . . . . He would be lying on the sofa or pacing the room, railing at life and literature as practised in England, and I would get a writing pad and pencil and, whilst he was still raving, would interject: 'Now then, what was it you were saying about coming up the Channel and nearly running over a fishing boat that suddenly appeared under your bows?' and gradually there would come 'Landfalls and Departures'. 81

It is possible that Hueffer played a similar role in relation to Conrad's sea fiction after the offer of collaboration in 1898; certainly he had talked to Hueffer about his sea experiences. The suggestion, that he prompted Conrad's sea narratives, would be of marginal significance if it were not for the fact that several other friends had encouraged Conrad to make a move in this direction. In addition it is as well to remember that Conrad attempted a domestic and psychological study ("The Return"),

79. See Baines, Conrad, pp. 290-291 and Ford Madox Ford, Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance, London (1924), p. 30 (referred to below as: Ford, Remembrance). He may also have inspired "Tomorrow". See Baines, Conrad, p. 269.

80. Baines, Conrad, p. 223.

81. Ford Madox Ford, Return to Yesterday, New York (1932), p. 190.



numerous Malay stories, and an autobiographical story ("The Sisters") in the manner of The Arrow of Gold (1919) in the early days of his sea-story period - as though he were wary of the sea in fiction.

One of the "discoverers" of Conrad was Edward Garnett, reader for the publishing house of T. Fisher Unwin. He and Conrad met in November, 1894, and, in the introduction to Letters from Joseph Conrad, Garnett records how he recommended Almayer's Folly to his firm and saw everything that Conrad wrote up to November, 1898.<sup>82</sup> Always loyal to what he considered to be Conrad's interests, Garnett went far beyond his duties as a reader - even advising him to try for better financial terms than those offered by his employer.<sup>83</sup> As would be expected from a man in publishing, Garnett had an eye for fiction which would sell well and his awareness that the sea story was a marketable commodity would appear to have channelled Conrad's energies into the maritime field.<sup>84</sup> He was partly responsible for turning him away from The Sisters and towards "The Rescuer" and was certainly lukewarm about "The Return".<sup>85</sup> He was lavish in his praise of the early chapters of "The Rescuer":

Excellent, oh Conrad. Excellent. I have read every word of The Rescuer and think you have struck a new note.

The opening chapter is most artistic; just what is right for an opening chapter. The situation grips one with great force. It is clearly and forcibly seen as if one had spent a month on those seas . . . . You bring before one wonderfully the sense of boredom, the oppression of the stillness and the heat, and all the monotony of life. And then the etching of the mate's portrait and the description of the crew is very finely done . . . . I think it will strike the Public too . . . . 86

82. Garnett, Letters, p. 1.

83. Garnett, Letters, p. 21.

84. See William E. Messenger, "Conrad and his Sea Stuff", Conradiana, VI (1974), 8 (referred to below as: Messenger, "Sea Stuff").

85. Garnett, Letters, p. 26.

86. Garnett, Letters, p. 19.

In the general acclaim for "Youth" his voice was one of the more important.

In 1974 Joseph J. Martin published two studies of Edward Garnett's influence on Conrad's fiction and his researches have made much clearer our understanding of the relationship between the two men.<sup>87</sup> Martin reinforces the view that Garnett's influence was considerable and concentrates his attention on two points. The first involves Garnett's persuasive advocacy of the techniques of "objective realism" as opposed to the methods of "subjective realism". Conrad changed from:

the task of creating characters, primarily through direct authorial analysis and interior monologue to a method of working essentially from the outside through selective description, dialogue, dramatic action, and the commentary of other characters. 88

Martin argues that Garnett's arguments in letters, commentary, and conversation were the main reason for this change. The second point concerns Conrad's use of the broken time-scheme or "distorted chronology". Conrad's friend and collaborator, Ford Madox Hueffer had hitherto claimed that he and Conrad had worked out the scheme together.<sup>89</sup> Martin shows that Garnett had long enthused over the technique<sup>90</sup> and presents convincing evidence that he suggested the "final chronological method of 'Karain'".<sup>91</sup> At the same time we must not forget that Stevenson had employed the method in The Master of Ballantrae and The Wrecker.

87. Joseph J. Martin, "Edward Garnett and Conrad's Reshaping of Time", Conradiana, VI (1974), 89-105 (referred to below as: Martin, "Conrad's Reshaping of Time"); and "Edward Garnett and Conrad's Plunge into the Destructive Element", Texas Studies in Language and Literature, XV (1974), 517-536 (referred to below as: Martin, "Conrad's Plunge"). See also Messenger, "Sea Stuff". David R. Smith, ed., Conrad's Manifesto : Preface to a Career, Philadelphia (1966), pp. 51-55 argues that Garnett's influence on The Nigger was virtually ignored.

88. Martin, "Conrad's Plunge", p. 519.

89. Ford, Personal Remembrance, pp. 129-139, 184-189.

90. Martin, "Conrad's Reshaping of Time", p. 93.

91. Martin, "Conrad's Reshaping of Time", p. 97.



Another of Conrad's close friends, but one whose influence is difficult to assess, was G.F.W. Hope. A friend of his seafaring days, Hope was a businessman but sufficiently knowledgeable about the sea for Conrad to send him the early chapters of "The Rescuer" in order that details of seamanship might be checked.<sup>92</sup> When Conrad lived at Stanford-le-Hope he was close to the Hope's and together they went on yachting expeditions off the Essex coast.<sup>93</sup> Hope owned a cruising-yawl, the Nellie, and Conrad sailed in it before and after his Congo trip. The Nellie is the name of the yawl in which Marlow narrates "Heart of Darkness" and Norman Sherry discovered that an unpublished account of Conrad and Hope's trips existed.<sup>94</sup> It emerges that not only was Hope a "director of companies",<sup>95</sup> but that Conrad, like Marlow, yarned to gatherings on board and at a river hostelry called the Lobster Arms.<sup>96</sup> Given this information it seems fair to assume that Hope's yacht and the gatherings of his and Conrad's friends provided the settings for "Heart of Darkness" and "Falk" and that the whole formed an atmosphere and environment which could only have stimulated his reflections on his years at sea.

R.B. Cunninghame Graham was famous as a traveller and writer.<sup>97</sup> Strangely enough, for a friend of Conrad's, he was a socialist. This socialism and his admiration of The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' led to an interesting exchange of letters about the skilled, and yet unlettered,

92. Garnett, Letters, p. 61: "I want him to look over the seamanship of my expressions." Hope and Conrad had both sailed under Captain Loutit of the Duke of Sutherland.

93. See Sherry, Western World, pp. 122-124.

94. Sherry, Western World, p. 122.

95. Sherry, Western World, p. 411, n.3.

96. Sherry, Western World, p. 124.

97. See above p.



Singleton.<sup>98</sup> Graham was all for educating the men before the mast and improving their standard of living; Conrad was afraid that such acquisitions would make them less than the men they were. Their exchange of letters on the subject was to be the prelude to a long and rewarding friendship. At this time Graham was a well-known author of essays, fiction, travel books, and political pamphlets and it seems a reasonable conjecture that Conrad would have been influenced by Graham's example. His work might also have encouraged the realistic aspects of Conrad's stories:<sup>99</sup> the use of autobiographical material and the employment of a narrator like Marlow to add authenticity.<sup>100</sup> C.T. Watts considers that the most important contribution Graham made was to provide support for a "critical and humane compassion which draws its energy from despair".<sup>101</sup> This is close to the tenor of many of Conrad's sea stories for, although he sees and captures, for example, the despair of Wait in The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' or Falk in the story of that name, his insights are always tempered with compassion.

Graham wrote sea stories himself and he published two in 1898. The first ran in The Saturday Review in February and was called "Bristol Fashion".<sup>102</sup> The hero, a gun-running skipper, brought extravagant praise from Conrad.

The skipper of the barque is "pris sur le vif".  
I've known the type. And the tongue is put out  
all along in a fine, effective way. 103

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98. C.T. Watts, Joseph Conrad's Letters to R.B. Cunningham Graham, Cambridge (1969), pp. 52-56 (referred to below as: Watts, Letters to Graham).

99. Watts, Letters to Graham, p. 33.

100. Baines, Conrad, p. 203.

101. Watts, Letters to Graham, p. 36.

102. The Saturday Review, LXXXV, 167-168 and 198-199 (5 and 12 February 1898). It was later collected in The Ipané (1899).

103. Watts, Letters to Graham, p. 78.

At that time Conrad was working on "The Rescuer" and considering a suggestion of Stephen Crane's that he should write a play about an island shipwreck.<sup>104</sup> His thoughts would have been very close to his own memories of life at sea, and "Bristol Fashion" must have stimulated memories of his own gun-running exploits. Lingard, significantly enough, is engaged in gun-running in the early chapters of "The Rescuer". More importantly, Graham appeared, in Conrad's eyes, to have written a sea story which contained a serious message in that it kept up the spirit of defiance necessary to the human condition as Conrad saw it. Conrad's evident delight in the presence of such a message may be a further reflection on his puzzled anxiety in the face of Arthur Symons's criticism of The Nigger and Captains Courageous as two sea stories in which there was little more than external action.<sup>105</sup> Graham's example must have been more than re-assuring; serious sea stories could be written and their "message" detected.

The second sea story Graham published in 1898 was entitled "S.S. Atlas",<sup>106</sup> a narrative about a Scottish tramp steamer in a storm. The similarity of its setting with that of "Typhoon" is noticed by Watts<sup>107</sup> who speculates that it might have started the idea in Conrad's mind. In January, 1898, Conrad had received a request for advice, from Graham, as to how a stack (funnel) would go overboard in a gale. He sent back a diagram and this enthusiastic comment

A Scotch tramp is a very good tramp. The Engineers tell anecdotes, the mates are grim and over all

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104. Baines, Conrad, pp. 207-208.

105. The criticism was made in a review of an English translation of D'Annunzio's Trionfo della Morte, The Saturday Review, LXXXV, 145-6. Symons's remarks are reprinted in Sherry, Critical Heritage, pp. 97-98. For Conrad's response see below p. 243.

106. The Saturday Review, LXXXV, 652-653 and 676-677 (14 and 21 May 1898). Collected in The Ipané.

107. Watts, Letters to Graham, p. 63.



floats the flavour of an accent that gives a special value to every word pronounced on her deck. You must know I've a soft spot for Scotchmen. Be easy on the tramp. 108

In fact "Typhoon" was not begun until mid-1900 but in mid-1898 Conrad announced plans for a number of sea stories all of which were to be based on personal experience or hearsay.<sup>109</sup>

Graham's influence was not confined to the writing of sea stories. He encouraged Conrad with praise of The Nigger;<sup>110</sup> went to the trouble of rereading it after Conrad's early letters;<sup>111</sup> and supplied intelligent comment at a time when Conrad's confidence was frequently at a low ebb. He sent him press-cuttings of reviews and the titles of sea fiction then being published.

# V

Of the periodicals for which Conrad wrote Blackwoods Magazine was the one that he valued most highly. In 1897 he wrote to Garnett:

All the good moments - the real good ones in my new life I owe to you - and I say it without a pang....  
You sent me to Pawling - you sent me to Blackwoods  
- when are you going to send me to heaven? 112

He was even prepared to accept lower fees for the pleasure of publishing in Maga.<sup>113</sup> The reasons for his feelings are fairly obvious. Once a regular contributor to Maga he was a member of a sort of club. This must have been no small comfort to a retired seaman on the edge of the literary world and in a precarious financial position. No longer was he in the

108. Watts, Letters to Graham, p. 60.

109. See above p. 231.

110. Watts, Letters to Graham, p. 53.

111. Watts, Letters to Graham, p. 59.

112. Garnett, Letters, p. 103.

113. Graver, Conrad's Short Fiction, p. 21.



time-consuming business of hawking material around magazines and, more importantly, he found in William Blackwood, the editor, a sympathetic colleague ready to advance money on the promise of future work, and well able to understand and make allowances for the vagaries of the imaginative artist in producing copy. In David Meldrum, Blackwood's reader, he found a ready support for his work. Meldrum wrote of "Youth", some years after publication, that it was "the most notable book we have published since George Eliot."<sup>114</sup>

This admiration for "Youth" is one of the characteristics of the Blackwood-Meldrum-Conrad correspondence. Echoed by others in his circle it becomes apparent that Conrad began to conceive of a "Youth"-Maga type of story.

I have enough matter laid up in my head for two more vols in the style - or, let us say as they do<sup>of</sup> men-of-war cruisers - in the class "Youth" . . . . 115

"Youth" was further distinguished by an external form likely to attract Maga readers. He described this form in a letter following his split with Maga

Exactly. Out of the material of a boys' story I've made Youth by the force of the idea expressed in accordance with a strict conception of my method. 116

He is referring to the way in which his stories use material associated with the simple adventure-story. That this material is presented in a quite different form to this basic adventure form is obvious from the stories he published in Maga: "Karain", "Youth", "Heart of Darkness", "The End of the Tether", and Lord Jim; doubtless he would have submitted more but for a promise to Heinemann of a volume of stories in July, 1899.<sup>117</sup>

114. Blackburn, Letters, p. 172.

115. Blackburn, Letters, p. 62.

116. Blackburn, Letters, p. 154.

117. Blackburn, Letters, p. xviii.

The Maga stories and "Falk" use broken time-schemes, a dramatised narrator, close physical and atmospheric description, and even closer investigations into the nature of human conduct under stress.

The standard of material published in Maga was by no means particularly high but its general tenor was calculated to appeal to Conrad. Many of the stories published were of a romantic or adventurous colour; indeed, in their use of the hero and the man-of-action, they bear much the same external appeal as the ill-fated "The Rescuer". Its readership was of a conservative nature and he was evidently pleased by the sort of person who read Maga:

One was in decent company there and had a good sort of public. There isn't a single club and messroom and man-of-war in the British Seas and Dominions which hasn't its copy of Maga . . . . 118

Marlow's companions in the sea stories are a similar set of people:

There was a director of companies, an accountant, a lawyer, Marlow, and myself . . . . the lawyer - a fine crusted Tory, High Churchman, the best of old fellows, the soul of honour - had been a chief officer in the P. & O... 119

The circle of friends described above gave Conrad a firm social base from which to start his investigations into human conduct. On the surface this might seem only to have encouraged his use of Marlow as a narrator, but we can go further. Conrad, hitherto, had been a seaman with roots - of a slender nature - in Poland, a country which at that time hardly existed as a national entity. His stress upon the professional, establishment nature of Marlow's circle suggests his need for a firm base; similarly he appears to have eagerly embraced the role of retired Merchant Service Officer.<sup>120</sup> Linked to this could be his

118. Quoted in Graver, Conrad's Short Fiction, p. 22.

119. Youth, p. 3 (referred to below as: Y). The following story in the volume, "Heart of Darkness", begins as a tale told amongst the same group (Y, pp. 45-46). The idea of a continuing bond features, as we have seen, in Kipling's work.

120. See his articles reprinted in NLL: "Some Reflections on the Loss of the Titanic"; and "Protection of Ocean Liners".



move away from the forecastle seaman (dealt with in The Nigger) to the officer-narrators of his following sea stories. It is significant that this latter type appears first (as a fully realised character-study) in "Youth". He obviously felt that he was speaking to and for men of intelligence and character who had shared the lonelinesses, the stresses, and moral dilemmas of command that are the subject of sea stories like "Falk", "The End of the Tether", and Lord Jim. Finally we must remember that Maga encouraged his use of the short story form.

## VI

There remains one more important influence, that of the reviewers.

It would be true to say that, on the whole, Conrad fared extremely well at the hands of contemporary reviewers. But from the beginning there was recognition also of those characteristics which would prevent Conrad's becoming a "popular" writer. 121

Despite the many understanding and perceptive reviews of his work Conrad suffered greatly at the hands of the reviewers simply because he was oversensitive. He was particularly concerned, for example, by Symons's article.<sup>122</sup> It is true that Symons had failed to detect the serious themes underlying his first published sea story but another author would have shrugged the criticism off with the contempt it deserved. Conrad wrote a puzzled letter to Graham on the article:

He says that Captains Courageous and The Nigger have no idea behind them. I don't know. Do you think the remark is just? Now straight? 123

Evidently he was worried that a respected reviewer should fail to see the depth of meaning in his own story; nevertheless other critics were aware of at least some of his purpose.

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121. Sherry, Critical Heritage, p. 1. The reception of Conrad's work is also discussed in John Dozier Gordan, Joseph Conrad: The Making of a Novelist, New York (1940), pp. 269-309.

122. See above p. 239.

123. Watts, Letters to Graham, p. 71.



There may be better tales of the sea than this, but we have never read anything in the least like it. There is no pirate in it, no wreck, no desert island, no treasure trove. The story is simply an account of an ordinary voyage<sup>made</sup> by an ordinary sailing ship from Bombay round the Cape to the Thames. Nothing particular happens. There is a big storm, some dissatisfaction among the crew, which never ripens into anything like mutiny, and the least admirable of the men dies and is shot into the water. That is all. Yet there is in that story which sounds so simple a freshness, reality, and peculiar interest which raise the book far above the ordinary level of tales of the sea, and appear to us to leave it in a distinct place by itself. 124

It is a pity that the reviewer did not explain further his reasons for valuing the story so highly.

Conrad listened to the reviewers as he listened to his friends and shaped his fiction accordingly. This is not to suggest a writer without a mind of his own, but one aware of critical and popular opinion because of his own desperate financial position. There are signs, for instance, that he was, in his early period, attempting to mould his fiction into a more popular framework.<sup>125</sup> This framework can be seen as a response to those critics who found The Nigger lacking in character interest, plot, and romantic colour - the sort of formula characteristics evident in the work of Sabine Baring-Gould,<sup>126</sup> W. Clark Russell, W.H.G. Kingston, and F.T. Bullen. The reviewer quoted above was obviously surprised that a novel lacking these characteristics could hold his interest and gain his admiration. It was natural, therefore that Conrad should attempt to produce his fiction in a more popular mould; "The Rescuer" was planned with a colourful hero, an exotic setting, and a romantic interest (in the relationship between Edith Travers and

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124. Sherry, Critical Heritage, pp. 89-90. From an article in The Daily Chronicle, 22 December 1897.

125. See Messenger, "Sea Stuff".

126. Sabine Baring-Gould (1834-1924). A prolific writer of religious homilies, travel books, novels, and verse.

Lingard). In contrast to the unglamorous, earthy sailors of The Nigger the yacht party are sophisticated figures from high society.

The Nigger and Lord Jim met a variety of criticisms which can be seen to have further influenced the shape of Conrad's later sea stories. Although Garnett wrote a general study of his work in which he praised The Nigger highly, not all the other critics were impressed. Garnett wrote:

he has seen in everything the significant fact, he has seen and shown us the way that that man spoke or this wave curled before breaking. It is always what the artist sees that defines his quality; and whether he can connect this tangible world with the vast unseen ocean of life around him, that determines whether he is a poet. 127

Some of his fellow-critics, who quite obviously admired the wealth of realistic detail, had quite clearly failed to grasp the nature of the psychological drama, the effect of Wait's fear of death upon the crew and the collective life of the ship.

His material is barely enough for half the number of pages . . . . A long story must be organic, it demands atmosphere, it exhibits character under many lights. Now of these essentials Mr. Conrad only gives us one - atmosphere. 128

A vast deal of excellent observation and much hard work have obviously been lavished upon the crew, but considering the space they occupy, the interest they arouse is surprisingly slight. 129

It seems a little more than coincidence that his sea stories, apart from Lord Jim and The Nigger, are all classed by Lawrence Graver as long short stories. Graver argues that he had a preference for a length of 30,000 words.<sup>130</sup> Of course there were other factors<sup>131</sup> at

127. Sherry, Critical Heritage, p. 106. From an article in the Academy, 15th October 1898, pp. 82-83.

128. Sherry, Critical Heritage, p. 95. From an unsigned article by I. Zangwill, the Academy, 1 January 1898, pp. 1-2.

129. Sherry, Critical Heritage, p. 100. From a review by Harold Frederic, The Saturday Review, LXXXV, 211.

130. Graver, Conrad's Short Fiction, pp. viii-ix.

131. See above p. 7.



play on top of the strictures of the critics, but these comments must have been persuasive. In addition there is a tendency for his sea stories to be constructed around simple dramatic incidents which give the reader something to "grasp": in "Typhoon" there is the storm and the plight of the coolies; in "The End of the Tether" Sterne's discovery of Whalley's blindness; and in "The Secret Sharer" the hiding of a fugitive from the crew. "The Secret Sharer" is, indeed, something of a masterpiece of economy in narrative structure.

The trappings of popular fiction presented him with a problem in the nineties but Conrad neatly solved this by using sensational news stories and shop-talk from his seafaring days; after "Youth" he could speak of using the material of a "boy's story". His narrative techniques might also have presented a barrier to his arrival as a popular writer - though Chance was later to be eminently successful. In fact his techniques were frequently misunderstood and criticised. Even Marlow came in for some heavy criticism in the Sketch's review of Lord Jim:

The story - the little story it contains - is told by an outsider, a tiresome, garrulous, philosophizing bore. 132

This might have particularly galled him for Marlow was probably conceived as a response to criticism of The Nigger's narrative presentation - it had been criticised because it was narrated by a member of the forecastle, a type considered too ignorant and inarticulate to figure in this role.<sup>133</sup>

## VII

Conrad's first attempts at the sea story, in chronological order and ignoring "The Black Mate", were "The Rescuer", The Nigger and "Youth".

132. Sherry, Critical Heritage, p. 118. From a review in the Sketch 14 November 1900, p. 142.

133. Sherry, Critical Heritage, p. 96. From a review by I. Zangwill in the Academy 1 January 1898, pp. 1-2. See also Sherry, Critical Heritage, p. 94.



There are various developments within this trio of stories. First, he was evidently seeking for a popular formula and this explains why "The Rescuer" drew less upon the circumstances of Conrad's own life at sea and more upon a literary tradition of romantic interest and colourful incident drawn from what he had heard and read of Victorian adventurers like Rajah Brooke.<sup>134</sup> The Nigger, it has been argued, was also a result of this desire for popularity; Messenger claims that he was attempting to produce a blend of patriotic celebration and nautical interest.<sup>135</sup> "Youth", as we have seen, was popular with Conrad's friends and this appears to have strengthened his interest in the lessons of his own career. Nevertheless popularity was hard to achieve and he did not receive such acclaim until Chance (1913), but by then his association with the sea in fiction was virtually at an end. It may appear strange that fiction with the dramatic power of "The End of the Tether" and "The Secret Sharer" were not popularly received earlier but the public apparently preferred W. Clark Russell's blend of romantic love and high suspense. Conrad's serious concerns must have worked to his disadvantage. A successful writer like C.J. Cutcliffe Hyne produced little other than colourful incident and high drama.

Secondly, the early stories mark important crossroads in Conrad's nautical fiction. In "The Rescuer" Part I he began to explore a number of options, involving characterisation and subject matter, and the choices he subsequently made as a result of his experiments were to determine the nature of his sea fiction for many years afterwards. Lingard, for example, is a quite different character to the majority of Conrad's seamen-protagonists. As a commercial adventurer he is a romantic figure who finds little satisfaction in the mundane world

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134. See Allen, Sea Years, pp. 199-201.

135. Messenger, "Sea Stuff", p. 12.

of the Merchant Service. On the other hand the seamen of "Typhoon" and The Shadow Line are professional servants cast in the mould of Kipling's McPhee. This latter type makes its earliest appearance in Conrad's sea fiction in Part I of "The Rescuer". The novel also relates to those sea narratives - "Freya of the Seven Isles", "A Smile of Fortune", and "Tomorrow" - which belong not to the realistic tradition of the sea story but to the romance-adventure tradition. Conrad was not to explore the possibilities of this tradition until later in his career and "Youth's" significance is that the professional servant, drawn against a realistic nautical background, and seen within the terms of institutional fiction, is employed in a central role for the first time. This is not to forget The Nigger, in which officers do figure; it is the only Conradian sea narrative involving as major characters the men before the mast. The final development within the trio of stories encompasses Conrad's increasing mastery of the sea-story form. His career might appear as an inevitable progression in quality but, in fact, he met obstacles which he did not immediately surmount. The caricature masters of "The Black Mate" are possibly evidence of early stumblings and the following chapter reveals similar examples in the opening chapters of "The Rescuer".

## CHAPTER TWO : Conrad's Officers



## CHAPTER TWO : Conrad's Officers

### I

In the preceding parts of the thesis three broad types of fictional sailor have been isolated. The first is the traditional sailor-caricature, often a guileless victim of shore vices, who is typified by nautical speech - the "shiver my timber absurdities" condemned by W. Clark Russell.<sup>1</sup> The second type is employed by Stevenson in his maritime adventure fiction: the seaman as adventurer<sup>2</sup> is a tough, ruthless figure whose independence and freedom of action creates an archetype of man in a hostile universe. The third type is the professional servant who first appears in Kipling's poetry and prose.<sup>3</sup> This figure is a man of professional abilities and professional standards of conduct. Conrad's earliest planned sea novel, The Rescue and its accompanying manuscript, illustrates the early development of this last type alongside the figure of the adventurer as represented by Lingard.

The Stevensonian seaman-adventurer is identified by his strong material desires and his willingness to exist as a competitor in a violent

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1. See above p. 15 and W. Clark Russell "Sea Stories", The Contemporary Review, XXXVI (July to December), 348.

2. See above pp. 22-23.

3. See above pp. 146-158.

world. Conrad's Lingard<sup>4</sup> belongs to the same stable, he is portrayed as a successful commercial-adventurer in a lawless and primitive environment, willingly employing force against his enemies. As a commercial-adventurer he is reminiscent of the Currency Lassies in The Wrecker; as a colourful, charismatic but ruthless figure he recalls Ballantrae. His success as a seaman, his nautical daring, and his authoritarian nature, derive from Conrad's nautical experience just as Lingard's ambitions as a colonial figure relate to the history of the Far East in the nineteenth century.

I would suggest that Lingard, especially in Part I of "The Rescuer", was carefully drawn to capture the imagination of the public.<sup>5</sup> In effect he was to be a much more exciting character than the career-seamen, Captain Ford (Almayer's Folly) and Carter and Shaw ("The Rescuer"). Lingard's nautical background is only part of a much greater whole, his skills are devoted to other ends like trading, and political intrigue - ends which make the career sailor's ambitions, command, safe retirement, seem small by comparison. These differences are emphasised rather than hidden by Shaw's position as Lingard's chief mate and right-hand man for he is deliberately made a humorous character as well as a less than perfect sailor.<sup>6</sup>

Lingard's ambition and imagination are portrayed through imagery which makes plain his dissatisfaction with pure seafaring and trading:

He moved with an erect freedom of gait more like  
a man accustomed to stride over plains or hills

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4. Lingard first appears in Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands. The main aspects of his character are the same in each of the three novels in which he appears. Although Almayer's Folly is the earliest novel of the three it details the last part of his career and The Rescue, the last of the trilogy of the Malayan works the earliest part.

5. This was the reason for the inclusion in the story of the yacht party. See Aubry, Life and Letters, i, 64, n. 1.

6. See the conversation with Lingard below p. 257 and his mistake in allowing Carter's craft to approach unobserved (see below p. 261).



than like one who from his earliest youth, had been used to counteract by sudden swayings of his body the rise and fall of cramped and restless decks of small craft, tossed by the caprice of playful or angry seas. 7

A similar sentence, but one which makes his dissatisfaction more explicit, was cut from the completed novel:

A sudden listlessness seemed to come over him. It was one of his peculiarities that whenever he had to call upon his unerring knowledge of his craft upon his skill and readiness in matters of his calling that big body of his lost its alertness, seemed to sink as if some inward prop had been suddenly withdrawn. 8

He has strong desires for personal aggrandisement, wealth, and self-realisation far outstripping his humble beginnings:

the islands, the shallow sea, the men of the islands and the sea seemed to press on him from all sides with subtle and irresistible solicitation, they surrounded him with a murmur of mysterious possibilities, with an atmosphere lawless and exciting, with a suggestion of power to be picked up by a strong hand. 9

Lingard as romantic hero determines the nature of The Rescue which is an account of his attempt to help two natives of royal descent, Hassim

7. "'The Rescuer' ms.," p. 13. The (slightly emended) passage appears in The Rescue (1919) p. 9 (referred to below as TR). In the following chapters I have quoted from "The Rescuer" Part I in preference to The Rescue Part I because I am interested in investigating Conrad's early approach to the sea story, seamen, and nautical detail, and "The Rescuer", as I showed above p. 230 n. 56 is his earliest planned sea tale involving European sailors (Part I was completed in mid-1896). The references below give the page reference of the quotation in the manuscript followed by its location (where it has not been cut) in The Rescue.

The relationship of manuscript to published text has been investigated by Moser, "Rescuer ms.," and René Kerf, "The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' and the ms., version of The Rescue," English Studies, 44 (1963) 437-443. (referred to below as: Kerf, "The Nigger and 'The Rescuer ms.,'"). Part I of "The Rescuer" contains 23,366 words and The Rescue, Part I 16,700 words (Moser "Rescuer ms.," p. 327). As both critics make clear The Rescue Part I is an abridgement rather than a reworking of the ms. (see Moser, "'Rescuer ms.," pp. 352-353 and Kerf, "The Nigger and 'The Rescuer ms.,' p. 438). My own studies of the ms. and the novel have confirmed this.

8. "The Rescuer ms.," p. 95.

9. "The Rescuer", Part II, p. 187.



and Immada, regain a Kingdom from which they have been evicted. In the novel as it was planned and completed Lingard uses his resources as a prosperous trader and his friendship with a local ruler, Belarab, to build up a supply of arms (itself an illegal act prohibited by the Dutch authorities) and a body of loyal men. This colourful plot and exotic location were probably not enough to capture the public's imagination; and so Conrad devised a further area of romantic interest. Lingard's eventual failure was to be bound up with the presence of a diplomat's wife, Edith Travers, whose party was stranded in a yacht on a sand-bank outside Belarab's kingdom - the kingdom in which the counter-coup had been planned. As the story was originally conceived, Lingard's infatuation with Edith Travers was to produce a conflict of loyalties in which he betrayed Hassim and Immada.<sup>10</sup>

At this juncture it is possible to see the bones of a theme which was to dominate some of Conrad's best work: the fall of the idealist.

Thomas Moser has written on this:

The talented and idealistic Kurtz attempts to realize his ideals, alone, in a remote part of the world. Instead, his ideals crumble and reveal only a self-destructive lust for power; he tries to possess the natives but, rather, is possessed and utterly destroyed by them. Jim, too, follows this cycle, in Patusan; in a sense, Nostromo, Decoud, and Gould follow the same path, as does Razumov in Under Western Eyes. Clearly this was the fate intended for Lingard in "The Rescuer". 11

Moser convincingly argues that the second half of Lord Jim (the Patusan episodes) is a reworking of "The Rescuer" and that this explains why the latter remained unfinished for nearly twenty years.<sup>12</sup> Given the distinction that I have made between the adventurer and the career-seaman,

10. Moser, "The Rescuer ms.," pp. 347-349.

11. Moser, "The Rescuer ms.," p. 340.

12. Moser, "The Rescuer ms.," pp. 342

it is easy to recognise Lord Jim and The Rescue as novels in which these types exist side by side: in Lord Jim, in fact, the protagonist is first a seaman and then an adventurer; "Heart of Darkness" is a similar case: Marlow the seaman observes Kurtz, the adventurer. It is natural, therefore, that these last three fictions should only be partly sea narratives: Lord Jim began as a nautical story built on Jim's desertion from the sinking Patna and the helpless pilgrims, later Conrad added the Patusan episodes in which Jim turns adventurer.<sup>13</sup> He did write pure sea stories, however, and, apart from "Youth" and The Nigger, they were all written after Lord Jim. The purpose of the following sections is to show how the seamen of these particular sea narratives developed, and to examine the characteristic aspects of the Conradian sailor.

There are two points which need stating here. In contrast to Stevenson's fiction the adventurer is not a major figure in Conrad's pure sea stories; in this respect he stands closer to Kipling in his use of the figure of the professional servant. Secondly, it is not sufficiently appreciated just how much his sea narratives as a group are given coherence by this subject matter: the British Merchant Service in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. He neatly defines the service in Notes on Life and Letters:

... the British Merchant Service. In this name I include men of diverse status and origin, who live on and by the sea, by it exclusively, outside all professional pretensions and social formulas, men for whom not only their daily bread but their collective character, their personal achievement and their individual merit come from the sea. 14

It is an ~~important~~ feature of his work because his characters' ambitions, fears, and personal prejudices fall within similar bounds: the master-

13. The novel was written in the order that it was published in Maga, indeed by 12 February 1900 the majority of the Patusan chapters were still unwritten (see Blackburn, Letters, p. 84).

14. "Tradition", NLL, p. 195.



narrators have striven for promotion, respect common traditions, and judge their men, as they themselves are judged, by common standards. One aspect, the seaman's code, is of particular importance. It denotes the standards of behaviour laid down by the Service and stresses the passive virtues: obedience to authority, the rightness of communal effort, and the virtue of self-sacrifice for the common good. This subject-matter often plays a crucial role in his plots. Thus the sea sections of Lord Jim are worked into the framework of a Court of Inquiry similar to the one which investigated the Palestine, Jeddah, and Cutty Sark,<sup>15</sup> and the master-narrator's state of mind in The Shadow Line is partly conditioned by the jealous attitude of the mate: jealous because he thinks he should be in command.<sup>16</sup>

Among the career-sailors two specific groups exist and their respective beginnings can be seen in "The Rescuer". On the one hand there is the group illustrated by Shaw. In the final version of the novel he is something of a coward<sup>17</sup> but, as he was originally conceived, he relates to a group of unimaginative, largely unthinking seamen with "stay-at-home minds".<sup>18</sup> A few of these - MacWhirr, Bob Stanton, Allistoun - are heroes, others are limited by their professional deficiencies and jealousies. The other type, represented in "The Rescuer" by Carter, are closely associated with the Otago stories "Falk", "The Secret Sharer", and The Shadow Line and they are serious and successful young men. In the later tales they are observed from within but this is not the only consideration which makes them appear

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15. An extract from the proceedings of the Cutty Sark Inquiry in 1882 is reproduced in Heart of Darkness and The Secret Sharer, ed., Franklin Walker, Bantam Books, New York (1969), pp. 203-205.

16. The Shadow Line, p. 63 (referred to below as: SL).

17. Kerf, "The Nigger and 'The Rescuer ms.,'" p. 441.

18. The phrase is from "Heart of Darkness", Y, p. 48.



thoughtful. In fact they possess sensitive and altruistic qualities which make them mindful of the moral ambiguities that their experiences reveal.

## II

René Kerf has made the first step in establishing the link between "The Rescuer" Part I and the later sea fiction. In Part I of the narrative (written in 1896 before The Nigger) Lingard and his brig, Lightning, are becalmed at sea. He and his mate, Shaw, discuss various matters on the quarter-deck: a local love affair,<sup>19</sup> the comings and goings of clipper ships,<sup>20</sup> and local politics.<sup>21</sup> Later the brig is approached (unnoticed by Shaw, the duty officer) by a cutter manned by Carter and some white sailors from a stranded yacht.<sup>22</sup> Lingard is discomposed by the news that the yacht is lying close to Belarab's kingdom, and the Flash subsequently makes a quick passage to the scene of the stranding, towing Carter and his men in their boat behind.<sup>23</sup>

Kerf identifies Shaw as "a new type of character",<sup>24</sup> a prototype of Baker in The Nigger. Kerf notes how Shaw shares:

two characteristics with the first mate of the Narcissus: he is grumpy, but under his grumpiness hides benevolence, and he has never been able to find a command . . . . 25

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19. "The Rescuer ms.," pp. 29-31; TR, pp. 20-21.

20. "The Rescuer ms.," p. 28; TR, p. 19.

21. "The Rescuer ms.," pp. 28-29; TR, p. 23.

22. "The Rescuer ms.," pp. 46-54; TR, pp. 25-29.

23. "The Rescuer ms.," pp. 72-103; TR, pp. 44-52.

24. Kerf, "The Nigger and 'The Rescuer ms.,'" p. 441.

25. Kerf, "The Nigger and 'The Rescuer ms.,'", p. 441. His "grumpiness" with the seamen can be deduced from TR, p. 12: "He was abrupt in manner and grumpy in speech with the seamen". In the ms., this was followed by "yet in reality very good-tempered and easily pleased" ("The Rescuer ms.," p. 18) which makes his kinship with Baker obvious.

He also emphasises how Shaw is given individuality through the use of speech characteristics: the mate has a habit of emphasising his carefully chosen words; thus he uses the polysyllabic "loc-ality" instead of "place".<sup>26</sup> In addition he has a favourite expression, "'All there'"<sup>27</sup> just as Baker has a speech mannerism "'Ough! . . . Better turn in now. Ough! Ough!'"<sup>28</sup>

The remainder of Kerf's article need not concern us here, though his argument can be developed further in a different direction. The similarity with Baker is not the only correspondence with the later unimaginative and unromantic sailor characters. Shaw, like most of them, is fitted into a larger career structure; he has ambitions and he is disappointed at his lack of success in obtaining a command.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, he has a history of poor relationships between himself and his immediate superiors: Lingard had engaged him after he had had a "thumping row"<sup>30</sup> with his previous captain. Such conduct anticipates Conrad's later mates who maintain uneasy relations with their masters: Sterne in "The End of the Tether", Burns of The Shadow Line, Jones (Brierly's chief mate in Lord Jim), and the chief mate of the narrator's ship in "The Secret Sharer".

The portrayal of Shaw in Part I of "The Rescuer" reads very strangely to anyone familiar with Conrad's sea fiction. Admittedly, he was attempting to make Shaw a humorous figure, but he is unable to achieve the blend of humour and seriousness which he mastered in the

26. "The Rescuer ms.," p. 27; TR, p. 18.

27. "The Rescuer ms.," p. 18.

28. NN, p. 21.

29. "The Rescuer ms.," p. 18: "the aspect of a world where such a good - 'all there' - seaman could find no command filled him with awe. It was mysterious - no doubt right - but hard."

30. "The Rescuer ms.," p. 18, TR, p. 12.



later sea fiction. In effect what makes Shaw rather ridiculous is his use of comical nautical metaphors; indeed he is representative of the traditional sailor-caricature.<sup>31</sup>

When we were the two days in Singapore you told me to have a run ashore if I liked, and so I took a day off, there being no par-ti-cu-lar duties in hand that the serang was not equal to. I had a walk in the morning and about noon I sighted some tiffin-rooms . . . . In I went, for I was peckish. The tiffin was good though it cost more than I am used to pay for my food. However, I don't often have a cruise in a strange place and I enjoyed the novelty, Sir. By -and bye (sic) some gentleman came in . . . . They spoke to me most aff-ably . . . and I answered in a civil manner. Why not, sir? even if I could see that some of them had run up against a lot of liquor in the morning. I hold that a sailor may be as much a man of the world - and more too - than any white faced chap that spends his life moored stem and stern alongside a mahogany desk, and . . . . 32

The humour stems not only from Shaw's quaint diction but also from his earnestness and his simple conviction that he is as good as any landsman. In addition he conveys the idea that a "run ashore" is an expedition into an odd and dubious environment.<sup>33</sup>

Whereas Shaw is, partly at least, a humorous character, Carter has the seriousness and dignity of a talented and highly professional officer. It is these qualities which make him a forerunner of the Otago group of narrators. In Part I of "The Rescuer" he has been detailed to seek assistance for the stranded yacht and to this end he achieves the difficult task of locating Lingard. His meeting with the famous trader is the first of many fictional situations in Conrad's sea fiction in which a young officer is confronted with a difficult problem. Carter is presented with such a problem when Lingard reacts to the news that

31. See above pp. 24-25.

32. "The Rescuer ms.," pp. 41-42. The passage is part of a much longer one cut from TR involving a conversation between Lingard and Shaw.

33. Cf. the attitude of the "Plain Dealer" (see above p. 20).



the yacht is stranded near Belarab's Kingdom.<sup>34</sup> Lingard himself is faced with two problems: first he must prevent Carter taking the news elsewhere; and, secondly, he has to decide what to do with Carter and his men. His solution is simple but disconcerting for Carter: he imprisons them.<sup>35</sup> Carter refuses to be brow-beaten and continues to perform his duties towards his men with care and attention to detail. When the brig sails to the yacht's rescue he declines an offer to stay on board and he is towed with his men in the open cutter aft<sup>36</sup> - the earliest example in Conrad's fiction of the British officer's concern and identification with the men under his command. Furthermore, he shows his evident pride in Carter's professional abilities. In describing the position of the yacht,

[Carter] seemed to dole out facts, to disclose with sparing words the features of the coast, but every word showed the minuteness of his observation, the clear vision of a seaman able to master quickly the aspect of a strange land and of a strange sea; his professionally wide-awake state of mind of a man ever confronted by rapid changes of circumstance. His somewhat sleepy voice presented with concise lucidity the picture of the hopeless tangle of reefs and sand-banks, through which the yacht had miraculously blundered in the dark before she took the ground at last. 37

In this instance the sailor is seen to be special but the observation grows from Conrad's insight into the nature of the skills which contribute to the ability of a good officer.

There is one occasion in Part I when Carter is identified as a man of particular qualities which have little to do with his profession:

Carter could see nothing. He felt about him people moving, heard them exchanging short whispers that seemed to hint at secrets, important or infamous.

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34. "The Rescuer ms.," pp. 59-74; TR, pp. 32-41.

35. "The Rescuer ms.," pp. 67-69; TR, pp. 37-38.

36. "The Rescuer ms.," pp. 72-73; TR, p. 40.

37. "The Rescuer ms.," p. 61; TR, p. 33.

The night effaced even words and its mystery had captured everything and every sound; had left nothing free but the unexpected that seemed to hover about very close, ready to stretch out its stealthy hand in a touch sudden, familiar, and appalling. Even the careless disposition of the young ex-officer of an opium-clipper was affected by the ominous aspect of that hour. He became uneasy and credulous. All he had heard spoke again in the night loud and persuasive, stirred up a gnawing desire to know more. What was this vessel. What were those people? What would happen tomorrow? To the yacht? To himself? He felt suddenly, without any additional reason but the darkness, that it was a poor look-out anyway, a dashed poor look-out for all hands. The irrational conviction made him falter for a second where he stood and he gripped the slide of the door hard. 38

The passage is significant because it examines, albeit briefly, Carter's inner self. He is revealed as a sensitive and thoughtful man. He is both self-confident and aware of his own vulnerability and it is this combination which makes evident his kinship with the Otago narrators:

At that moment I was alone on her decks. There was not a sound in her - and around us nothing moved, nothing lived, not a canoe on the water, not a bird in the air, not a cloud in the sky. In this breathless pause at the threshold of a long passage we seemed to be measuring our fitness for a long and arduous enterprise, the appointed task of both our existences to be carried out, far from all human eyes, with only sky and sea for spectators and for judges. 39

The comparison cannot be pushed too far; Carter is not revealed in close contact with his work - we do not experience his professional responses to nautical problems. This in itself is typical of "The Rescuer" Part I; Conrad was to find his feet in this aspect of sea fiction later in the decade.

The differences between Carter and Shaw are established in a number of incidents. From the very beginning of "The Rescuer" Shaw emerges as an unimaginative and conventionally-minded sailor. Whereas Carter, as

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38. "The Rescuer ms.," pp. 75-76; TR, p. 42.

39. 'Twixt Land and Sea, p. 92 (referred to below as: TLS).



we have seen, is of a reflective temperament, Shaw is quite the opposite:

He was proud of his mind also - although he used it  
seldom for reflection upon things in general. 40

The very fact that Shaw is represented as a particular type of seaman serves to reinforce this impression:

He was a typical shellback, of a species extinct now,  
not much troubled by sentiment and in any case quite  
unable to express it otherwise than by oaths . . . . 41

In comparison Carter is articulate and sensitive. Conrad uses every opportunity to emphasise those aspects of Shaw's character which make him at one with the life of established institutions and communities: law abiding ship's companies and dockside towns. In one long scene, cut from the completed novel, Shaw attempts to question Lingard on the Lightning's eventual destination and the purpose of Lingard's intrigues.<sup>42</sup> Lingard gives nothing away, though Shaw is plainly worried about his wife and a child born while he has been at sea. It emerges that Shaw lives in Barking<sup>43</sup> and that his brother-in-law owns a public house "on the East India Dock Road".<sup>44</sup> Such a figure in the company of Lingard, somewhere in the East Indies, is incongruous to say the least; Conrad comments upon a similar case in "Typhoon": Captain MacWhirr, the grocer's son who ran away to sea.

It was enough, when you thought it over, to give  
you the idea of an immense, potent, and invisible  
hand thrust into the ant-heap of the earth, laying  
hold of shoulders, knocking heads together, and  
setting<sup>the</sup> unconscious faces of the multitude towards  
inconceivable goals and undreamt-of directions. 45

40. "The Rescuer ms.," p. 18.

41. "The Rescuer ms.," p. 18.

42. "The Rescuer ms.," pp. 36-37.

43. "The Rescuer ms.," p. 18.

44. "The Rescuer ms.," p. 37.

45. T, pp. 4-5.



Carter, on the other hand, is naturally suited to the role cast for him: he is a roving sailor and he has already gained much experience of the type of activities with which Lingard is engaged; he has sailed with the opium clippers.<sup>46</sup> The contrasting backgrounds and temperaments of the two officers are reflected in their conduct. After Carter has been interviewed by Lingard, Shaw, annoyed that the approach of Carter's boat should have taken him unawares, attempts to reprimand him for "ungentlemanlike tricks".<sup>47</sup> Whereas Carter is able to accept his imprisonment with a calm confidence, Shaw is incapable of adapting to an unpredictable turn of events and his ridiculous reproaches are met with a "nonchalant manner".<sup>48</sup> This contrast between the imaginative and outwardly self-confident young man and the unimaginative, conventionally-minded older second-in-command recurs throughout Conrad's sea fiction. This is not to imply of course that Shaw's type are always mates: MacWhirr, master of the Nan-Shan, shares many of Shaw's characteristic traits.<sup>49</sup>

The link between Carter and the master-narrators of the later sea fiction is not The Nigger (1897), which is concerned more with the life of ordinary sailors than the careers of officers, but "Youth" (1898). "Youth" is a significant advance in Conrad's formulation of his particular type of sea story on two counts: it is the first narrative in which the career-officer holds the stage, and it is the scene of Marlow's debut, the first of Conrad's fully realised career-sailors. In "Youth" Marlow reflects upon his voyage, as a second mate, from Falmouth to the East in

46. "The Rescuer ms.," p. 64; TR, pp. 34-35. The opium clippers belonged to smugglers exporting opium to China. See Basil Lubbock, The China Clippers, Glasgow (1914), pp. 3-36. The men who manned the ships were expert seamen renowned for their daring and Carter's association with such men demonstrates how much Conrad wished him to be differentiated from Shaw. The opium smugglers were highly paid and there was great competition for berths on the clippers.

47. "The Rescuer ms.," p. 66; TR, p. 36.

48. "The Rescuer ms.," p. 66; TR, p. 36.

49. See below pp. 265-266.

the Judea. As an older man he understands aspects of the voyage which had escaped him at the time. He sees his own youthful strength<sup>50</sup> in brushing aside the obstacles that meet a ship, that was little more than a floating hulk condemned to be lost at sea, with a hold full of burning coal, but realises that he had been largely oblivious to the tragedy of the master, Beard, who was broken by his failure to keep his ship afloat. For the young Marlow the importance of the voyage was the fulfilment of his desire to experience at first hand the mystery and attractions of the East; as a middle-aged officer the significance of the voyage is its revelation of the strength and optimism of youth balanced against the weaknesses and disappointments of old age. Similarly, in the Otago group, the keynote is revelation: young officers undergo experiences which test their abilities and their moral assumptions, and the stories take the form of narratives in which men look back and draw out the significance of their early struggles. However, before these master-narrators are examined it is necessary to look more closely at Shaw's sailor-descendants.

### III

The career-seaman in Conrad's fiction is an organisation man, grist to the mill of the seaman's code; he is a small cog in a large machine. In portraying this type, whether he is of the Shaw or Carter strain, Conrad continually stresses the unfairness of the life: promotion depends only marginally on merit, and more often than not on luck - being in the right place at the right time. The master, Beard, and the chief mate, Mahon, of the Judea, in "Youth", are both slightly sorry figures; neither has had much luck in promotion; neither is a poor seaman.

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50. "'O youth! The strength of it, the faith of it, the imagination of it!'" (Y, p. 12).



He [Mahon] was well connected; yet there was something wrong with his luck, and he had never got on. 51

They are not glamorous figures and few indulge in the traditional sailor vices of drink and women.<sup>52</sup> Baker, the chief mate of the Narcissus, is a paragon of sailor virtues but, like Mahon and Beard, he has not "got on": "I haven't somehow the cut of a skipper about me,"<sup>53</sup> His life has been marked by total devotion to the service and, appropriately, his near relatives are all dead: "Mother dead; father and two brothers, Yarmouth fishermen, drowned together on the Dogger Bank".<sup>54</sup> He obviously misses the ties that landsmen possess and feels deeply his failure to obtain a command. In his portrait it is possible to see how a career-based service diminishes the idea of the strong individual and focusses attention "in the ranks".<sup>55</sup> The emphasis is recognisably Conradian: the small cog in a heartless institution, and the disappointed life-servant, are both expressions of his view of an unremittingly bleak existence.

Baker is one of the few chief mates in Conrad's fiction who completely engages our sympathy; the majority of his rank are actively jealous of the master or are dismissed in the narrative with a few scornful sentences. The most vividly presented of the malcontents is Sterne of the Sofala in "The End of the Tether"; his will is bent totally towards discrediting Captain Whalley, and his appetite is the sharper because the owner is also the chief engineer. The chief mate

51. Y, p. 5.

52. The exception is the master-narrator's predecessor in The Shadow Line (p. 59) apparently modelled on Conrad's predecessor in the Otago (Sherry, Eastern World, pp. 220-227).

53. NN, p. 167.

54. NN, p. 166.

55. The phrase is from LJ, p. 339.



of the master-narrator's ship in "The Secret Sharer", a man older than the master, never allows his distrust of the narrator's abilities to subside: "'I knew it'd end in something like this'",<sup>56</sup> he shouts at the climactic moments of the final sequence of events. Burns of The Shadow Line had seen a chance of command when the narrator's predecessor had died on board. He takes the ship into a remote port where he hopes he will be appointed master in the absence of a qualified rival. The ploy fails, his "naïve reasoning forgot to take into account the telegraph cable . . . .";<sup>57</sup> nevertheless his disappointment sours shipboard relations for some time.

The appearance of these officers is equally unprepossessing: the mate in "The Secret Sharer" has "frightful whiskers"<sup>58</sup> and a manner ridiculed by the second mate;<sup>59</sup> and Sterne has a nervous tic in his eyes.<sup>60</sup> Burns, like a number of Conrad's officers, appears in an undignified role. He has a thick red beard which he attempts to shave off while he is in a fever:

He turned to me his face grotesque beyond the fantasies of mad dreams, one cheek all bushy as if with a swollen flame, the other denuded and sunken, with the untouched long moustache on that side asserting itself, lonely and fierce. 61

In "Falk" the narrator's second mate is a man called Tottersen "or something like that":

His practice was to wear<sup>on his head</sup>, in that tropical climate, a mangy fur cap. He was, without exception, the stupidest man I had ever seen on board ship. 62

56. TLS, p. 140

57. SL, p. 63.

58. TLS, p. 44.

59. TLS, p. 93.

60. Y, pp. 235-236.

61. SL, p. 90.

62. T, p. 154.

MacWhirr, master of the Nan-Shan, is nothing like a hero, in his old world politeness and his slow moving and thinking.

The consequences of the presence of this type of officer are many, but, above all, the effect is to remove the heroic perspective. The process by which this is achieved can be seen clearly in "Typhoon" which makes play out of two kinds of sailor stupidity. The story's narrative framework is built out of Jukes's scorn for his master, MacWhirr, whom he sees as a stupid man unable to carry on a simple conversation: "'Outside the routine of duty he doesn't seem to understand more than half of what you tell him'".<sup>63</sup> Jukes expresses this opinion in a letter written during the spare moments of the Nan-Shan's voyage through a typhoon and, at the end, he asks the rhetorical question, "'I think that he got out of it very well for such a stupid man.'"<sup>64</sup> Jukes's own stupidity is that of a "clever" young man, qualified, confident, and talkative, who is unable to appreciate the true value of MacWhirr's unimaginative but unshakeable demeanour. MacWhirr sails through the very eye of a typhoon because he cannot justify to himself the expenditure on the coal needed to avoid it:<sup>65</sup> he must experience a typhoon to "believe" in it. His strength is that, lacking any imagination, he also lacks fear; in comparison, Jukes has a very imaginative mind which, socially an asset, does nothing but hinder his conduct in the typhoon. He anticipates disaster before it strikes: "It was the beginning of the end".<sup>66</sup> At one point he is unable to respond to MacWhirr's orders:

And directly, his heart, corrupted by the storm  
that breeds a craving for peace, rebelled against  
the tyranny of training and command. <sup>67</sup>

63. T, p. 17.

64. T, p. 102.

65. T, p. 33.

66. T, p. 53.

67. T, p. 53.



MacWhirr is quite different: he thinks logically and practically; he sets about his duties as though there were every chance of survival: "Keep on hammering . . . builders . . . good men . . . And chance it".<sup>68</sup> When the coolies, battered beneath hatches, are thrown about the hold in a disorderly riot for their scattered possessions and life-savings, he follows his orderly instincts and sees to it that Jukes, who considers the entire exercise futile, puts things right.<sup>69</sup> In fact MacWhirr's conduct in the storm is not his only triumph over Jukes. The coolies' possessions prove something of a problem when the Nan-Shan docks. Jukes is aware that the ship could be held responsible and is all for a show of armed force against the coolies.<sup>70</sup> He is horrified to discover MacWhirr, unarmed, doling out to each man an equal share of the collected money.<sup>71</sup> There is a minimum of fuss that reflects only credit on the ship; the coolies appear satisfied, and, in addition, his practical solution avoids involving dishonest officials.<sup>72</sup>

Jukes's rhetorical question forms the last line of "Typhoon" but, ironically, Jukes might be judged more "stupid" than MacWhirr. Jukes has survived and doubtless he is a capable officer but his particular stupidity is that of the man who lacks the self-knowledge to recognise how close he came to "cracking-up" and by just how much he was saved by MacWhirr's solidity.<sup>73</sup>

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68. T, p. 48.

69. T, p. 54.

70. T, p. 98.

71. T, p. 100.

72. T, pp. 101-102.

73. H.M. Daleski, Joseph Conrad : The Way of Dispossession, Faber and Faber, London (1977), p. 112 argues that Jukes achieves self-knowledge. I would suggest, however, that there is a greater distance between belief in oneself and self-knowledge than Daleski allows.



The conventional assessment of a man who keeps his nerve in a crisis and is unthinking of his personal safety would be to class him as brave. The point is that "Typhoon" makes it abundantly plain that bravery or heroism are inapplicable terms; MacWhirr's "bravery" consists of a mental deficiency - an inability to perceive the metaphorical or figurative uses of language. Before the typhoon strikes, for example, the weather becomes intolerably hot. Jukes complains that, "It would make a saint swear . . . . I feel exactly as if I had my head tied up in a woollen blanket."

Captain MacWhirr looked up. 'D'ye mean to say,  
Mr Jukes, you ever had your head tied up in a  
blanket? What was that for?' 74

He even goes so far as to query whether a saint would be saintly if he swore. The point of the narrative is to demonstrate that MacWhirr's deficiency on this score is related to his particular merits as a sea captain and perhaps even to reduce the heroic stature of the man of action.

The relation between linguistic insensitivity and bravery is made in a number of incidents. The second mate of the Nan-Shan, for example, is the one white sailor on board who loses his head in the typhoon.<sup>75</sup> His weakness is related to his sensitivity to language. In fact he has a tendency to regard a linguistic proposition as a fact; it is a tendency which eventually breaks him. Conrad makes this point quite early in the narrative. Waiting for the typhoon, the second mate implies, in conversation with Jukes, that the weather has taken a turn for the worse.

'Do you mean to say we are going to catch it  
hot?' asked Jukes with boyish interest.

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74. T, p. 25.

75. T, p. 67.

'Say? . . . I say nothing. You don't catch me,' snapped the little second mate, with a mixture of pride, scorn, and cunning, as if Jukes's question had been a trap cleverly detected. 'Oh, no! None of you<sup>76</sup> shall make a fool of me if I know it,' he mumbled to himself. 76

He is afraid to externalise his fears in the "concrete" forms of language and Jukes appropriately retorts, "'Oh, go to Jericho'",<sup>77</sup> a remark which recalls the destructive power of words.<sup>78</sup> Significantly, the second breaks down when he overhears MacWhirr speaking to Rout about him: "'The second mate's lost . . . .'"<sup>79</sup>

The second, who is something of a parody of Jukes, and Jukes himself, perceive the daunting scale of man's fight against natural forces, and they are contrasted with MacWhirr and the bos'un. The bos'un is a comic figure, a parody of MacWhirr. He is somewhat reminiscent of a large and friendly ape.<sup>80</sup> When he reaches the master on the bridge at the height of the typhoon, he is content to subside on the deck:

hugging with his arms and legs the stand of the engine-room telegraph - an iron casting as thick as a post. When that went, why, he expected he would go, too. 81

The bos'un gives no more concession to existence than the recognition of facts as he perceives them, of this, the telegraph, which records and conveys factual commands - STOP, FULL AHEAD - is a symbol.

The second and Jukes are men with obvious limitations; MacWhirr is an admirable figure but Conrad goes to even greater lengths to make

76. T, p. 29.

77. T, p. 29.

78. "And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout . . . and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him." Joshua, VI, 5.

79. T, p. 67.

80. See T, p. 49.

81. T, p. 59.



him appear ordinary. His relationship with his wife, who fears his return home, is virtually non-existent and yet he writes home regularly, "twelve times every year",<sup>82</sup> including a factual account of his ship's activities:

desiring quaintly to be 'remembered to the children', and subscribing himself 'your loving husband', as calmly as if the words so long used by so many men were, apart from their shape, worn-out things, and of a faded meaning. 83

The irony is that MacWhirr has little or no self-knowledge, something signified by his uncritical use of words - in his hands they are of a "faded meaning". In fact the only relationship he does make is with his ship; at the height of the storm he admits that he "wouldn't like to lose her".<sup>84</sup> It is a supreme irony, the great student of facts - he sleeps on the bridge so that he is close to the dangerous "facts" (shoals, currents, and reefs) of the China coast<sup>85</sup> - has fallen in love with an inanimate object. He is fortunate to the extent that his limitations - comic as they may so frequently appear - have found a milieu in which they have become strengths; nevertheless we are never allowed to forget that even if MacWhirr's type is necessary they are something less than fully-realised human beings.

#### IV

Although Conrad used the traditional sailor-caricature in his portrayal of Shaw, he soon discarded it in favour of differing kinds of deflating humour. Much of The Nigger's humour is of a very grim kind; Wait's final interview with the evangelist Podmore<sup>86</sup> is humorous

82. T, p. 15.

83. T, p. 15.

84. T, p. 90.

85. T, p. 15.

86. NN, pp. 113-119.



but it serves to emphasise Wait's approaching death. A substantial proportion of the humour, however, works to expose the ridiculous side of the sailor's dangerous life and the consequence is to stress the ordinary nature of his aspirations, fears, and prejudices. At the very beginning of the novel Belfast romances - "his eyes comical as a mask"<sup>87</sup> - about the toughness of the ship and his own uncompromising attitude to the officers. He tells the men how he had upset a tar bucket over a second mate:

'"That's the kind of man I am!" shouts I . . . .  
You should have see'd him skip, boys! Drowned,  
blind with tar, he was! So . . . .'<sup>88</sup>

His story is denied on the spot and his subsequent conduct on the Narcissus - his "devotion"<sup>89</sup> to Wait, his liking for Baker's chaffing and chiding<sup>90</sup> - emphasises his benevolent and homely aspect. Together with the majority of the crew, he helps to rescue Wait from the waterlogged cabin off the Cape.<sup>91</sup> The incident is remarkably comic: Belfast instructed to pull Wait out by his hair, despairingly retorts "'How can I hold on to 'is blooming short wool?'"<sup>92</sup> and the returning "wanderers" shelter on the poop:

and on the very brink of eternity we tottered all  
together with concealing and absurd gestures, like  
a lot of drunken men embarrassed with a stolen  
corpse.<sup>93</sup>

The humour is all-pervasive: Baker is ironically disappointed in his hope that Wait will prove a good man on a rope and is shocked, as though

87. NN, p. 8.

88. NN, p. 8.

89. NN, p. 140.

90. NN, p. 21.

91. NN, pp. 65-73.

92. NN, p. 70.

93. NN, p. 71.

he were a school-master, at Donkin's disreputable appearance.<sup>94</sup>

Lord Jim, whose first part has as its main theme an assault upon the concept of heroism, contains a number of figures who, as tough and ruthless characters, might be thought to lend support to the heroic idea by providing evidence of tough, masculine seamen equal to the physical challenges of their profession. During the proceedings of the Court of Inquiry, Marlow hears of the notorious Robinson:

'Yes; the Robinson. Don't you know? The notorious Robinson. The man who smuggled more opium and bagged more seals in his time than any loose Johnny now alive. 95

He is soon disappointed:

An emaciated patriarch in a suit of white drill, a solah topee with a green-lined rim on a head trembling with age, joined us after crossing the street in a trotting shuffle, and stood propped with both hands on the handle of an umbrella. 96

Bob Stanton is a hero but his heroism is presented in as humorous and ironic a manner as is commensurate with an inherent dignity. He had attempted to rescue a ladies' maid in the aftermath of a collision off the Spanish coast.

'All the passengers had been packed tidily into the boats and shoved clear of the ship when Bob sheered alongside again and scrambled back on deck to fetch that girl . . . . The wrestling-match could be seen plainly from the boats; but poor Bob was the shortest chief mate in the merchant service, and the woman stood five feet ten in her shoes and was as strong as a horse . . . . So it went on, pull devil, pull baker, the wretched girl screaming all the time, and Bob letting out a yell now and then to warn his boats to keep well clear of the ship. One of the hands told me, hiding a smile at the recollection, "It was for all the world, sir, like a naughty youngster fighting with his mother." . . . . We never saw anything alive or dead come up. 97

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94. NN, pp. 20 and 16.

95. LJ, p. 162.

96. LJ, p. 163.

97. LJ, p. 150.



Conrad provides additional humorous detail. Stanton was "undersized and bearded to the waist like a gnome".<sup>98</sup> In particular we are told how he had left the sea to become an insurance salesman: "'but my immortal soul was shrivelled down to the size of a parched pea after a week of that work.'"<sup>99</sup> The choice of his alternative profession is intentionally ironic; his final sacrifice is contemptuous of the value of his own life.

Occasionally Conrad's humour makes his sailors appear almost pathetic figures; Beard, master of the Judea, is one. He achieves command only at the end of his career and the Judea is hardly ship - more a hulk. At one point she is berthed in the Tyne where she is hit by a steamer at night.<sup>100</sup> In the emergency Beard leaps overboard into a small boat with his wife in his arms. Little actual damage is done to the Judea but Beard and his wife are left, without oars, floating in the dock for nearly an hour.<sup>101</sup> It is difficult to capture the impact of the incident upon the reader; it is both humorous and tinged with Beard's dignity; nevertheless the keynote is Beard's helplessness - Mahon has to bargain with a waterman to fetch him.<sup>102</sup>

There is no humour in the narrative "Initiation" in The Mirror of the Sea.<sup>103</sup> The master of a Danish ship recalls how he and his men had worked to keep their ship afloat. Working heroically against time, the labour defeats the men and "just as the sun went down, the men's hearts broke".<sup>104</sup> This is a reminder that Conrad's constant theme is that

98. LJ, p. 150.

99. LJ, p. 151.

100. Y, p. 8.

101. Y, p. 9.

102. Y, p. 9.

103. The Mirror of the Sea, p. 140 (referred to below as: MOS).

104. MOS, p. 142.



men's efforts fall below what is demanded and their bravery makes no mark "upon the mirror of the sea". This in itself is what he saw as the black joke of creation and it informs much of the humour of the sea stories; given the conditions of life on earth man's heroism can appear ridiculous.

## V

Of the Otago group The Shadow Line is the only tale which concentrates almost entirely upon the master's role; in the other three there are related but more complex issues: the ambiguity of man's egoistic drives in "Falk"; the nature of crime and punishment in "The Secret Sharer"; and a problem of sexual guilt in "A Smile of Fortune". In three of the stories ("Falk", The Shadow Line and "The Secret Sharer"), however, the master-narrators might be the same person: each is sympathetic to the problems of others; each looks back upon and reviews his conduct; and each appears to be a man observing a time of his life when he was young and new to the rigours of command. The result of these common characteristics is that these officers appear very different to Kipling's sailor or marine-engineer heroes. McPhee, McAndrew, and Pyecroft are rarely seen at a professional disadvantage; we may perceive their intellectual limitations - Pyecroft's diction, McAndrew's bleak sense of personal realisation, and McPhee's hamfistedness in the business world - but we never fear for their courage or professional ability as we do for the protagonists of the Otago group. In addition, and this is central to the difference between the two groups, they are sensitive to the nuances of human relationships and exhibit a willingness and ability to confront the ambiguous.

Approaching Conrad from the perspective of romanticism, David Thorburn has investigated the meeting of two traditions in his work: the "fin de siècle tradition of the adventure story"<sup>105</sup> and a tradition

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105. David Thorburn, Conrad's Romanticism, New Haven and London (1974) p. x (referred to below as: Thorburn, Romanticism).

stemming from the great romantic poets. Thorburn isolates a particular type of Conradian protagonist:

the type of the young hero, dragged unready into a world of moral and physical menace, is both a cliché of the adventurous mode and a figure of seminal importance in Conrad's finest books. 106

Of course we must qualify the term "unready" because the officer-sailors of Conrad's fiction are seen to be rigorously trained and aware of their professional responsibilities; nevertheless, in general, Thorburn's point is correct and the master in "The Secret Sharer" who anxiously reflects, "I was somewhat of a stranger to myself",<sup>107</sup> is referring to the awesome task of assuming total responsibility for the ship and its crew. It is the one area in which he is inexperienced. These masters are, therefore, a testimony to what Thorburn sees as the characteristic romantic crisis of "self-doubt and self-examination".<sup>108</sup>

These men are not caricature "iron-men" because we experience too closely and through their own eyes the doubts, anxieties, and fears lying beneath their response to the challenges of seamanship and leadership they encounter. As masters they are seen in the confined spaces of the quarter-deck where they face the envies and criticisms of their immediate subordinates. Because they are characters of more than usual sensitivity and imagination their inadequacy and fear of failure becomes magnified; they do not immediately appear as the skilled officers they undoubtedly are. In addition they are treated in the same ironically humorous fashion as the other career-seamen: the narrator of "Falk" is placed in a ridiculously impotent situation through a misunderstanding;<sup>109</sup>

106. Thorburn, Romanticism, p. 42.

107. TLS, p. 93.

108. Thorburn, Romanticism, p. 106. Cf. the young master's phrase in The Shadow Line which describes the relationship between man and ship: "a searching intimacy with your own self" (p. 53).

109. See below pp. 278-279.



his counterpart in The Shadow Line is put at a disadvantage when his mate catches him staring in the cuddy's mirror;<sup>110</sup> and the master in "The Secret Sharer" is made to look a fool by his antics in trying to conceal Leggatt in his cabin.<sup>111</sup> In fact the very human failings of these characters might explain why Marlow does not appear more frequently in the sea stories. It is certainly true that the sober, middle-aged Marlow imposes a welcome objectivity on the narratives which he relates, but perhaps Conrad wanted to create more exciting yarns than Marlow's presence allowed. Marlow is very much like Captain Giles of The Shadow Line who is compared to a "church warden";<sup>112</sup> both these masters exude self-confidence and an air of having been tried, tested, and found satisfactory as seamen. The youthful master-narrator type, however, creates immediacy and drama: we, and they, are less sure of their abilities and mental strengths. Another tack, of course, is to employ an omniscient narrator; in "Typhoon" the reader has no real idea as to the fate of the Nan-Shan simply because the narrator is not a member of the crew.

The Shadow Line and "Falk" illustrate the salient points in the argument. The former falls neatly into two halves: the first,<sup>113</sup> which takes place mainly in the officers' home in an Eastern port; and the second,<sup>114</sup> which examines the young and newly appointed master's conduct at sea. In general, the first half is concerned with problems arising from human relationships. The narrator checks into the sailor's home after resigning on impulse from his berth as chief mate of a steamship -

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110. SL, p. 53.

111. See e.g., TLS, p. 135.

112. SL, p. 12.

113. SL, pp. 3-51.

114. SL, pp. 52-133.



a position in which he had distinguished himself.<sup>115</sup> In the home he meets Captain Giles, the chief steward, and a young officer, Hamilton. Each character has a particular significance and Hamilton, who is afraid to take a command<sup>116</sup> but is contemptuous of his colleagues,<sup>117</sup> represents inner deception. Hamilton has also refused to pay his bills and, when a note arrives in the home from the harbour-office asking for an applicant for a vacant command, the steward conceals the news from the narrator in the hope that Hamilton will take the command, leave, and settle his account.<sup>118</sup> Hamilton, meanwhile, delays his application.

The narrator is unaware of these goings on, and indeed mentally ridicules Giles's attempts to convince him that something underhand is being practised.<sup>119</sup> He gains the command only because Giles is persistent, more perceptive, and ready to help. Giles is the first of a number of characters who are stewards to the narrator in his hours of trial. His ability to handle men and relationships, as well as his tact and understanding, are symbolised by his reputation for expertise in intricate navigation.<sup>120</sup> The very fact that these qualities are so obviously admired in The Shadow Line forms a vivid contrast with Kipling's sea fiction: in "Bread Upon the Waters" tact, understanding, and the ability to read human motives were part of the land business-world. Giles's sympathetic defence of the steward's deceptions<sup>121</sup> compares oddly with McPhee's contempt for men who are found out by their own folly.<sup>122</sup>

115. SL, p. 15.

116. SL, p. 31.

117. See e.g., SL, p. 17.

118. SL, pp. 27 and 41.

119. SL, p. 22.

120. SL, p. 12.

121. SL, pp. 38-39.

122. "Bread Upon the Waters", The Day's Work, p. 281.

The lesson of the first part of the narrative for the narrator does not bode well for his career as master. He had arrived in the home with a reputation for seamanship but his resignation had emphasised his lack of self-knowledge: he had been unable to explain either to himself or Giles his reasons for doing so.<sup>123</sup> Once in the home he shows himself to be an innocent in the affairs of human relationships and is only set on the rails by Giles's helping hand - a hand he spurns on several occasions.<sup>124</sup> His assumption of command demonstrates the fallacy of his belief that the anxieties of command are those of seamanship, a view rendered in his remark that "The difficulties, the dangers, the problems of a ship at sea must be met on deck."<sup>125</sup> His subsequent problems stem from two factors: the irresponsible and indeed evil behaviour of the previous master;<sup>126</sup> his own sensitivity to the sufferings of others; and a heightened sense of his own inadequacies.<sup>127</sup>

The previous master is an important presence in the second part of the story because he defines the nature of the narrator's inexperience. The master had not only caused the outbreak of fever on board ship by keeping it, for three weeks, "in a pestilential hot harbour",<sup>128</sup> while visiting his mistress, but had sold the ship's supply of quinine - needed to treat the men - for ready cash.<sup>129</sup> He is thus representative of man's duplicity and capacity for evil, and the young master's unpreparedness demonstrates his relative innocence. Unfortunately he does not

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123. SL, p. 14.

124. SL, pp. 18 and 21.

125. SL, p. 89.

126. SL, pp. 58-63.

127. SL, pp. 95 and 107.

128. SL, p. 59.

129. SL, pp. 89 and 93-94.



discover the sale of the quinine until he is at sea and the ship is once more in the grip of the fever. The effect upon the narrator is to intensify his sense of unworthiness and instigate feelings of quite unjustified guilt which arise because he considers that he should have checked the contents of the quinine bottles (which had been filled with salt) as opposed to their presence. This sense of guilt is exacerbated as long as he remains one of the few fit and healthy men on board. In addition, the long catalogue of misfortune, added to the lack of wind which becalms the ship, produces a near conception of original sin in the narrator. This is a major theme in a story, sub-titled "A confession" and narrated by a master with a predilection for biblical diction: "The seed of everlasting remorse<sup>130</sup> - the weight of my sins<sup>131</sup> - the sickness of my soul".<sup>132</sup>

And I felt ashamed of having been passed over by the fever which had been preying on every man's strength but mine, in order that my remorse might be the more bitter, the feeling of unworthiness more poignant, and the sense of responsibility heavier to bear. 133

He succeeds in successfully shouldering his responsibilities but this does not prevent the reader from perceiving his inexperience.

The Shadow Line strongly emphasises the weakness of its protagonist. In "Falk" the narrator's mental state is much less of an issue and his shortcomings are exposed more through the operation of the plot: he is desperate to get his ship to sea but his adversary, Falk, is the master of the sole tug on the river and so his conventional expressions of outrage are unavailing. He only succeeds in solving his problem when he learns to take account of the complexities of human relationships:

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130. SL, p. 95.

131. SL, p. 109.

132. SL, p. 109.

133. SL, p. 117.



he meets Falk, diplomatically questions him on his odd behaviour,<sup>134</sup> and acts wisely in mediating between Falk and his prospective in-laws. The early chapters of negotiation recall "Bread Upon the Waters" but the seaman has become as adroit as the businessman in human affairs.

It is important, therefore, not to overestimate the failings of the master-narrators. Mary-Low Schenck has conveniently demonstrated that, however much the master of "The Secret Sharer" appears a fool to himself, he acts with outward decision and firmness;<sup>135</sup> her remarks may be applied to the other two stories. When the master in "Falk" negotiates with Falk he is conscious of the ridiculous elements of their meeting:<sup>136</sup> the watching bystanders, however, are impressed and he achieves a sort of legendary status in the life of the port:

there was some vague tale still going about the town of a certain Falk, owner of a tug, who had won his wife at cards from the captain of an English ship. 137

This revelation of the outer appearance and inner reality of the man-of-action is valuable enough in itself. It is accompanied by a testimony to the dependence of men upon each other: Leggatt, in "The Secret Sharer" is helped by the master-narrator; Falk desperately needs the young skipper in "Falk"; and Giles, Ransome, and the doctor help to sustain The Shadow Line's protagonist in his hours of trial.

## VI

Whether Conrad was consciously emulating Kipling or not, it is a neat fact that his sailor-characterisation is a natural step from

134. T, pp. 196-208.

135. Mary-Low Schenck, "Seamanship in Conrad's 'The Secret Sharer'", Criticism 15 (1973), 4 (referred to below as: Schenck, "Secret Sharer").

136. T, pp. 197-198.

137. T, p. 240.

Kipling's formulation of the professional servant type made some years earlier. It is difficult to make an assessment as to whether Conrad was helped by Kipling's achievement but, in any case, the question of influence is not of paramount importance: Conrad had lived the life of an officer in the Merchant Service and, once he had begun to write about it, it must have been a natural, indeed inevitable, step to begin the portrayal of his fellow professionals in terms similar to Kipling.

The professional servant does not feature in Stevenson's work though, as we have seen, his later novels do include the type-cast American skipper. The next chapter in the thesis entitled "Manliness", however, identifies and pursues a theme in Conrad's sea fiction which is also a feature of The Ebb Tide. It will be remembered that Davis, the tough American skipper, undergoes a string of misfortunes and adversities which culminate in a mental breakdown.<sup>138</sup> The novel is in fact an exposure of the illusions of manliness and consequently forms a fitting prelude to the far more extensive debate in Conrad's sea narratives.

The manliness debate offers an insight into the manner in which Conrad made serious sea fiction out of essentially ephemeral material but it also offers a means of investigating further his sailor-characterisation. There has necessarily been some simplification in the present chapter because of the concentration upon two character types and this, it is hoped, will be corrected in the following chapter.

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138. See above p. 108.

### CHAPTER THREE : Manliness



### CHAPTER THREE : Manliness

#### I

The following chapter has as its subject the theme of manliness in Conrad's sea fiction. Of the three writers with whom this study is most concerned, Conrad, Kipling, and Stevenson, Kipling took, in his sea stories, the simplest attitude to manliness and the related concepts of bravery and heroism. Men like Pyecroft, McPhee, and McAndrew are tough men and the reader is never given cause to doubt their invincibility in the manly, physical world they inhabit. This simple type with the accompanying physical characteristics - square neck, steely eyes, and grey hair - is a feature of Conrad's early sea fiction. The obvious examples are the masters Allistoun (of the Narcissus) and MacWhirr (of the Nan-Shan):

The hair of [MacWhirr's] face . . . carrotty and flaming, resembled a growth of copper wire clipped short to the line of the lip; while, no matter how close he shaved, fiery metallic gleams passed, when he moved his head, over the surface of his cheeks. He was rather below the medium height, a bit round-shouldered, and so sturdy of limb that his clothes always looked a shade too tight for his arms and legs. 1

In this fashion the first page of "Typhoon" identifies, in the manner of a popular adventure story, its tough, unshakeable man-of-action. A

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1. T, p. 3.

number of Conrad's narratives, however, take issue with the seeming invincibility of the type and The Nigger is the starting point in the debate. The novel celebrates a world in which men are conscious of an accepted standard of manliness but, at the same time, both they and the reader are aware that this standard is frequently broken.

The crew of the Narcissus are not supermen but they are seen to pursue a dangerous vocation in conditions demanding physical toughness, strength, and cool nerves.<sup>2</sup> Conrad reminds us of this when he describes the men assembling on the deck at midnight ready to struggle up the rigging,<sup>3</sup> or Singleton returning from a thirty-hour-plus spell at the helm to confront a soaked straw bed: "a slimy soft heap of something".<sup>4</sup> Baker, the chief mate, selects Wait for his watch because he appears to be a more than usually strong man.<sup>5</sup>

The crew hold particular views on physical aggression. Belfast, for example, yarns on principle to frighten the newcomers about the toughness of the ship and its officers,<sup>6</sup> and he revels in the rivalry between quarter-deck and forecastle.<sup>7</sup> Later he threatens Donkin: "'Cos if I start to kick you' - he brightened up a bit - 'if I start to kick you, it will be Yankee fashion - to break something.'"<sup>8</sup> The men are very proud of their capacity to endure the life they lead and listen in "offended" silence to Allistoun's twice repeated taunt: "'Too

2. See Conrad's comment in a letter of 1897: "But The Nigger is a rough story, - dealing with rough men and an immense background." (Aubrey, Life and Letters, i, 200).

3. NN, pp. 49-50.

4. NN, p. 98.

5. NN, p. 20.

6. NN, p. 5.

7. e.g., NN, pp. 8-9.

8. NN, p. 132.

much for your strength!"<sup>9</sup> made when the men are complaining about his treatment of Wait. Their pride scorns the physically weak and, when Donkin returns to the forecastle after the ship has been on her beam-ends off the Cape and refuses to take the wheel because he is exhausted, their reaction is typical of such a community: "'He won't go,' exclaimed a contemptuous voice", and Davis, "painfully squaring his shoulders",<sup>10</sup> goes instead. Donkin promises him a pound of tobacco but he is unimpressed and replies "'I'll go . . . but you will pay for it.'"<sup>11</sup>

The men expect their officers to be tough and uncompromising and they are pleased when Baker roughs-up Donkin for insolence.<sup>12</sup> Their conduct the next day, when the latter appears minus some front teeth, is, however, governed by the "etiquette" of the forecastle. Charley, the ship's boy, makes an inopportune remark about a dentist and is unceremoniously silenced.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the crew have a strong sense of fair play which even exists between themselves and the officers. After Donkin throws a belaying-pin at Allistoun someone exclaims "'We ain't that kind'"<sup>14</sup> and Donkin is once again beaten-up. There is in many ways little justice on the voyage for Donkin who receives the treatment due to the weak man among strong men. At one point the men are impressed by his arguments and they:

refrained from kicking him, tweaking his nose, or  
from accidentally knocking him about, which . . .  
had been rather popular amusement. 15

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9. NN, p. 134.

10. NN, p. 96.

11. NN, p. 96.

12. NN, p. 40.

13. NN, p. 41.

14. NN, p. 123.

15. NN, p. 102.



## II

The central characters of The Nigger, Wait and Donkin, are both in their way villains and they are opposed to Allistoun, the master, and Singleton, an Able Seaman. Inevitably the ideas with which Wait and Donkin are associated threaten not only Allistoun and the harmony of the ship, but, at another level, the whole web of ideas governing the Merchant Service. In the final analysis Singleton and Allistoun are seen to be "men" and their opponents something much less. Both are men of few words; it is a characteristic that, in contrast to Donkin's "filthy loquacity",<sup>16</sup> is much admired in the novel.

Singleton's life-achievement exists in his actions:

Singleton who had sailed to the southward since the age of twelve, who in the last forty-five years had lived . . . no more than forty months ashore - who boasted, with the mild composure of long years well spent, that generally from the day he was paid off from one ship till the day he shipped in another he seldom was in a condition to distinguish daylight....<sup>17</sup>

Despite the drinking-bouts ashore the character is idealised and this is achieved by making him not only an example of superb devotion to duty and stoic endurance but also by marking him out as one of the few surviving remnants of a kind of ideal race of sailors: "a lonely relic of a devoured and forgotten generation".<sup>18</sup> Singleton's skills are favourably contrasted with those of the younger men but he is also identified as different by his spells of debauchery ashore; in this case appetite defines the man. His generation were men

who knew toil, privation, violence, debauchery - but knew not fear, and had no desire of spite in their hearts.    19

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16. NN, p. 100.

17. NN, p. 7.

18. NN, p. 24.

19. NN, p. 25.

At the height of the "mutiny" (caused by the men's sympathies for Wait) Allistoun recalls to Baker a crew of mutineers he dealt with as a young master and his comments make evident Singleton's kinship with them. He praises them, to the disadvantage of his present crew, for their unambiguous, animal behaviour - they wanted to broach a cargo of liquor.<sup>20</sup> Such animal desire, reflected in Singleton's shore-conduct, is contrasted favourably with the "overcivilised" and "rotten" behaviour of the majority of the Narcissus's crew,<sup>21</sup> who are afraid of death. Conventional morality is of less importance than the maintenance of the sailor's effectiveness; a mutiny over liquor is preferable to a mutiny over the dangerous conditions of his life.

Singleton possesses a true simplicity. He is to be admired for his unquestioning acceptance of life's tragedies. This is demonstrated in a central incident: the crew had always feared that Singleton despised their concern for Wait's health, but, when Singleton collapses<sup>22</sup> after his marathon spell at the wheel, during which the ship has been on her beam-ends, it appears that he too might need their sympathy. Nevertheless, although affected by this sign of his age and vulnerability, he turns out with the watch the following morning, as though nothing has happened.<sup>23</sup> His latent stoicism has thus given him the right to say to Wait, "'Well, get on with your dying'".<sup>24</sup> The essential rightness and strength of his position is confirmed when he visits the sick-bay a second time:

There was a sense of <sup>a</sup>contest in the air. We felt the inward strain of men watching a wrestling bout. At last Jimmy [Wait] with perceptible apprehension turned his head on the pillow. - 'Good evening,' he

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20. NN, p. 137.

21. NN, p. 139.

22. NN, pp. 97-98.

23. NN, p. 98.

24. NN, p. 42.



said in a conciliating tone - 'H'm,' answered the old seaman, grumpily. For a moment longer he looked at Jimmy with severe fixity, then suddenly went away. 25

He has won the contest. Unlike Wait he has not given up the struggle to continue working in the face of his new comprehension of death. On a symbolic level the meeting is, therefore, Singleton's confrontation with the fear of death. It is after this incident that we learn of his theory about the headwinds which are delaying the ship: when Wait dies, he says, they will disappear - and so they do.<sup>26</sup> It is his final triumph: a sign that his character is in harmony with the forces of nature.

### III

Unlike many of Conrad's later masters we are never presented with an interior view of Allistoun's personality; he is delineated from the outside and drawn in stereotypical terms. Taciturn and authoritarian he is distinguished by his self-confidence and an extreme vigilance. During the day he never leaves the deck - "as though he had been part of the ship's fittings"<sup>27</sup> - and, at night, he appears periodically on the poop, "watchful and mute",<sup>28</sup> under the stars. He is portrayed very much as a forecastle-seaman would see him. Today the character appears perhaps unduly stereotypical because we have come to expect, as a matter of course, in popular literature at least, the characteristics which Conrad emphasises.

He pronounced his owner's name with a sardonic smile, spoke but seldom to his officers, and reproofed errors in a gentle voice, with words that cut to the quick. His hair was iron-grey,

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25. NN, pp. 141-142.

26. NN, pp. 142 and 156.

27. NN, p. 50.

28. NN, p. 30.



his face hard and of <sup>the</sup> colour of pump-leather. He  
shaved every morning of his life - at six - but  
once . . . . 29

His inflexible attitude to daily shaving establishes (albeit humorously) his imperturbable demeanour. His position as master and natural leader is celebrated in a number of passages and the imagery stresses the harmony which pervades the ship when this authority is unchallenged.<sup>30</sup> In fact it is threatened from three sources: the instinctive reactions of the men to the storms and dangers of the sea; the presence of Wait; and the arguments and complaints of Donkin.

Allistoun, like the majority of his historical counterparts, dreams of making a fast passage which will be mentioned in the nautical papers.<sup>31</sup> On this particular voyage storms and adverse winds frustrate his purpose and he has to tack and dodge the Narcissus to achieve sixty miles in twenty-four hours.<sup>32</sup> However, a master had other responsibilities than making a fast passage. He had a duty to protect his owners' property and not to take undue risks so as to endanger unnecessarily the lives of the crew. These responsibilities are issues when a "big foaming sea"<sup>33</sup> keels the ship over to a position where the water on her decks and the strength of the wind keep her pinned down on her beam-ends. In such a situation the master could hang on and hope to right the ship in favourable conditions - incurring a delay which would involve a certain amount of risk - or he might order the masts to be cut knowing that the consequent loss of weight would enable the ship to right herself.

29. NN, p. 31.

30. e.g., the description of the ship's bells on NN p. 126 which, significantly enough, is accompanied by further proof of Allistoun's strength of mind and ability to command men.

31. NN, p. 31.

32. NN, p. 48.

33. NN, p. 56.

The disadvantage of the latter course would be that, once righted, the ship would lack sails and become a drifting hulk until some sort of jury (or temporary) mast could be raised. The crew, in the moment of crisis have no doubt what they want: "They all yelled unceasingly:-'the masts! Cut! Cut!'"<sup>34</sup>

Allistoun refuses, in the manner of the manly stereotype he has "nerve", and is willing to back his judgement that the ship can be righted. The men,

waited for the ship to turn over altogether, and shake them out into the sea; and upon the terrific noise of wind and sea not a murmur of remonstrance came out from those men, who each would have given ever so many years of life to see 'them damned sticks go overboard!' They all believed it their only chance; but a hard-faced man shook his grey head and shouted 'No!' without giving them as much as a glance. 35

There is a note of wonder in the narrator's voice analogous to Marlow's stated admiration in "Youth" where he remembers how well the seamen on the burning Judea took the decision of Captain Beard to refuse help from a passing steamer.<sup>36</sup> This note of wonder is significant and is to be contrasted with the humorous irony which colours so much of The Nigger. At moments such as these, the narrative is a tribute to and a celebration of the qualities of British seamen.

Paul Kirschner criticises Allistoun for being a "martinet far more interested in his own glory and prestige than in the welfare of the ship".<sup>37</sup> The crew, however, are not only obedient to his commands, they actively sympathise with his desire to make a fast passage: "Our hearts went out to the old man when he pressed her hard".<sup>38</sup> We might

34. NN, p. 58.

35. NN, p. 59.

36. Y, p. 28.

37. Paul Kirschner, Conrad : The Psychologist as Artist, Edinburgh (1968), p. 109 (referred to below as: Kirschner, Conrad).

38. NN, p. 51.



note also that the obedience of the men in the crisis is amply rewarded: the ship is righted and makes a successful passage home. Allistoun's conduct in the period immediately after the ship is righted may appear harsh, but he is no less demanding of himself. Once the ship is righted he cannot afford to let the men relax because there is much to do to ensure the safety of the vessel: he sees to it that new sails are bent, and makes sure that the steering and pumps are functioning correctly.<sup>39</sup> He has to be fierce and uncompromising because the men are tired, but his harshness is accepted because he has undergone the same discomfort and danger and is thus asking the men to follow his own example. Conrad makes a point about the responsibility that authority carries when he notes how Allistoun would not drink until all the men had done so.<sup>40</sup> He is plainly exhausted at the end of the crisis, a mark of the responsibility he carried: "Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown".

#### IV

It was the men's fear of death that prompted them to shout "'Cut'" just as it was Allistoun's responsibility to make them forget death. The Nigger's main theme is the impact of the reality of death upon a tightly-knit group of men in a dangerous occupation. The fear of death is symbolised by Jimmy Wait. His effect, like the effect of death on the body, is to paralyse the ship's orderly operation. His name puns on a number of meanings: first, that he is a weight on the ship's progress and normally happy atmosphere; and, secondly, that death waits for every man. The illness which afflicts him is never named but it is associated with a harsh "metallic" cough,<sup>41</sup> probably indicating a form of T.B. The ambiguity is intentional: the reader is never certain

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39. NN, pp. 88-89.

40. NN, p. 63.

41. NN, p. 18.



whether he is ill or a malingerer, or, indeed, how ill he is: he might be seeking somewhere to be alone with his fear of death - like the second mate in The Shadow Line.<sup>42</sup> The crew's attitude to him continually changes but, after they have damned him as a malingerer, their dominant emotion is one of truculent sympathy. As their sympathy for him grows, so runs the novel's implication, their betrayal of their own manliness increases. This betrayal is shown through the clash between the men and their master consequent on the increasing influence of Wait and Donkin.

Wait sets up a rival centre of authority as the men tend to his needs: medicine, extra food, and conversation.<sup>43</sup> He demands, and receives, silence on the deck when he is sleeping. He begins to assume the looks of a skeleton:

the fleshless head resembled a disinterred black skull, fitted with two restless glo es of silver in the sockets of eyes. He was demoralizing. Through him we were becoming highly humanised, tender, complex, excessively decadent: we understood the subtlety of his fear, sympathised with all his repulsions, shrinkings, evasions, delusions - as though we had been over-civilised, and rotten, and without any knowledge of the meaning of life. 44

The men are so completely dominated that, ironically, they risk their lives off the Cape to rescue him from the sickbay, where he has been trapped.<sup>45</sup> The incident itself, which entails the breaking of a bulk-head between the carpenter's shop and the sick bay - a dark wet operation from which Wait emerges, screaming like a new-born baby - has been seen as the rebirth of fear on the vessel.<sup>46</sup> Allistoun takes no part in the rescue; he could have little interest in an incident which will only increase the threat to his authority and the safety of his ship.

42. SL, p. 99.

43. See e.g., NN, pp. 37-38 and 45.

44. NN, p. 139.

45. NN, pp. 63-72.

46. Albert J. Guerard, Conrad the Novelist, Cambridge, Mass. (1958), p. 112 (referred to below as: Guerard, Conrad).

The challenge to his authority reaches a climax when the evangelical cook, Podmore, slips into Wait's sick bay to prepare the negro's soul for death.<sup>47</sup> The interview merely increases his already huge fears of death with a potent, and appropriately nautical, image of hell: "'The furnaces of one of them White Star boats ain't nothing to it'".<sup>48</sup> A scene ensues and Allistoun intervenes. Wait, thoroughly terrified, wants to return to work - his last desperate act of self-deception. The master refuses; he explains his reasons to Baker:

'Did you think I had gone wrong there, Mr Baker?'  
He tapped his forehead, laughed short. 'When I saw him standing there, three parts dead and so scared - black amongst that gaping lot - no grit to face what's coming to us all - the notion came to me all at once, before I could think. Sorry for him - like you would be for a sick brute. If ever creature was in a mortal funk to die! . . . I thought I would let him go out in his own way. Kind of impulse. 49

It is the first and only flaw in Allistoun's diplomacy and he pays dearly for it. Ironically it is his only concession to the manly qualities expected of sailors. Wait's wish, to return to work, was probably the best course of action - in work he might have forgotten his fears. Of course the clash between the officers and crew that follows is partly comic: the crew remind Allistoun of a man's right to work,<sup>50</sup> whereas before they had given Wait a life of luxury; and the master, a hard driver of men, is placed in the invidious position of demanding that Wait stays in the sickbay. This superbly ironic situation is one of the few moments in the novel when one senses that Conrad is reaching the point where he can show the limitations of a man-of-action without detracting from the manliness of his creation.

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47. NN, pp. 113-117.

48. NN, p. 115.

49. NN, p. 127.

50. NN, pp. 120-121.



Allistoun is cornered by his own feelings of sympathy and, in the terms of the standards of manliness that inform the narrative, he is being well-punished for his mistake in demanding that Wait should stay in the sickbay. The implication is that only a harsh and uncompromising attitude to man's fear of death is acceptable. The sailmaker mumbles an opinion as he sews up Wait's corpse into a sail:

'When I . . . West India Station . . . In the Blanche frigate . . . Yellow Jack . . . sewed in twenty men a week . . . Portsmouth - Devonport men - townies - knew their fathers, mothers, sisters - the whole boiling of 'em. Thought nothing of it. And these niggers like this one - you don't know where it comes from. Got nobody. No use to nobody. Who will miss him?' - 'I do - I pulled him out,' mourned Belfast dismally. 51

The novel suggests that Belfast has only a possessive interest in Wait. Thus he tends him - he spent "every moment of his spare time in Jimmy's cabin"<sup>52</sup> as though he is sustaining his own life; he has succumbed to "the latent egoism of tenderness to suffering [which] appeared in the developing anxiety not to see him die".<sup>53</sup> The insistence, that every man must stand alone and that sympathy is misplaced, underlines The Nigger's place as one of Conrad's early sea stories. Even Belfast conforms to the tough, unsentimental, man-of-action stereotype when, as Wait's corpse refuses to slide into the water, he shouts:

'Jimmy, be a man!'<sup>54</sup>

## V

The third challenge to Allistoun's authority comes from the cockney reformer, Donkin. He is an Ordinary Seaman, that is one who is unskilled, in contrast to Singleton, an Able Seaman, who is skilled. There are many

51. NN, p. 158.

52. NN, p. 140.

53. NN, p. 138.

54. NN, p. 160.



indications that Donkin is a poor seaman, but the most revealing is when he pays another member of the crew to take his trick at the wheel after the storm.<sup>55</sup> He offends all the traditional standards of manliness but, because he is articulate, and because he is able to capitalise on Wait's disruption of the ship, he exerts a powerful influence on the crew at particular times during the voyage. The Nigger consequently becomes a contest between weakness, as represented by Wait and Donkin, and strength as illustrated in the characters of Allistoun, the officers and Singleton.

Donkin is never called a socialist and we should be wary of connecting his arguments - most of which refer to specifically maritime questions - with the young Conrad's disapproval of socialists.<sup>56</sup> Donkin's ideas seem very familiar today; the narrator speaks of

His care for our rights, his disinterested concern for our dignity . . . . "Didn't we lead a 'dorg's loife for two poun' ten a month?" Did we think that miserable pay enough to compensate us for the risk to our lives and for the loss of our clothes?" 57

There seems little that is either reprehensible or revolutionary in Donkin's sentiments. Conrad, however, appears to be giving these ideas no credence because his advocate is a troublemaker, a malingerer, a thief, and an unskilled and cowardly sailor.

On a more specifically maritime note there is one incident in the novel which has been interpreted as an attack upon the maritime reformer

55. NN, p. 96.

56. See e.g., Aubry, Life and Letters, i, 84: "Where's the man to stop the rush of social-democratic ideas?". Such sentiments must be balanced against his later letters to the socialist Cunninghame Graham. In 1897, for instance, he wrote: "You are a most hopeless idealist - your aspirations are irrealisable. You want from men faith, honour, fidelity to <sup>themselves</sup> themselves and others. . . . What makes you dangerous is your unwarrantable belief that your desire may be realised. This is the only point of difference between us. I do not believe." Watts, Letters, p. 56.

57. NN, p. 100.

Samuel Plimsoll.<sup>58</sup> After the ship has been righted the crew live optimistically in the glory of their "success". Donkin capitalises on their good humour and, because they are pleased with themselves, his doctrines gain a sort of acceptance. His suggestion that they should all go sick prompts an anecdote about a crew who refused duty on the advice of a Plimsoll man.<sup>59</sup> He had advised them that their ship was overloaded and they acted upon his word. Unfortunately for them he was proved to be mistaken and the crew were sentenced to six weeks hard-labour.<sup>60</sup> The common link between Conrad's portrayal of Donkin and the Plimsoll man is that he chooses poor representatives for what many of us would call a just cause: Donkin is a fraud and a malingerer; the Plimsoll agent "'Couldn't see no further than the length of his umbreller.'"<sup>61</sup>

There would appear to be three points at issue over Donkin's arguments and the Plimsoll anecdote: first, what were Conrad's opinions on socialism and reforming movements in general; secondly, what attitude did he take towards Plimsoll's campaigns to improve the safety of British ships; and, finally, to what extent can The Nigger be read as a political statement? The first question has been extensively debated and one critic at least has argued that Conrad was by no means the reactionary

58. See Norris W. Yates, "Social Comment in The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' (referred to below as: Yates, "Social Comment in The Nigger"), P.M.L.A., LXXIX (1964), 183-185 and particularly p. 183. Yates includes a short biographical sketch of Plimsoll who was active as a maritime reformer during Conrad's career at sea. For further details see David Masters, The Plimsoll Mark, London (1955) (referred to below as: Masters, Plimsoll).

59. NN, pp. 107-108.

60. NN, p. 107.

61. NN, p. 107.



that he has often been taken for.<sup>62</sup> To extend the debate further is outside the scope of this thesis and, in any case, as I hope to show in answering the third point, I am not sure that it is a particularly helpful line of enquiry.

In order to do justice to Conrad's probable opinions on the rightness or wrongness of Plimsoll's campaigns one need only read his article "Certain Aspects of the Admirable Inquiry into the Loss of the Titanic" (1912).<sup>63</sup> The article makes plain his hatred of the commercial exploitation of the sailor and the public by unscrupulous owners and "passage-selling Combines". In the following extract Conrad is writing of the debate about how many life-boats are needed on ocean liners:

On an earlier day there was another witness before the Court of Inquiry. A mighty official of the White Star Line. The impression of his testimony which the report gave is of an almost scornful impatience with all this fuss and pother. Boats! Of course we have crowded our decks with them in answer to this ignorant clamour. Mere lumber, How can we handle so many boats with our davits? Your people don't know the conditions of the problem. We have given these matters our best consideration . . . . We have done more than our duty. We are wise, and good, and impeccable. And whoever says otherwise is either ignorant or wicked.

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62. See Yates, "Social Comment in The Nigger"; Marvin Mudrick, "The Artist's Conscience and The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'", Nineteenth-Century Fiction, XI (1957), 288-297 and especially pp. 294-295 (referred to below as: Mudrick, "Artist's Conscience"), both of which see Conrad as a conservative figure. One critic who argues that Conrad's political opinions were complex and by no means reactionary is Avrom Fleishman, Conrad's Politics: Community and Anarchy in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad, Baltimore (1967). Fleishman concedes that The Nigger offers only a "confused and unsatisfactory" judgement of the working class (p. 132) but argues that Conrad's mixture of sympathy and scorn "cannot, however, be used to characterise Conrad's politics, for it is to be found in the heart of organicists, liberals, and conservatives alike" (p. 132). Like Fleishman, Eloise Knapp Hay, The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad: A Critical Study, Chicago and London (1963) pp. 31-80, and Najder, Polish Background, pp. 30-31 assess the influence of his Polish upbringing on his political attitudes.

63. NLL, pp. 213-248.



This is the gist of these scornful answers which disclose the psychology of commercial undertakings. It is the same psychology which fifty or so years ago, before Samuel Plimsoll uplifted his voice, sent overloaded ships to sea. "Why shouldn't we cram in as much cargo as our ships will hold? Look how few, how very few of them get lost, after all." 64

Although this passage was written some thirteen years after The Nigger there should be little doubt as to the sincerity of his feelings on the subject or the strength of his condemnation of those owners who had endangered the lives of their crew.<sup>65</sup>

Conrad's support for Plimsoll's activities should remind us that the Plimsoll anecdote is related by a character; there is no hint that it expresses his own views on the subject. Nevertheless it does contain the key to his purpose in the novel and therefore helps to formulate an answer as to whether The Nigger is a political statement or not.

It is obvious that the Cardiff sailors involved in the affair are not particularly conscious of the part they might play in the drive for political, social, and economic reform. Indeed their actions are governed by something less than honest intent: "'They thought to have a bloomin' lark and two or three days' spree'".<sup>66</sup> If this appears to be a slander on the sailors of the time then perhaps we can hardly blame them for attempting to cheat something out of the ship's owners. The

64. NLL, pp. 241-242.

65. Conrad's opinions as a sailor can perhaps be deduced from a letter his uncle, Bobrowski, wrote to him in January 1882: "Both your Captain Beard [of the Palestine] and you appear to me like desperate men who look for knocks and wounds, while your ship-owner is a rascal who risks the lives of 10 good men for the sake of a blackguardly profit." (Najder, Polish Background, p.81). Conrad had doubtless written to him of the poor state of the ship (Baines, Conrad, p. 70 refers to it as "decrepit"). Owners are frequently cast as villains in the sea fiction of the period though Conrad hardly ever mentions them. See e.g., Cutcliffe Hyne's Captain Kettle stories. Perhaps he wished to distance his own sea narratives from their popular counterparts and therefore avoided what was becoming a hackneyed figure.

66. NN, p. 107.

crew of the Narcissus, for example, remind us of the unfairness between the relative strengths of the owners and the seamen:

A seaman emitted the opinion that after a verdict of atrocious partiality [the harsh sentences imposed] "the bloomin' beaks go an' drink at the skipper's expense." Others assented. It was clear of course. 67

It might also be argued that the Plimsoll anecdote is unfair to the reforming movement itself; nevertheless the comic inefficiency of the Plimsoll agent and the scepticism at the root of the tale was probably justified on two counts. First, Plimsoll's campaigns were hampered by an inability to present an accurate case;<sup>68</sup> secondly, much of the shipping legislation sponsored by Plimsoll was ineffective and the owners delayed improvements for decades.<sup>69</sup> Indeed the anecdote reads like a parody of the early history of the movement, and the enduring impression it creates is that sailors are doomed to suffer at the hands of friends and enemies alike; even the revenge they plan to take on the Plimsoll agent - they "'stood by to duck that old spunger weeping in the dock'"<sup>70</sup> - is frustrated.

The Cardiff men exhibit a self-reliance stemming from an essentially "manly" approach to life; it is ironic that their one act of dependence - their trust, however cynically motivated, in the Plimsoll agent - results in trouble with the law and subsequent imprisonment. Their attitude is one response to a world where exploitation was rife and injustice common. The general point to be drawn is that Conrad was not writing a pamphlet for maritime reform<sup>71</sup> but an<sup>imaginative</sup> study of seamen as he had observed them in some twenty years service at sea.

67. NN, p. 108.

68. See Masters, Plimsoll, pp. 146, 158-159, 162-163, and 170-172.

69. Captain A.G. Course, The Merchant Navy : A Social History, London (1963), pp. 238-239, 245-249

70. NN, p. 107.

71. As did his contemporary W. Clark Russell (see above p. 8): A Forecastle View of the Shipping Commission, Sampson Low and Co., London (1885).



There still remains the intriguing question of his attitude to Donkin and other aspects of maritime reform beyond issues involving the safety of vessels; Donkin, for example, advocates better pay and conditions. Immediately after the Plimsoll anecdote we are reminded that, as far as the novel is concerned, Donkin has nothing to offer the sailors. In answer to a question as to who would sail the ship if they went on strike, he comments: "'Drift an' be blowed'".<sup>72</sup> It seems undeniable that Conrad was against demands for better pay and working conditions and yet what we are really faced with is a difference of emphasis, and what he has chosen to emphasise is once again the manly virtues: self-sufficiency, endurance, and stoicism. Donkin's ideas would mean an end to these virtues because he would remove the very conditions that create them; in a world of his making there would be no need for them:

and inspired by Donkin's hopeful doctrines [the crew] dreamed enthusiastically of the time when every lonely ship would travel over a serene sea, manned by a wealthy and well-fed crew of satisfied skippers. <sup>73</sup>

Conrad's essentially conservative attitude - and it is one common among men in dangerous occupations<sup>74</sup> - is evident in his letters of the 1890's.<sup>75</sup>

72. NN, p. 108.

73. NN, p. 103.

74. Stephen Reynolds (see above pp. 168-169) makes the same point about the Devon fishermen he describes in Alongshore, London (1910), p.67: "They depend on that which is changeless in its changeableness, the sea and luck. They have the more primitive conservatism of men to whom two days are never the same - a conservatism backed by the active fatalism (as opposed to the passive variety) which comes from the hazards of fishing and the sea. Having few things certain in life, they hold the more stubbornly to those that are."

75. See e.g., his famous reply to Cunninghame Graham's suggestion that what was required was "Singleton with an education" (Watts, Letters, pp. 53-54). Ian Watt makes a related point in "Conrad Criticism and The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'", Nineteenth-Century Fiction, XII (1958), 257-283 (referred to below as: Watt, "The Nigger"): "Symbolically, Conrad seems to be saying that although pitilessness is characteristic of the selfish, yet the increasing sensitiveness to the sufferings of others which civilisation brings necessarily poses grave problems of control for the individual and for society; and by making Singleton not so much unsympathetic as unaware of Wait's suffering he may be thought to have reminded us that the older and less humanitarian order was not so easily deflected from its collective purpose" (p. 277).



What is perhaps surprising is that in both novel and letters he shows an almost total unawareness of the political implications of his ideas.<sup>76</sup>

Some critics, however, have linked The Nigger's derogatory references to Donkin's socialism and its stress upon Allistoun's right to authority and read it as a reactionary political statement in which Conrad was advocating that society itself should be run on the same authoritarian lines as a ship.<sup>77</sup> It is argued below that the novel cannot be interpreted as social allegory<sup>78</sup> but what I should like to stress at this juncture is how much it is a closely realistic portrait of life and attitudes at sea in the sailing-ship era. To recognise this is to begin to understand by how much the internal action of the narrative is determined not by the author's political opinions but by the world which he was observing. This process can be demonstrated by Allistoun's handling of the mutiny stirred up by Donkin.

The confrontation between crew and officers is a direct result of Allistoun's demand that Podmore should leave Wait's cabin and his refusal that the negro should be allowed to return to work. The crew feel that an injustice has been committed: "'D'ye mean to say, sir . . . that a sick chap ain't allowed to get well in this 'ere hooker?'"<sup>79</sup> Amongst the talk of a strike Donkin is present, generally stirring things up and, when the men are called to account by Allistoun, he takes the opportunity offered by the encroaching darkness to throw an iron belaying-pin at the master; he is promptly beaten-up by the men.<sup>80</sup>

76. Najder, Polish Background, pp. 30-31 e.g., summarises her own opinion on Conrad's political opinions thus: "Politically he always remained an outsider. He did not understand the new, emerging social forces . . . and at the same time he was outspokenly contemptuous of the contemporary socio-economic order or 'material interests'".

77. Kirschner, Conrad, p. 107, and Mudrick, "Artist's Conscience", pp. 294-295.

78. See below pp. 385-388.

79. NN, p. 120.

80. NN, pp. 123-124.

Allistoun waits until morning before he confronts the crew who have merely misunderstood his attempt to make death easier for the negro. His point of view is quite simple:

'but I am here to drive this ship and keep every man-jack aboard of her up to the mark' 81

He asks the men what they want,<sup>82</sup> a neat act of diplomacy because they can only answer him with inarticulate murmurings. This appears to have been a common ploy by masters, who could rely upon the reluctance of the men to speak in public; there is a similar incident in David Bone's The Brassbounder.<sup>83</sup> Significantly, Allistoun also plays upon the men's masculine susceptibilities: he suggests that the work is too hard for them, "There was an offended silence";<sup>84</sup> and, when a sailor replies, saying that they do not want to work shorthanded, he rounds angrily on them and, without the least concession to logic, berates them for being "'Too big for their boots'".<sup>85</sup> He dramatically produces the iron belaying-pin,<sup>86</sup> thrown at him by Donkin, because he knows of the crew's distaste for the incident; the confrontation between master and men dissolves into a clash between Donkin and the master.

His diplomacy has been unfair (in the "liberal" sense of the word) but it is commensurate with his conception of duty: "'but I am here to drive this ship . . . .'"<sup>87</sup> He has the limited horizons of the stoic. He believes he can do nothing for the men, except keep them at their work, because their plight is that of mankind in a hostile universe;

81. NN, p. 133.

82. NN, p. 133.

83. David Bone The Brassbounder, Longmans Concise Edition, London (1960), pp. 96-97.

84. NN, p. 134.

85. NN, p. 134.

86. NN, p. 135.

87. NN, p. 133.



he knows nothing of a meliorating society as he knows nothing of a benevolent ocean. Conrad himself held these views in the 1890's,<sup>88</sup> but it is also true that they are not inconsistent with a portrait of a sailing-ship master (which, of course, Conrad had been).<sup>89</sup> Allistoun's position is limited, traditional, and conservative; but his owners would not thank him - or indeed employ him - if he promised better wages and conditions of service. Significantly, the men respond to his appeal, indeed their allegiance to the authority vested in the master is never seriously threatened.

The confusion which exists over the exact point where Conrad's ideas can be distinguished from those of a seaman of the 1880's would appear to stem at least partly from the fact that the dramatised narrator of The Nigger is given no clearly defined status in the ship's hierarchy or, indeed, a presence acknowledged by the other characters; consequently it often seems upon a cursory examination as though Conrad is speaking directly to the reader when the reverse

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88. See e.g., Conrad's letter to the socialist Cunningham Graham, whom he called a "hopeless idealist" (Watts, Letters, p. 56): "The fate of a humanity condemned ultimately to perish from cold is not worth troubling about . . . . If you believe in improvement you must weep, for the attained perfection must end in cold, darkness and silence." (Watts, Letters, p. 65).

89. In 1892, while chief mate of the Torrens, Conrad wrote to his aunt Marguerite Poradowska in reply to a suggestion that he should resign from his post: "And as for resigning from the ship, I cannot afford that luxury on account of my daily bread - you know, that which one eats by the sweat of one's brow, and sometimes by the sweat of another's when one is clever enough to stay in the shade and let others strive in the sun . . . . When one <sup>used</sup> understands that in oneself one is nothing and that a man is worth neither more nor less than the work he accomplishes with honesty of purpose and means, and within the strict limits of his duty towards society, only then is one the master of his conscience, with the right to call himself a man." (Letters of Joseph Conrad to Marguerite Poradowska, 1890-1920 translated from the French and edited by John A. Gee and Paul J. Sturm, New Haven (1940), pp. 45-46 (referred to below as: Gee and Sturm, Letters). Conrad's stress on work, duty, and being a "man" anticipates Allistoun's attitudes.



is true.<sup>90</sup> What needs to be stressed is, first, that the novel is designed to give what we might call an "inner view" of the Service, and, secondly, whatever opinion we ultimately form of Conrad's political stance it should not necessarily affect our judgement of his "picture of society".<sup>91</sup> I would argue, therefore, that Allistoun's handling of the crew may be seen as both realistically conceived by Conrad and appropriate to the situation Allistoun faces within the novel: the men appreciate his mental and physical toughness and respond favourably. What further complicates any broader view of Conrad's purpose in the novel is that his sense of man's vulnerability and impotence in a hostile natural world finds a ready mouthpiece in Allistoun's essentially conservative attitude.

## VI

Marlow is frequently seen as a significant character in Conrad's sea fiction because it is through the medium of his personality that fresh elements are introduced.<sup>92</sup> Marlow is the first seaman of whom the reader obtains an inner view; his inner debates, fears, prejudices, and musings are fully presented. Unlike Allistoun, he develops; in "Youth" we view through his middle-aged eyes his younger self on his first voyage as an officer and the point of the story is to illustrate

90. The seaman-narrator is identified by the pronouns we, us, our, and, in the final pages of the novel I. The omniscient narration ends in Chapter Two (p. 31) (see Marion C. Michael, "James Wait as Pivot : Narrative Structure in The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'", Proceedings of the Comparative Literature Symposium, vii: Joseph Conrad : Theory and World Fiction, ed., Wolodymyr T. Zyla and Wendell M. Aycock, Lubbock, Texas (1974), p. 99. Michael, and Watt, "The Nigger", pp. 258-262 defend the handling of the narration though Watt admits that there are some "logical contradictions" in the early parts (Watt, "The Nigger", p. 262).

91. This point is made by Watt, "The Nigger", p. 279.

92. See e.g., Baines, Conrad, p. 212, and Gerald Levin, "The Scepticism of Marlow", Twentieth Century Literature, 3 (1958), 177-184.

both how he has developed and how he conceived of that development at two different stages in his life. Marlow is, in fact, a seaman quite out of the ordinary. This point is made by an anonymous narrator in "Heart of Darkness":

He was the only man of us who still 'followed the sea'. The worst that could be said of him was that he did not represent his class. He was a seaman, but he was a wanderer, too, while most seamen lead, if one may so express it, a sedentary life. Their minds are of the stay-at-home order, and their home is always with them - the ship; and so is their country - the sea. One ship is very<sup>much</sup> like another, and the sea is always the same. In the immutability of their surroundings the foreign shores, the foreign faces, the changing immensity of life, glide past, veiled not by a sense of mystery but by a slightly disdainful ignorance . . . . 93

Indeed, Marlow figures more as a philosopher than a seaman in the novels in which he appears.

Whatever his atypicality he is also aware of, and always deeply indebted to, the traditional sailor virtues - as established in Conrad's sea fiction. He narrates his stories - "inconclusive experiences",<sup>94</sup> as one of his companions calls them - to men united by the "bond of the sea".<sup>95</sup> In "Heart of Darkness" he recalls how he navigated a steamer up an African river. The difficulties of navigation that he faced were considerable and, gradually, the shoals, islands, and twisting passages become representative of the moral abyss into which he feels he has fallen, an abyss compounded of the suffering, exploitation, and greed which he found in the Congo. The navigational problems which confront him, and the discipline they impose on his mind - "'I was learning to clap my teeth smartly before my heart flew out,'"<sup>96</sup> - keep him sane. The same

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93. Y, p. 48.

94. Y, p. 51.

95. Y, p. 45.

96. Y, p. 93.



point is made in the incident where he finds the book, An Inquiry into Some Points of Seamanship.

I handled this amazing antiquity with the greatest possible tenderness, lest it should dissolve in my hands . . . . Not a very enthralling book; but 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. 97

The book is representative of an albeit limited way of life in which the magnitude of evil and the harshness of fate are ignored; Marlow keeps his sanity because he concerns himself with the everyday problems of existence.

Lord Jim questions the abilities of man to live up to his ideals. The incident upon which the novel is built, and which prompts Marlow's questionings, is the desertion of the steamer Patna by her white officers. He is particularly concerned with the case of the young chief mate, Jim. The German captain and the chief engineer do not bother him because they have the aspect of men who would desert two hundred pilgrims. Jim appears to be different; as Marlow remarks "'he was one of us'"<sup>98</sup> - a Western seaman, seemingly reliable, trustworthy, and confident in his own abilities,

he was outwardly so typical of that good, stupid kind we like to feel marching right and left of us in life, of the kind that is not disturbed by the vagaries of intelligence and the perversions of - of nerves, let us say. He was the kind of fellow you would, on the strength of his looks, leave in charge of the deck - figuratively and professionally speaking. 99

The thought that continually teases Marlow's mind is that, if Jim is untrustworthy, can anybody trust himself; is Jim's weakness typical?

97. Y, p. 99.

98. LJ, p. 43.

99. LJ, p. 44.



This might be put differently: are the standards of manly endurance and endeavour by which sailors live an illusion? The question may seem too remotely philosophical to be compatible with the demands of the adventure novel but Conrad's use of various narrators (Marlow, his friend who writes to him about Jim, Gentleman Jim Brown, Jim himself, and the omniscient narrator of the early chapters) achieves a remarkable balance. The immediacy of the problems which confront the actors in the drama emerges through Jim and Gentleman Jim Brown, whereas the more philosophical questions emanate from Marlow and his unnamed friend.

The circumstances in which Jim fails are carefully constructed so as to reveal the nature of his personality. His captain is completely unprincipled and as eager to abandon the Patna as his fellow officers. Consequently Jim has no other example which he could follow. In addition, Jim is in a subordinate position; he does not have the honour of being in command to stiffen his resolve. The pilgrims are unaware of the drama of the officers' escape since it takes place at night, and the deserters are able to flee unobserved in a small boat. When the Patna's lights disappear the secrecy of their desertion seems complete: the ship has apparently sunk without trace.<sup>100</sup>

Jim had not left the Patna without an inner struggle but, ironically, his better qualities work against him; he had always dreamed of being a hero,<sup>101</sup> yet the seeming hopelessness of the ship's position makes heroism seem an empty gesture. He thinks of a way to help the pilgrims, but his plan is defeated by the magnitude of the problem: there are not enough lifeboats and the Patna's bulkheads are so rust-ridden that there is no course of action to follow; in fact any efforts to strengthen the restraining bulkhead might fatally weaken it. On the

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100. LJ, p. 113.

101. LJ, p. 6.

other hand, if he alerts the pilgrims there will be panic:

Before he could shout three words, or make three steps, he would be floundering in a sea whitened awfully by the desperate struggles of human beings, clamorous with the distress of cries for help. There was no help. 102

As Marlow realises, Jim is partly a victim of his own imagination -

"His confounded imagination had evoked for him all the horrors of panic . . ."<sup>103</sup> but he is also a victim of a sudden vision of the state of the world as Conrad, in his most pessimistic moments, imagined; he has seen in a marine emergency the futility of life. Furthermore, Jim, in deserting the pilgrims, is adopting a stance Conrad often took in his more pessimistic letters:

The fate of a humanity condemned ultimately to perish from cold is not worth troubling about. If you take it to heart it becomes an unendurable tragedy . . . . In a dispassionate view the ardour for reform, improvement for virtue . . . is only a vague sticking up for appearances as though one were anxious about one's clothes in a community of blind men. 104 <sup>the cut of</sup>

This last passage was written only a few months before he began "Tuan Jim"<sup>105</sup> and the sentiment is dramatised in Jim's desertion in the completed novel. The final simile is an interesting one because Jim never expects to be found out.

Despite his act of cowardice and his consequent dismissal from the service, Jim retains a sense of his own worth; he feels that he is different from his fellow deserters.<sup>106</sup> In this he is similar to

102. LJ, pp. 86 and 92.

103. LJ, p. 88.

104. Watts, Letters, p. 65.

105. The letter is dated 14 January 1898 and "Tuan Jim" was begun some time during the summer of 1898 (see above p. 231).

106. In his conversation with Marlow Jim claims that, "It was their doing" that he had jumped from the Patna (LJ, p. 123).



those of us who look for the altruistic and the idealistic in man and society. His quest for heroic success finally leads him to the jungle village of Patusan where he becomes a lawgiver and judge, a friend to the weak against the strong. As such he escapes the knowledge of the full significance of his act, escapes that is, until Gentleman Jim Brown arrives in Patusan.<sup>107</sup>

Brown, one of the few adventurers in Conrad's sea fiction, is an important figure because he reasserts the kinship, the levelling democracy of evil. In his confrontation with Jim he paralyses the law by asserting that he, as the accused, and Jim, as the judge, are both of the same type:

"'When it came to saving one's life in the dark, one didn't care who else went - three, thirty, three hundred people' . . . . 'I made him wince,' boasted Brown to me. 'He very soon left off coming the righteous over me . . . .' He asked Jim whether he had nothing fishy in his life to remember that he was so damnedly hard upon a man . . . .'" 108

Brown's choice of illustration is uncanny; there were three hundred souls on board the Patna the night Jim deserted it. At the very moment that Jim is deciding what action to take over a murderer he is crippled by his own guilt. Brierly had felt a similar kinship with Jim when he had been asked to judge at the Court of Inquiry. Jim is thus representative not only of a part of Marlow's mind, of the side which "exists stealthily in perpetual darkness",<sup>109</sup> but to all of us who possess within us, as the world's religions have long asserted, a capacity for evil, cowardice, inhumanity, and selfishness. Jim is only different from us in that he has tangible evidence of his guilt:

'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

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107. LJ, p. 357.

108. LJ, pp. 386-387.

109. LJ, p. 93.



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 . . . . 110

Marlow's problem in Lord Jim is simply but graphically represented. The seamen's spokesman, as it were, he feels that Jim should be condemned, but, at the same time, he knows that Jim's problem concerns us all. The famous "fixed standard of conduct" passage<sup>111</sup> sets forth his fears that we are all potential cowards. Nevertheless, Marlow struggles hard to maintain what is essentially a conception of manliness. In the sea part of the novel he draws upon his own experience and seeks the advice of fellow sailors to help him decide upon the significance of Jim's desertion. His findings are, nevertheless, inconclusive; indeed there is a strong sense that men are capable of heroism and can live up to their standards of manliness even when they are aware of their own insignificance in the world, and the futility but necessity of sacrifice. The cases of Brierly and the French lieutenant illustrate the point.

The incident in which Brierly commits suicide by leaping over the taffrail of his ship has already been referred to.<sup>112</sup> His act can reasonably be linked to the impact of Jim's trial on his high opinion of himself; his jump would seem to be a symbolic act, recalling Jim's own jump from the Patna. Brierly is similar to Jim in that both men think of themselves as special: Brierly's career had been one of brilliant success.<sup>113</sup> In one sense, therefore, his suicide would appear to be a recognition of the fact that all men are potential cowards; in another sense, what has really destroyed Brierly is his own conceit: he has suddenly become aware that he is prey to the same

110. LJ, p. 93.

111. LJ, pp. 50-51.

112. See above p. 307.

113. LJ, p. 57.

doubts and fears that torment ordinary men. The incident is made to appear less central simply because one has the impression that he has received what he deserves. Indeed Brierly does not belong at all to the men "in the ranks" and the novel gives no certain answer as to whether Brierly proves that men cannot live up to their ideals or whether he is a victim of a quite unjustifiable conceit and self-confidence.

In complete contrast to Brierly, the French lieutenant, who had been on board the Patna when it had been towed into harbour,<sup>114</sup> is supremely unsuccessful in career terms; when Marlow meets him he is the elderly third lieutenant of a French battleship. Unprepossessing in appearance, he is shabby and ungainly in his movements; nevertheless he has the bearing of a "man" and carries the scars of battle and the marks of time.

Time had passed indeed: it had overtaken him and gone ahead. It had left him hopelessly behind with a few poor gifts: the iron-grey hair, the heavy fatigue of the tanned face, two scars, a pair of tarnished shoulder-straps; one of those <sup>steady, reliable</sup> men who are the raw material of great reputations  
 . . . . 115

His lack of worldly success and his tough appearance seem to guarantee truth. Moreover when Marlow talks to him he appears to answer in riddles (as though that were some sort of divine guarantee): he speaks in broken English interspersed with French phrases. At the end Marlow feels encouraged enough to suggest that the Frenchman is advocating leniency towards Jim;<sup>116</sup> unfortunately the man is somewhat offended<sup>117</sup> and his reaction is accompanied by a description containing all the stereotyped

114. LJ, p. 137.

115. LJ, p. 143.

116. LJ, p. 148.

117. LJ, pp. 148-149.



marks of manliness:

I was confronted by two narrow grey circlets, like two tiny steel rings around the profound blackness of the pupils. The sharp glance, coming from that massive body, gave a notion of extreme efficiency, like a razor-edge on a battle-axe. 118

What is more, in concert with the taciturn hero, he refuses to consider the finer points of the argument. Marlow suggests that, if honour spurs men to courage, as the Frenchman suggests, then "'couldn't it reduce itself to not being found out?"; the man's reply is uncompromising:

'This, monsieur, is too fine for me . . . .' 119

The French lieutenant is a character in the mould of Allistoun and he leaves an enduring impression that his sort would never betray the trust placed in them. The close of the novel itself suggests that manliness is a viable ideal: Jim sacrifices his life for the common good and his own pride in Patusan. Nevertheless, the debate, and this is especially true in the early maritime chapters, has been extensive enough to warrant Lord Jim's place as a major investigation of the concept.

## VII

In "The Secret Sharer" and "Falk" manliness is once again a theme but, whereas Lord Jim is a study of weakness the two later stories are testimonies to the strength and courage of man. There is a further difference: Marlow had examined Jim's conduct from the point of view of the hero; in "The Secret Sharer" and "Falk" the adventurer enters and becomes the focus of Conrad's investigation into human behaviour.

"Falk", which was written and published some time before "The Secret Sharer", is a singular story; narrated to a group of sailors

118. LJ, p. 148.

119. LJ, p. 149.



in a river hostelry in England, it is the record of an English master's relationship with a Norwegian tug-master, Falk. Falk is a lonely man who wishes to marry but feels that he must inform his prospective in-laws of his experiences on the Borgmester Dahl. The Borgmester Dahl had been on a voyage to the Pacific which had ended when the propeller-shaft had snapped. The ship had drifted out of the main shipping lanes and the food had run out. Falk, the most talented, energetic, and resourceful crew member had survived by eating his shipmates.

The master-narrator of "Falk" early reveals that his story is concerned with manliness of a different kind than normally might be the case:

We talked of wrecks, of short rations and of heroism - or at least<sup>120</sup> what the newspapers would have called heroism at sea - a manifestation of virtues quite different from the heroism of primitive times. 120

Allistoun, MacWhirr, Leggatt, and Bob Stanton are heroes and conform to an ideal of manliness which demands self-sacrifice; on the other hand, the qualities of "classic heroism" ("pitiless resolution, endurance, cunning, and courage . . . .")<sup>121</sup> approximate to the "standards" by which the adventurer lives. Falk displays the latter qualities on board the Borgmester Dahl.

The narrator's development as a young man and master, as seen by his older self, partly encompasses the appreciation of the difference between two types of heroism. When Falk begins telling his tale and mentions cannibalism the narrator immediately thinks that he has been lucky "in the drawing of lots".<sup>122</sup> Nevertheless, it was presumably because Falk thought that a sailor would understand that a man must compete for his existence that he asked for the narrator's help. Falk

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120. T, p. 146.

121. T, p. 234.

122. T, p. 226.

describes his experiences as

a great misfortune. Terrible. Awful,' he said.  
'Many heads went wrong, but the best men would  
live.'

'The toughest, you mean,' I said. He considered  
the word. Perhaps it was strange to him, though  
his English was so good.

'Yes,' he asserted at last. 'The best'. 123

Later, when we are told how Falk had defeated the carpenter in a fight to decide who should live the narrator comments: "The best man had survived".<sup>124</sup> He is not condoning Falk's action, but acknowledging a fact of life. When he begins his own narration he describes the main characters as "my enemy Falk, and my friend Hermann",<sup>125</sup> and this presumably indicates not a personal animosity to Falk (Hermann is in many ways equally repulsive) but a regretted belief that man's higher ideals are threatened by his nature. The story consequently acknowledges that manliness is both a force for good - Falk had been perhaps the most capable and public-spirited man on board the Borgmester Dahl<sup>126</sup> just as he became an energetic member of the commercial life of the eastern port - and a force of frightening intensity.

"The Secret Sharer" continues and develops the arguments raised in "Falk"; the difference being that the heroic values of the Merchant Service are directly challenged in the later tale. In "Falk" the narrator is approached with a request for help and understanding, but he is not compelled to match Falk's bravery, endurance, and skill as a justification for his own altruistic standards which, we may infer

123. T, p. 226-7

124. T, p. 234.

125. T, p. 147.

126. Falk only resorts to cannibalism after he has been attacked by the carpenter (T, p. 233). Up to that point he had attempted to stiffen the weak captain's resolve (T, pp. 230-231) and ensure the fair distribution of food (T, p. 231).



from Falk's behaviour on the Borgmester Dahl, the adventurer finds inadequate. On the other hand the master-narrator of "The Secret Sharer" sees his own standards - once again the altruistic values of the Merchant Service - threatened, and, like any "man" in a contest involving the masculine qualities responds with a show of daring courage and skill.

The narrative has two main characters: Leggatt, the chief mate of the Sephora, who has murdered a seaman under extenuating circumstances; and the narrator who, as the master of a sailing ship to which Leggatt escapes, must decide what to do with him. The details of Leggatt's crime are straightforward. Like Jim he has violated the trust which binds an officer in his position: a seaman with whom he has always had poor relations, is insolent while a sail is being set after days of bad weather.

'I tell you I was overdone with this terrific weather that seemed to have no end to it. Terrific, I tell you - and a deep ship. I believe the fellow himself was half crazed with funk. It was no time for gentlemanly reproof, so I turned round and felled him like an ox. He up and at me. We closed just as an awful sea made for the ship. All hands saw it coming and took to the rigging, but I had him by the throat, and went on shaking him like a rat  
 . . . . 127

When the wave is gone the man is dead. Leggatt is "put in irons" but later escapes. When he tells his story to the narrator he reiterates his refusal to submit to the law:

'What can they know whether I am guilty or not - or of what I am guilty, either? That's my affair.' 128

The "they" he refers to are the natural opposites of the man-of-action: "'an old fellow in a wig and twelve respectable tradesmen'".<sup>129</sup>

127. TLS, p. 102.

128. TLS, pp. 131-132.

129. TLS, p. 131.



Nevertheless Leggatt's crime has not only set him apart from landsmen; he is also at odds with the officers and men of the Merchant Service: the master-narrator's crew instinctively condemn him;<sup>130</sup> he is being pursued by his old ship's company as a homicidal maniac; and the master-narrator describes him in terms which emphasise his position as an "outsider".

[Leggatt] looked thoughtfully at the chart as if surveying chances and distances from a lofty height - and following with his eyes his own figure wandering on the blank land of Cochin-China, and then passing off that piece of paper clean out of sight into uncharted regions. 131

Leggatt has become, through his killing of the seaman and his rejection of the conventional processes of the law, an adventurer. There may seem a world of difference between Leggatt and the ruthless and evil Ballantrae or Gentleman Jim Brown but we might compare his crime with the violent climax of The Wrecker: in each case men not distinguished for exceptional ruthlessness and cruelty are suddenly forced into a position where a violent inner nature is revealed. In effect Conrad and Stevenson were revealing that there is an "adventurer" inside each one of us. In this case the narrator's actions towards Leggatt take upon themselves a fresh significance.

The reasons for the narrator's concealment of Leggatt are quite complex. In one way he is caught unawares. He is in charge of a sleeping ship in which he is master and sole conscious member.<sup>132</sup> In this situation it is easier to listen to Leggatt's appeal than to rouse the sleeping ship. At first his sense of identification with Leggatt stems less from a conscious act of reason than an emotional impulse:

But at the time it was pure intuition on my part.  
A mysterious communication was established already

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130. TLS, p. 123.

131. TLS, p. 134.

132. TLS, pp. 91-99.

between us two - in the face of that silent, darkened tropical sea. I was young, too; young enough to make no comment. 133

Later he is drawn to Leggatt because they are both young, both outsiders, and because Leggatt's personal tragedy - he has lost his career - evokes both pity and fear in himself. More than anything else there is a sense in which the two stand against the ossified and mediocre ranks of the service. The mediocrities are represented by Archbold, whose name appropriately recalls a series of law manuals.<sup>134</sup> Archbold had been afraid to allow Leggatt to escape, partly because he was dominated by the steward and the second mate - "'Those two old chaps ran the ship'"<sup>135</sup> - and partly because he is a man who finds in rules and regulations a shelter for his own deficiencies in the manly virtues of initiative and courage.<sup>136</sup> Spurred on by these considerations the master-narrator is willing to admit that:

The same strung-up force which had given twenty-four men a chance, at least, for their lives, had, in a sort of recoil, crushed an unworthy mutinous existence. 137

The master-narrator's sympathy for Leggatt is interesting on two counts. First, it is another ramification of Marlow's contention in Lord Jim that a legal court cannot find the "truth" of such affairs.<sup>138</sup> Secondly, it demonstrates how, in a "masculine" context the crime of the strong man is more favourably judged than the crime emanating from a weakness of character: the "man" can reserve the right to judge himself.

133. TLS, p. 99.

134. J.F. Archbold 1785-1870 author of The Practice of the Court of King's Bench in personal actions and ejectment, 2 vols. (1819) 14 ed. (1885) and many other legal works.

135. TLS, p. 107.

136. See the passage beginning "He was. To the law . . . ." (TLS, pp. 118-119).

137. TLS, pp. 124-125.

138. LJ, p. 93.



The effect which Leggatt has upon the master-narrator underlines the point made in "Falk", that the masculine virtues - even those associated with the figure of the adventurer - can be a force for good. At first the master-narrator reacts poorly to the strain imposed by hiding Leggatt. He shouts hysterically at the steward when he fears that the fugitive will be discovered<sup>139</sup> and the nautical commands and "gestures, that should come as naturally, as instinctively as the winking of a menaced eye" desert him: "But all unconscious alertness had abandoned me".<sup>140</sup> The strain, however, prompts better responses and he begins to command in the dictatorial fashion demanded of a master.<sup>141</sup> He manages to ignore what he thinks the men are thinking of him, and to make decisions without deference to the other officers. He dresses down the young "cub" of a second mate<sup>142</sup> and begins to size up the men under his command. His new inner toughness is finally and decisively demonstrated when he risks his reputation in taking the ship close to the shore of an island in order to facilitate Leggatt's escape. He firmly disregards the hysterical importunities of the mate:

I hadn't let go the mate's arm and went on shaking it. 'Ready about, do you hear? You go forward' - shake - 'and stop there' - shake - 'and hold your noise' - shake - 'and see these head-sheets properly overhauled' - shake, shake - shake. <sup>143</sup>

The extent of the danger involved in the ship's manoeuvrings is an important question; certainly the narrator shows a lordly disdain in his use of the crew and his owners' property. Mary-Low Schenck argues that the chief mate's claim, that the risk involved - "'Do you mean, sir, in the dark amongst the lot of all them islands and reefs

139. TLS, p. 128.

140. TLS, p. 126.

141. Schenck, "'Secret Sharer'", pp. 4-6.

142. TLS, p. 135.

143. TLS, p. 141.



and shoals?"<sup>144</sup> - is an overstatement and that the worst the narrator is risking is the loss of his certificate.<sup>145</sup> Her argument lacks textual justification and, if we dismiss the mate's opinion, then it must also be remembered that Leggatt's story must be accepted with a larger element of trust. The important point is that the master-narrator demonstrates his superior daring and inner toughness over his crew and officers.

The narrator's commitment to Leggatt demonstrates the bonds that can exist between men-of-action. As the ship nears the shore Leggatt, in the sail-locker, is close at hand to the quarter-deck.

He was able to hear everything - and perhaps he was able to understand why, on my conscience, it had to be thus close - no less. 146

On a simple level the narrator has to sail close to the shore in order to give Leggatt a chance to reach land but, as has often been said, he is a good swimmer and should need no extra help.<sup>147</sup> The narrator's insistence suggests a deeper reasoning. I suggest that he is demonstrating that his was an act of sincere identification. Here my early point, that the narrator was placed in a position where silence and help were easier responses than denunciation, is relevant. Once Leggatt had elicited approval, the narrator could hardly have him arrested. Leggatt recognises this when he asks, "'and . . . you have understood thoroughly. Didn't you?"<sup>148</sup> The narrator is thus proving, within the conventions of manliness, his total identification with Leggatt. He is, furthermore, atoning for the less than masculine behaviour of

144. TLS, p. 134.

145. Schenck, "'The Secret Sharer'", p. 11.

146. TLS, p. 141.

147. TLS, pp. 99 and 106.

148. TLS, p. 132.

his fellow officers in the service - in particular the craven Archbold. In this sense he is reasserting and rekindling the true values of the Merchant Service.

## VIII

The theme of manliness is one unifying element in Conrad's nautically realistic sea stories. This is true whether the narratives date from the period 1896 to 1902 or the period 1909 to 1916. Furthermore an awareness of the theme helps to make clearer the motives behind the actions of the major characters and define more closely the ideas behind the stories. Thus the narrator of "The Secret Sharer" endangers his ship because he is sensitive to his standing as a man-of-action, and Jim (of Lord Jim) undergoes agonies of shame because his manliness is called into doubt. In addition it is important to recognise the extent to which Conrad's depiction of sailors is influenced by the concept of manliness because it enables a line to be drawn between their often myopic perspectives and Conrad's much broader view of man's relation to his environment.

The fact that the concept of manliness exists in the work of Stevenson and Kipling serves to forge a further bond between the three writers' work. Harvey Cheyne in Captains Courageous strives to match up to the manly ideals of the We're Here and his education begins when he is knocked to the deck for insolence. But Conrad, like Stevenson, is not content to allow it to become sacrosanct and in his work the viability of manliness as an ideal is called into question. Although this scepticism is at work in a novel as early as Lord Jim (1900) there are developments in his handling of the theme. One development is the extent to which his major characters are implicated: MacWhirr and Allistoun, as far as devotion to duty and contempt of death are involved, are supermen; the later narrator-masters are all too human.

Nevertheless manliness is not the only preoccupation of the Conradian officer and the following chapter is partly concerned with the sailor's professional expertise; but, whereas the present chapter has been a study of ideas, the next is an examination of form: the manner in which Conrad made use of his nautical expertise in the creation of dramatic content, symbolic incident, and the revelation of character.



## CHAPTER FOUR : Conrad's Use of Nautical Detail

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### I

For Stevenson and Kipling, the desire to write sea stories preceded any close acquaintance with the working life of sailors and the techniques of seamanship. In the early part of this thesis, it was shown how their lack of nautical knowledge conditioned the shape of their sea fiction; as they learned more, so their narratives became increasingly realistic in a maritime sense. Conrad did not face this problem; he was a qualified master-mariner and, consequently, he had a free hand to employ a whole range of marine subjects which were largely out of the reach of his two contemporaries. This chapter examines Conrad's use of this material and demonstrates the characteristic tenor it gives his sea stories.

Like Kipling and Stevenson, Conrad did not immediately master his subject matter: his nautical expertise could not prepare him for the skilled task of using his knowledge as an integral part of a narrative's structure. That this is so is evident in his earliest work where the nautical detail is often superfluous to the action. There is of course a place for background atmosphere and colour but the sea detail in his later fiction is usually so closely integrated that narratives like An Outcast of the Islands and "The Rescuer" suffer

by comparison. In addition the maritime scenes of this latter group are attended by a certain self-consciousness. In An Outcast of the Islands, for example, there is a small incident in which Almayer approaches Lingard's schooner and asks for a small boat:

'Let me have the gig at once, Mr Swan [the mate] - at once. I ask in Captain Lingard's name. I must have it. Matter of life and death.'

The mate was impressed by Almayer's agitation.

'You shall have it, sir. . . . Man the gig there! Bear a hand, serang! . . . It's hanging astern, Mr Almayer,' he said, looking down again. 'Get into it, sir. The men are coming down by the painter.' 1

In the later work Conrad does not attempt to introduce purely descriptive remarks into a character's direct speech.

"The Rescuer" Part I exhibits additional differences with the later work. One passage, cut from the completed novel, dwells almost lovingly on the atmosphere of a sailing-ship's deck:

There was no stir in the brig's sails. The topsails sheeted right out and set up with taut leeches without a wrinkle in their surface, hung down, all of a piece resembling two smooth, thin, and towering slabs of white marble; while under them the courses hauled up in their gear had a heavy aspect of those ornamental stone festoons that the commonplace hand suspends between the urns at the base of stolid monuments of mourning. The higher sails, also clewed up, were gathered motionless under the yards. 2

It is surprising, to one familiar with Conrad's published sea fiction, to discover the extent to which he allows the brig's sails to dominate the scene. Perhaps because sail-technology was a complex subject and "white winged clippers" a cliché of the sea story, narratives like "The Secret Sharer" and "Youth" hardly mention the sail area above the characters's heads.

1. An Outcast of the Islands, p. 322.

2. "The Rescuer ms.," p. 6.



The emphasis in the mature Conradian sea story is, therefore, upon the deck and the officers' quarters. Nevertheless if one complex area of nautical terminology - sail-technology - is avoided then Conrad's approach to the working relationships of his characters makes few concessions to readers unfamiliar with the maritime world. He writes about the work of the leadsman, helmsman, master, and steward as though they and their working environment were as much a part of everyday life as the corporation bus or the motor car. This uncompromising attitude works and succeeds in divesting his sea fiction of the self-consciousness which marks the presentation of maritime subject matter in the sea fiction of lesser writers. F.T. Bullen, for example, has a habit of emphasising the complexities of seamanship, a practice which immediately establishes a distance between himself and the reader.<sup>3</sup> Conrad, however, writes about the most skilled sailors - the officers - and yet he is seldom obscure. He includes as much information as is commensurate with a realistic background,<sup>4</sup> while his nautical language is usually explained quite adequately by the context:

'It happened while we were setting a reefed foresail, at dusk. Reefed foresail! You understand the sort of weather. The only sail we had left to keep the ship running; so you may guess what it had been like for days. Anxious sort of job, that. 5

In this case Leggatt's description makes it plain that the Sephora was enduring bad weather.

## II

The beginning of every voyage saw the master of the crew on deck in the port of departure. In Redburn Melville concentrates on the

3. See e.g., The Log of a Sea Waif (1899), Collins, London (1953), p. 342.

4. It is evident that Conrad cut many technical terms when he revised "The Rescuer" Part I for inclusion in The Rescue.

5. TLS, p. 102.

feelings of his protagonist as the men are chosen for the two watches.<sup>6</sup> The strongest and most skilful men are chosen first and the "greenest" hands last. On the Narcissus no such humiliating ceremony takes place, though in the early pages of the novel the men - particularly Belfast and Donkin - can be seen establishing a "pecking" order.<sup>7</sup> Conrad does use, however, the routine roll-call to introduce the crew and two of the main characters, Donkin and Wait.<sup>8</sup> The chief mate, Baker, reads the crew list and the men answer and step "barefooted into the circle of light"<sup>9</sup> as they cross the deck into the shadows of the port bulwarks. When Donkin appears, Baker cannot help ejaculating an involuntary "'O Lord!'"<sup>10</sup> at his destitute appearance. The reply, "'Is there anythink wrong with me, Mister Mate?'"<sup>11</sup> introduces a major theme of the story. Wait is late and arrives shouting "'Wait!'"<sup>12</sup> as Baker is preparing to dismiss the men. The mate is furious at such a peremptory demand, momentarily unaware that Wait is calling his own name. The incident is rich in ironic associations and is the first in what will be a long chain of misunderstandings.

The Nigger is generally uncharacteristic of Conrad's sea fiction because it is marked by the inclusion of profuse detail often included solely for background effect and to build up the world in which the sailors move. In later stories like "Falk" and "The Secret Sharer" much of this detail is left undescribed and, consequently, The Nigger

6. Herman Melville, Redburn, The Standard Edition, New York (1963) v, 47-49.

7. Donkin first turns on Charley, the ship's boy, "'I'll make you keep this 'ere fo'c'sle clean . . .'" (NN, p. 13) and then proceeds to insult Wamibo the Finn.

8. NN, pp. 15-18.

9. NN, pp. 15-16.

10. NN, p. 16.

11. NN, p. 16.

12. NN, p. 17.



is to be prized on this account for in no other sea story of the period is there such a wealth of information about the ordinary day-to-day tasks of merchant seamen.

It was a bad winter off the Cape that year. The relieved helmsman came off flapping their arms, or ran stamping hard and blowing into swollen, red fingers. The watch on deck dodged the sting of cold sprays or, crouching in sheltered corners, watched dismally the high and merciless seas . . . . 13

The watch then on duty, led by Mr Creighton, began to struggle up the rigging. The wind flattened them against the ratlines; then, easing a little, would let them ascend a couple of steps; and again, with a sudden gust, pin all up the shrouds the whole crawling line in attitudes of crucifixion. 14

'What?' growled Mr Baker, turning menacingly at the mutter, and the whole half-circle like one man stepped back a pace. 'Set the topmast stunsail. Away aloft, Donkin, overhaul the gear,' ordered the mate inflexibly. 'Fetch the sail along; bend the down-haul clear. Bear a hand.' Then, the sail set, he would go slowly off and stand looking at the compass . . . . 15

The memories of his life at sea and the everyday routine of a sailing ship must have been strong in his mind for, only three years before he began The Nigger, he was chief mate of the sailing ship Torrens.

One of the central episodes of the narrative is the rescue of Wait, which extends over eleven pages.<sup>16</sup> This episode displays a number of characteristic features which were later to become the hall marks of the Conradian sea story. Very typical is the emphasis, through close delineation, of a prolonged crisis in which the seamen's efforts are matched against a nautical problem. In The Nigger the problem is to rescue Wait; in Lord Jim the efforts of the deserters are pitted

13. NN, p. 49.

14. NN, p. 56.

15. NN, p. 103.

16. NN, pp. 63-74.



against a lifeboat caught in her davits;<sup>17</sup> and, in The Shadow Line, the master struggles with the anxieties laid on him by his becalmed ship. In many of these incidents Conrad orders his graphic effects by closely describing the positions of the men on board the ship: in The Nigger the course of the crisis is plotted by the stages of the journey the men make from poop to deck-house and back again; in "Typhoon" the bos'un's journey from deck to bridge and bridge to the forward 'tween decks (accompanied by Jukes) to quell the panic among the coolies spans the core of the narrative.<sup>18</sup>

In these crises the chief participants are observed with an ironic detachment and that now familiar Conradian sense of humour which delights in seeing life-and-death struggles in a comic light. This is a particular feature of The Nigger and Lord Jim where the exertions of the sailors are seen as misguided and ill-advised. The harsh inference of The Nigger is that Wait is not worth the candle. He does nothing to assist the crew in the rescue and,<sup>19</sup> once safe, accuses them of cowardice.<sup>20</sup> The crew are, therefore, ironically observed in their dangerous journey: "we tottered all together with concealing and absurd gestures, like a lot of drunken men embarrassed with a stolen corpse;<sup>21</sup> Wait's sole comment is "'What kept you back? Hey? Funk?'"<sup>22</sup> The episode is marked by an attendant symbolism of incident which comments upon the action and suggests interpretations of the issues involved. It has already been mentioned how the pulling of Wait from his cabin suggests

17. LJ, pp. 91, and 95-109.

18. T, pp. 54-59, 60, 76-82.

19. NN, p. 72.

20. NN, p. 73.

21. NN, p. 71.

22. NN, p. 73.

the birth of fear.<sup>23</sup> In another incident, Belfast, who clings strongly to Wait throughout the voyage and who is first to act upon the suggestion of a rescue,<sup>24</sup> recklessly throws off the lashings which are securing him to the poop as soon as the idea occurs to him. His disregard for the security of the lashings represents the mistake of spending any effort on Wait, and the point is reinforced when he almost slides to his death down the tilted poop.<sup>25</sup> The crew find the incident funny but he is unamused: "'Look at 'em, sorr. The bloomin' dirty images! Laughing at a chum going overboard.'"<sup>26</sup> Ironically, for they join in his misguided rescue attempt, theirs is the correct attitude. Attended by these rich symbolic overtones and the ever-present irony, the episode becomes a parody of man's place in the world as Conrad saw it: men risking their lives and striving heroically in futile causes.

There are analogous overtones in the early scenes of Lord Jim in which Jim and the other officers of the Patna react to their mistaken conviction that the ship is about to sink. The action is not presented integrally, as in The Nigger, which is an unbroken, chronologically arranged narrative; it is split into component parts. The early part of the novel is narrated omnisciently, it ends at the moment the ship strikes the mysterious object which holes the hull.<sup>27</sup> The scene then shifts to Marlow's conversation with Jim after the Court of Inquiry. Chapters Seven, Eight, and Nine then deal with the incidents following the collision. Jim, as chief mate, goes to inspect the bulkhead which is holding the water back and concludes that, at any moment, it will

23. See above p. 290.

24. NN, p. 64.

25. NN, p. 64.

26. NN, p. 64.

27. LJ, p. 27.



give way.<sup>28</sup> He returns to the bridge and finds the other white officers struggling to release a lifeboat; with some difficulty it is lowered to the water. Jim, after a moment's hesitation, jumps after it<sup>29</sup> and his act of cowardice is complete.

The episode is marked by an extreme irony (created by the broken time-scheme which ensures that the reader knows, fairly early in the novel, that the Patna never sinks).<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, by reducing the suspense of the narration, the technique focusses attention on the crucial "why" of the affair as opposed to the relatively superficial "how".<sup>31</sup> The men's desperate labours are therefore completely wasted, indeed the donkey-man is "fooled" into dying (he suffers a heart attack):

Excitement. Over-exertion. Devil only knows.  
Ha! ha! ha! It was easy to see he did not want  
to die either. 32

"'A joke hatched in hell'"<sup>33</sup> Jim comments; once again the irony is telling, the hell which he speaks of is his own hell created by his own cowardice and his own sense of guilt. There are further ironies: the little engineer who risks his life to fetch a hammer from below deck,<sup>34</sup> and the chief engineer who shouts at Jim: "'Won't you save your own life - you infernal coward!'"<sup>35</sup>

28. LJ, p. 92.

29. LJ, p. 111.

30. It is fairly obvious that Jim has been caught out at the beginning of Chapter Four (LJ, p. 28) at which point Jim is attending an "Official Inquiry". The fact that the ship did not sink is revealed by Marlow's retort to the chief engineer's assertion "'I saw her go down'": "'I made ready to vent my indignation at such a stupid lie'" (LJ, p. 51).

31. LJ, p. 56.

32. LJ, p. 107.

33. LJ, p. 108.

34. LJ, p. 103.

35. LJ, p. 100.



The bulkhead, which Jim inspects with his lamp,<sup>36</sup> is a crucial symbol. Unlike Jim it holds out against all the odds, "'It's extraordinary what strains old iron will stand sometimes'",<sup>37</sup> and Marlow adds:

'did I not know how tough old iron can be - as tough sometimes as the spirit of some men we meet now and then, worn to a shadow and breasting the weight of life.'<sup>38</sup>

This observation looks forward to his meeting with the elderly but tough French lieutenant.<sup>39</sup> It also focusses attention on the thin dividing line between heroism and cowardice, of which the virtually rotten bulkhead is representative. Jim recognises the importance of maintaining his own standards of courage but his conduct falls short of his ideal; his desertion was not a foregone conclusion and one feels that the issue was close: the bulkhead held, Jim failed. This aspect of his conduct is also represented in his attempt to maintain the division between himself and the other white men on the Patna by standing apart from them on the starboard side of the bridge.<sup>40</sup> He forgets, however, what he has come to the bridge for: he had intended to cut the lashings of the lifeboats so as to give the pilgrims a chance when the Patna sank.<sup>41</sup> He is oblivious to the example of the two lascar seamen - "Niggers" to the officers - who stay at the helm while the officers escape in the lifeboat.<sup>42</sup>

The attention which Conrad expends upon the struggle of the officers to free the boat is particularly detailed. It is held under

36. LJ, p. 84.

37. LJ, p. 83.

38. LJ, p. 98.

39. LJ, pp. 137-149.

40. LJ, p. 97.

41. LJ, pp. 89 and 102-103.

42. LJ, p. 99.

the davits by a chock secured by a bolt. The bolt has jammed and will not turn.<sup>43</sup> Jim, meanwhile, is paralysed with doubt and he ignores their calls for assistance. None of the officers is willing to crawl under the boat to push from below in case the Patna should suddenly sink; in that event the man under the boat would be unable to extricate himself. Nevertheless, their frantic activity compares oddly with Jim's inactivity; he is not only uncertain what to do but is waiting, with what Marlow calls "high-minded resignation",<sup>44</sup> to die. In view of Jim's unwillingness to help them the other officers forget him and, once the boat is free, they face the next problem of swinging it away from the bridge:

They pushed with their hands, with their heads, they pushed for dear life with all the weight of their bodies, they pushed with all the might of their souls - only no sooner had they succeeded in canting the stem clear of the davit then they would leave off like one man and start a wild scramble into her. As a natural consequence the boat would swing in abruptly, driving them back, helpless and jostling against each other. <sup>45</sup>

The passage recalls Yeats's famous lines, "The best lack all conviction, while the worst/Are full of passionate intensity".<sup>46</sup>

The freeing of the lifeboat is a carefully constructed episode in which the detail ensures that what would seem an impossibly humorous situation, verging on the fantastic, is powerfully and realistically presented to the reader. The comic elements, closely related to the ironic, should not be underestimated: "that comic business"<sup>47</sup> Marlow comments to himself. He sees more than Jim whose memory is curiously selective: Jim remembers his inaction and laughs at his colleagues

43. LJ, pp. 95-96.

44. LJ, p. 95.

45. LJ, p. 104.

46. From "The Second Coming".

47. LJ, p. 105.



vainly trying to climb into the boat, defeated by their eager selfishness:  
 "Enough to make you die laughing."<sup>48</sup> But Marlow pinpoints Jim's self  
 deception:

I am forced to believe he had preserved through it  
 all a strange illusion of passiveness, as though  
 he had not acted but had suffered himself to be  
 handled by the infernal powers who had selected  
 him for the victim of their practical joke. 49

This in itself is a mark of the cruel irony: Jim had only to remain  
 passive and he would have been counted a hero when the Patna was towed  
 into port. Unfortunately he jumps after the lifeboat. It is a jump  
 he cannot remember and one is prompted to recall Conrad's description  
 of Carter's seamanlike mind in The Rescue, "every word showed the minute-  
 ness of his observation, the clear vision of a seaman . . . ."50

### III

"The End of the Tether" is an exciting story but it is not  
 generally appreciated that its drama is rooted in Conrad's close and  
 detailed descriptions of shiphandling. The action involves scenes on  
 the Sofala's bridge, and it is broken by flashbacks to earlier episodes.  
 The flashbacks inform the reader why Whalley is master of such an unhappy  
 ship and lay down the essential components of the moral drama.

After Chapter One, which is set entirely on the bridge, the reader  
 learns that Whalley became master, with a £500 share, because he had to  
 support his daughter's family.<sup>51</sup> When the action returns to present  
 time at the end of Chapter Six,<sup>52</sup> the reader already has an unpleasant  
 enough opinion of the owner and chief engineer, Massy, to view his

48. LJ, pp. 105-106.

49. LJ, p. 108.

50. "The Rescuer ms.," p. 61; TR, p. 33.

51. See Y, pp. 174-183 and 214-215.

52. Y, p. 215.



approach on the bridge with some misgiving. He taunts Whalley about the native Serang's presence as the master's constant aid.<sup>53</sup> Massy believes that Whalley is merely lazy but it later transpires that Whalley is going blind.<sup>54</sup> As Massy speaks he draws closer:

Captain Whalley got up from his chair in all his imposing stature and walked across to the binnacle, holding such an unswerving course that the other had to back away hurriedly, and remained as if intimidated, with his pipe trembling in his hand. 55

It looks like pointed rudeness; in fact Whalley is maintaining a straight line because of the difficulties of his failing sight.

Massy wants Whalley to remain as master and keep his £500 stake in the ship. The engineer needs the money so that he can have the engines overhauled. Whalley, as he knows, is set against this and is determined to exercise his right to withdraw. Massy's alternative course of action is more threatening; he hopes to find a pretext for dismissing him, in which case he has the right to hold the stake for a further term.<sup>56</sup> The last would be a disaster for Whalley. Everything, then, is bound up with his success as a master, just as the plot is made out of maritime subject-matter: Conrad has set himself the task of portraying a character and a moral problem through the medium of a working world.

The bridge, traditionally the master's domain, becomes the main theatre of action. When Sterne, the chief mate, appears<sup>57</sup> the odds are weighted against Whalley. He is an ambitious young man who wants

53. Y, p. 216.

54. Sterne discovers that something is wrong with Whalley at Y, pp. 241-247 but the reader is not told directly of his blindness until p. 300, though on a second reading the way in which his disability is conditioning his behaviour is obvious as early as Y, pp. 215-217.

55. Y, p. 216.

56. Y, pp. 230-231.

57. Y, p. 217.

to have the captain dismissed and the command pass to himself.<sup>58</sup> The moment before his arrival the reader is given a sizeable hint as to Whalley's blindness:

but his eyes, instead of going straight to the point, with the assured keen glance of a sailor, wandered irresolutely in space, as though he, the discoverer of new routes, had lost his way upon this narrow sea. 59

This ominous remark, made as the Sofala approaches some tricky navigation, together with the presence of Massy and Sterne, and the visible signs of strain upon Whalley's person: he

squeezed the iron rail . . . eyes glared with enormous effort . . . the perspiration fell from under his hat . . . 60

increases the tension. It is suddenly relaxed when the mate, damned as a "confounded fool"<sup>61</sup> by Massy, leaves the deck.

The tension is almost as quietly raised again as the Sofala approaches a river mouth. Across the mouth is a "submarine ridge of mud"<sup>62</sup> through which there is a single narrow channel. Navigation is difficult:

The alluvial coast having no distinguishing marks, the bearings of the crossing-place had to be taken from the shape of the mountains inland. 63

Whalley cannot rely on his own sight and so he must trust to the Serang's compass bearings and the cries of the leadsman in the bows (who shouts out the depths he is recording with his lead-line). The Serang, however, is not totally reliable because, ever-ready to give pleasing answers, he will not contradict a white man's judgement.<sup>64</sup> As the ship nears the

58. Y, pp. 235-241.

59. Y, p. 217.

60. Y, p. 217.

61. Y, p. 217.

62. Y, p. 219.

63. Y, p. 219.

64. Y, p. 228.



the bar he is aware that "the Sofala was out of the proper track for crossing the bar at Batu Beru",<sup>65</sup> but he makes no warning. The leadsman's cries, which merely record the results of decisions made earlier, confirm his judgement:

"Thirteen feet . . . Thirteen! Twelve!" cried the leadsman anxiously below the bridge. And suddenly the barefooted Serang stepped away noiselessly to steal a glance over the side. 66

Whalley is fortunate: the Sofala merely grazes the bar sending clouds of mud to stain the ship's wake<sup>67</sup> - as Whalley's association with the Sofala threatens to mar his spotless record as a seaman. Massy is puzzled but angry, and Sterne is quick to comment on the misjudgement.<sup>68</sup>

#### IV

No critic has fully investigated Conrad's use of nautical detail in his sea fiction as a whole. Nevertheless "The Secret Sharer" has attracted a number of interpretations based upon the implications of the final sailing manoeuvres under the shadow of the island Koh-Ring.<sup>69</sup> It is a principle of these interpretations that nautical detail is used to comment upon character and moral significance<sup>70</sup> through the use of

65. Y, p. 228.

66. Y, p. 227.

67. Y, p. 227.

68. Y, p. 237.

69. The most important of these are: Frank B. Evans, "The Nautical Metaphor in 'The Secret Sharer'", Conradiana, VII (1975), 3-16 (referred to below as: Evans, "Nautical Metaphor"); Robert O. Evans, "Conrad: A Nautical Image", Modern Language Notes, 72, (1957), 98-99 (referred to below as: R.O. Evans, "A Nautical Image"); Paul E. Foye, Bruce Harkness, and Nathan L. Marvin, "The Sailing Maneuver in 'The Secret Sharer'", Journal of Modern Literature, 2 (1971), 119-123 (referred to below as: Foye, "Sailing Maneuver"); and Schenck, "'The Secret Sharer'".

70. See e.g., Evans, "Nautical Metaphor" and Porter Williams, Jr., "The Matter of Conscience in Conrad's 'The Secret Sharer'", PMLA, 79 (1964), 626-630 (referred to below as: Williams, "Conscience in 'The Secret Sharer'").



metaphor and symbol. Thus the sudden about-turn manoeuvre executed by the ship at the climax of the story is a fairly obvious representation of the master-narrator's new confidence in his abilities. In addition, the very process of attaining mastery in ship-handling is seen as a metaphor for achieving mastery of the self. The interpretations set out to explain the exact nature of the manoeuvres the narrator's ship follows and identifies the decisions he makes. Each successive article has offered the "true" account, and their corrections have been a testimony to the difficulties confronting a writer on nautical subjects. The latest offering, by Frank B. Evans, exposes mistakes in the diagrams of an article prepared by a critic, and two writers from the United States Coast Guard Academy.<sup>71</sup>

The following section takes a fresh look at the nautical content whilst taking into account what has already been written on the subject. This involves drawing material from a number of articles, not because Evans's paper on the subject is incorrect, but because its interpretation does not fully cover the approach to the manoeuvre.<sup>72</sup> In addition the section views Conrad's use of nautical detail in "The Secret Sharer" from the broader perspective of his sea fiction as a whole.

"The Secret Sharer" invites the reader to judge the master as a seaman. In effect most commentators have always done so; they ask questions such as: is the master justified in sailing so close to the shore;<sup>73</sup> in what manner has Leggatt's presence influences the master; and has Leggatt's influence been good or bad?<sup>74</sup> In each case the

71. The article is Foye, "Sailing Maneuver".

72. In spite of offering a "definitive explanation" (Evans, "Nautical Metaphor", p. 3).

73. e.g., Williams, "Conscience in 'The Secret Sharer'", p. 627.

74. e.g., Schenck, "'Secret Sharer'", p. 14, and Guerard, Conrad, p.24.

master's decisions and behaviour have been assessed in a nautical context. This may seem a simple point but a comparison with Kipling's work in this area gives a better idea of the significance of Conrad's achievement. Kipling's engineer-sailors are also assessed from the perspective of their conduct but the reader is instructed in what to think: the narrator invites us to join in admiring McAndrew's devotion to his profession, McPhee's canny Scots seamanship, and the resourcefulness of Mr Wardrop. "The Secret Sharer", however, makes greater demands: the master-narrator is judged almost solely on his actions. In addition there is not even the presence of a manly stereotype to assist judgement by providing a hero because we learn very little of the master's appearance whilst experiencing all his inner doubts and fears.

The sequence of events which preludes the climax is set in the same geographical area as The Shadow Line and the one in which Conrad confessed to a daring bit of seamanship: the island of Koh-Ring, lying roughly north-south in the Gulf of Siam.<sup>75</sup> The narrator's ship is sailing south and, because the light wind is blowing from the south, the sailing ship is having to tack or "zig-zag" against it.

The fourth day out, I think (we were then working down the east side of the Gulf of Siam, tack for tack, in light winds and smooth water) . . . . 76

At this time Leggatt, the escapee, is still being hidden from the crew by the master, but the sudden crisis brought about by the steward's unplanned for and unpreventable entry into the bathroom (where Leggatt is, at that time, hidden)<sup>77</sup> convinces the fugitive that he must be put ashore on one of the islands off the eastern coast of the Gulf: "'You must maroon me as soon as ever you can get amongst these islands off

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75. Ford, Personal Remembrance, p. 107.

76. TLS, p. 127.

77. TLS, p. 129.



the Cambodge shore'"<sup>78</sup> the master responds:

'Maroon you! We are not living in a boy's adventure tale',<sup>79</sup>  
He later admits that this comment was intended to disguise his real feelings and was indicative of a "mere sham sentiment, a sort of cowardice".<sup>80</sup> Evidently he did not want to come to terms with Leggatt's departure which would involve the risky business of getting him off the ship, and bring to a close what has become a relationship of some emotional depth. His reluctance, on both these scores, is understandable because of the strain he is under. As a man in his first command<sup>81</sup> he has not only to contend with the novel situation of being a master but also the tricky affair of hiding Leggatt from the ubiquitous steward and his scornful officers. In the heat of the small cabin he must converse with Leggatt in whispers.

The movements of the ship during the time between Leggatt's broaching of the idea of escape<sup>82</sup> and the master's formulation of his final plan<sup>83</sup> are singularly appropriate to the captain's state of mind. Although the narrator recognises his own reluctance to come to terms with Leggatt's departure, and despite what is virtually an ultimatum on the fugitive's part, he makes no positive response until much later. After Leggatt's demand he goes on deck and, in an act suggestive of petty spite growing from strain and frustration, he dresses down the second mate: "That intolerable cub . . . ." <sup>84</sup> Nevertheless under

78. TLS, p. 131.

79. TLS, p. 131.

80. TLS, p. 132.

81. TLS, p. 93: "and untried as yet by a position of fullest responsibility".

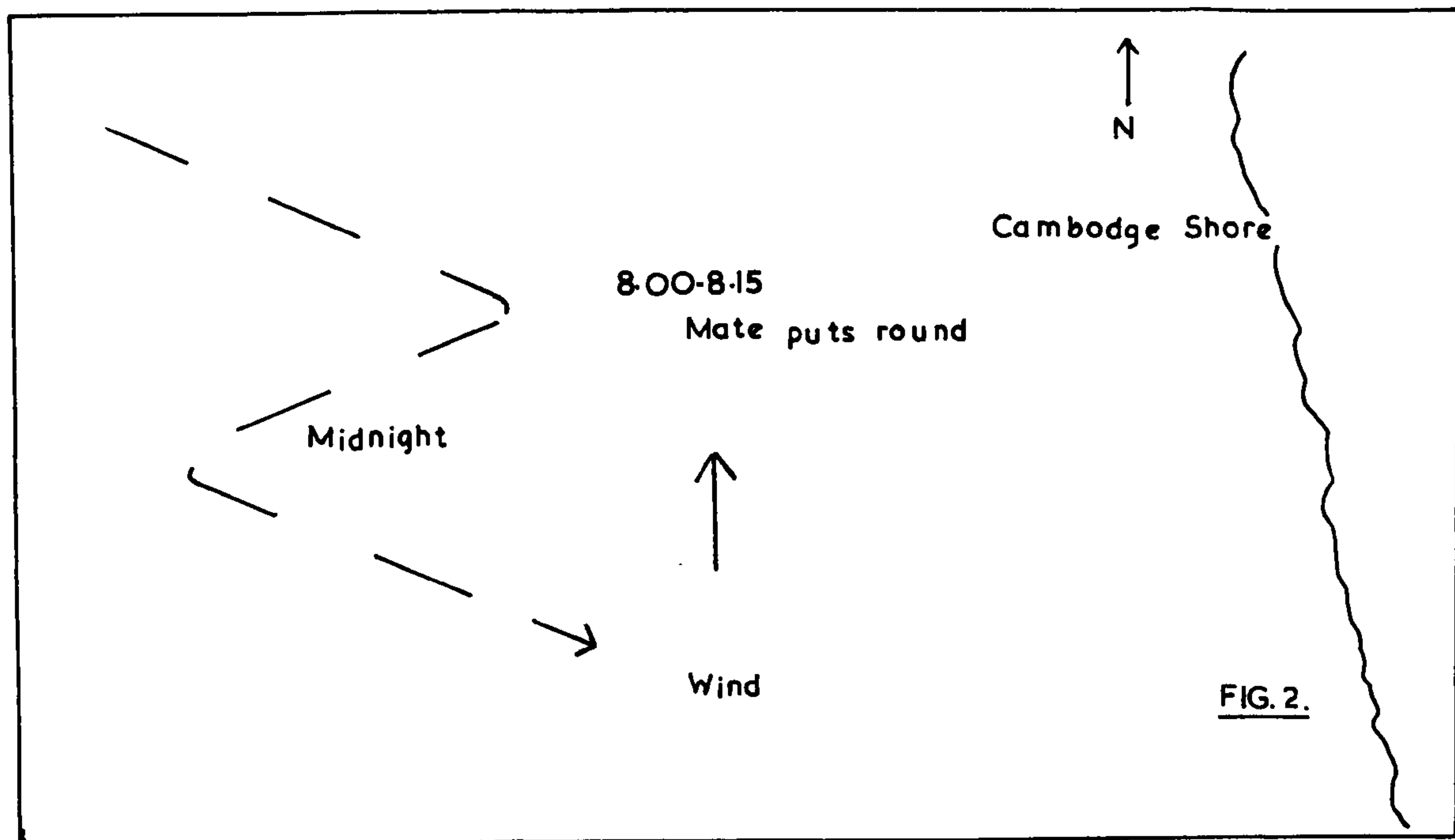
82. TLS, p. 131.

83. TLS, pp. 134 and 136.

84. TLS, p. 133.



Leggatt's influence he has put the ship round and it is now heading for the land.<sup>85</sup> Its movements are represented below (Fig. 2).<sup>86</sup> These



movements form a clear representation of the actual process of the master's thinking. Between eight o'clock and midnight he is reluctant to contemplate coming to terms with Leggatt's desire to be put ashore and during that period the ship is heading into open sea - where he could not be marooned. Once he changes tack,<sup>87</sup> however, he is committed to positive action and he has to ignore the importunities of the mate who (quite correctly, as the master admits)<sup>88</sup> can see no reason for heading for the shore.<sup>89</sup> At the same time the manoeuvring at sea has been paralleled for some time by the shifting of Leggatt, below decks,

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85. TLS, p. 132.

86. The following diagrams have been prepared with the help of Alan J. Villiers, Voyaging with the Wind, H.M.S.O. (1975) (referred to below as: Villiers, Voyaging).

87. TLS, p. 132.

88. TLS, pp. 132-133.

89. TLS, p. 134.

from one hiding place to another. Frank B. Evans has identified<sup>90</sup> a passage where the narrator connects the fact and its metaphorical extension:

Every day there was the horrible manoeuvring to go through so that my room and then the bath-room should be done in the usual way. 91

The fourth day out, I think (we were then working down the east side of the Gulf of Siam, tack for tack, in light winds and smooth water) - the fourth day, I say, of this miserable juggling with the unavoidable.... 92

Evans does not make clear exactly what the metaphorical extension is - "as the objective correlative to his moral dilemma".<sup>93</sup> There is no moral dilemma at this point, however,<sup>and</sup> the master is certain that he must allow Leggatt to escape;<sup>94</sup> the metaphor merely highlights the master's reluctance to act.

From midnight onwards the master grows in confidence. At noon the following day he does not follow what has become, in the preceding days of tacking, the routine procedure; he announces no change of tack and says to the mate: "'I am going to stand her right in. Quite in - as far as I can take her.'" The mate's reply,

'Bless my soul! Do you mean, sir, in the dark amongst the lot of all them islands and reefs and shoals?'" 95

is a realistic assessment of the danger involved but it is also a metaphor emphasising the fact that the master has decided to risk the danger of

90. Evans, "Nautical Metaphor", p. 10.

91. TLS, p. 127.

92. TLS, p. 127.

93. Evans, "Nautical Metaphor", p. 10.

94. e.g., When lying to Archbold the master-narrator thinks: "I could not I think, have met him by a direct lie, also for psychological (not moral) reasons." (TLS, p. 120, my italics).

95. TLS, p.134.

putting Leggatt ashore and being found out in the process. When the master goes below to brief Leggatt on his plan the change in his attitude is plain: he is now fully involved in planning an escape and his companion has to warn him: "'Be careful'".<sup>96</sup>

At this point the plan is to sail close to the land and let Leggatt slip overboard; this plan has the advantage that it will mean no change of course.<sup>97</sup> A little later, however, the reader has to accommodate a fresh plan.<sup>98</sup> The master now intends to tack under the very shadow of Koh-Ring, a manoeuvre which involves a certain amount of risk. He gives no reasons for his change of mind but it seems plausible to infer that he hopes to achieve two objectives in one stroke: he will be able to deposit Leggatt in the water near the coast; and he will complete a tacking operation at the same time that will extricate him from a dangerous coast (beyond Koh-Ring to the east) and head the ship for the open sea. In addition Leggatt will be able to slip overboard at a time when the crew are heavily engaged in hauling the tackle.<sup>99</sup> There is, however, a further reason which extends to the heart of the story's meaning. The master had thought of himself guilty of a "sort of cowardice". Leggatt's response had been to show himself increasingly worried that the master did not fully sympathise with him. His uncertainty must grow from two considerations: first, that the master is helping him only because circumstances have made it the easier course; and, secondly, that when the master opposed the idea of marooning him he was losing his nerve. In the latter case Leggatt might even have been afraid that he would be turned over to the other officers. His anxiety

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96. TLS, p. 135.

97. TLS, p. 135.

98. TLS, p. 136.

99. See Schenck, "'The Secret Sharer'", p. 10.



is the greater because he does not know as much as the reader, who is aware of the master's sense of identification with him. Nevertheless, the master's thoughts, when showing Archbold, Leggatt's old captain, round his ship, stress the manner in which he is afraid that his actions will not match up to his convictions: "If he had only known how afraid I was of <sup>his</sup> putting my feeling of identity with the other to the test!"<sup>100</sup> It is little wonder, therefore, that Leggatt anxiously asks him, ". . . you have understood thoroughly."<sup>101</sup> The master takes up this phrase when he sets out his plan: "'I only hope I have understood, too'".<sup>102</sup>

The master's bold plan is, as I argued above,<sup>103</sup> an attempt to prove both to his "conscience" (or his doubts about his identification with Leggatt) and to Leggatt that he fully believes in his act of sympathy. His faith is symbolised in what is at stake, his own career as an officer: "the only future for which I was fit".<sup>104</sup> His action is also a testimony to the master's conception of manliness: he is proving his nerve, his skill, and his fitness for command.<sup>105</sup>

Evans argues that the slow approach to Koh-Ring "parallels her captain's slow and reluctant development of his plan to maroon Leggatt";<sup>106</sup> but this is better represented by the tacking. The slow approach is little more than a superb device to increase the drama of the final manoeuvre. From the moment that the master decides to go inshore and tack he is faced with the problem of keeping his officers satisfied

100. TLS, p. 120.

101. TLS, p. 132.

102. TLS, p. 136.

103. See above p. 317.

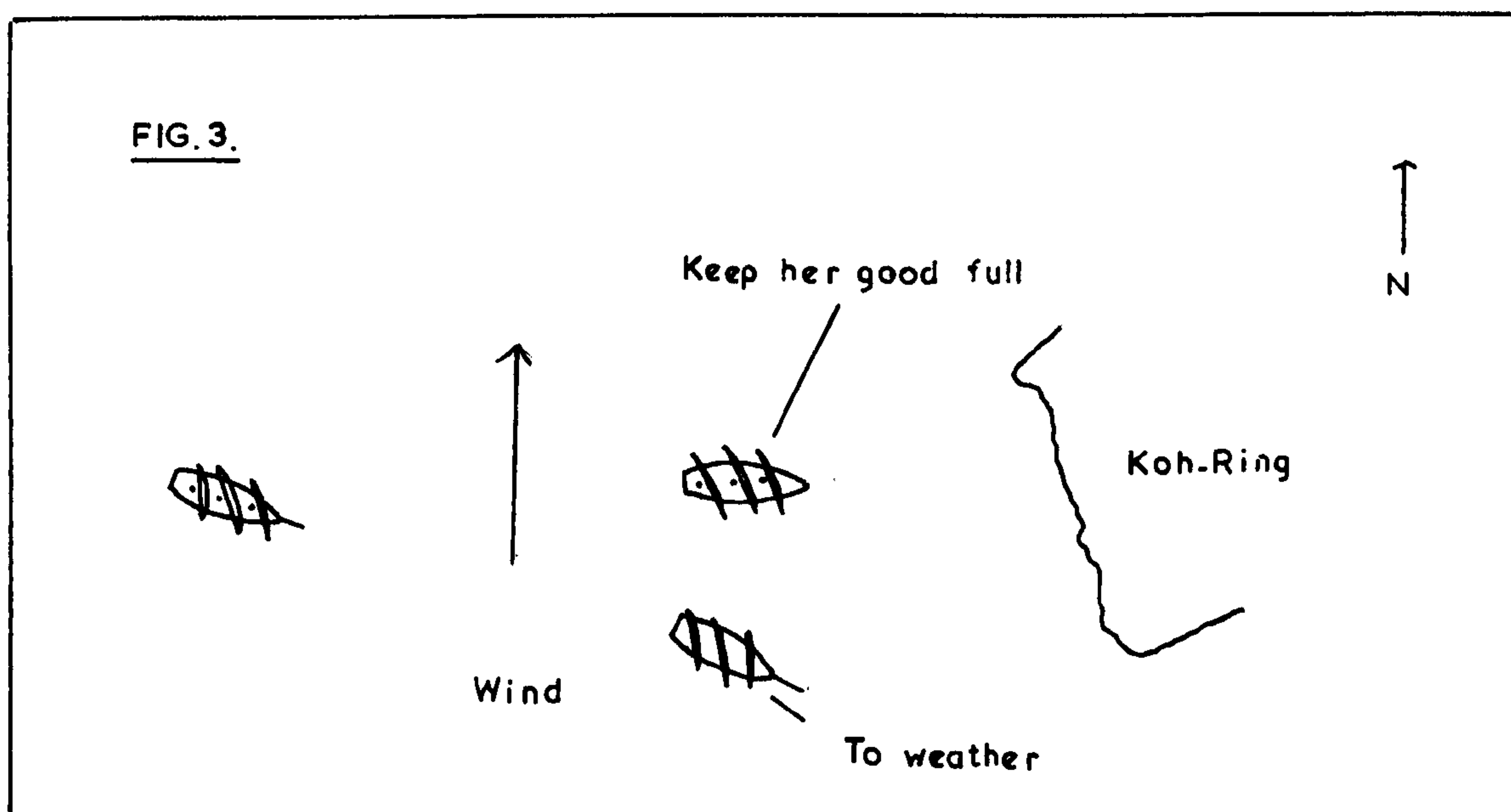
104. TLS, p. 135.

105. See above pp. 317-18.

106. Evans, "Nautical Metaphor", p. 12.

as to his sanity; a difficult task because, from their point of view, his conduct is eccentric and dangerous. Fortunately the mate is below for most of the approach and he is outfaced when he does appear.

Mrs Schenck has convincingly shown how the inexperienced second mate is deceived.<sup>107</sup> First, the captain announces that he will "weather"<sup>108</sup> Koh-Ring, which means that he will not tack but sail past the southern point of the island; his next order to the helmsman, however, shows that he has no such intention - "Keep her good full".<sup>109</sup> The deception is represented in diagrammatic form below (Fig. 3).



To keep the sails full of wind means that the helmsman must steer in a more northerly direction. In effect he is being told to sail towards the island as opposed to shaving its southern tip. The order "to weather" means to spill some wind from the sails and head more to the south.<sup>110</sup> The second mate is both astonished and a little frightened at the master's orders, but he is too inexperienced either to recognise

107. Schenck, "'The Secret Sharer'", pp. 7-8.

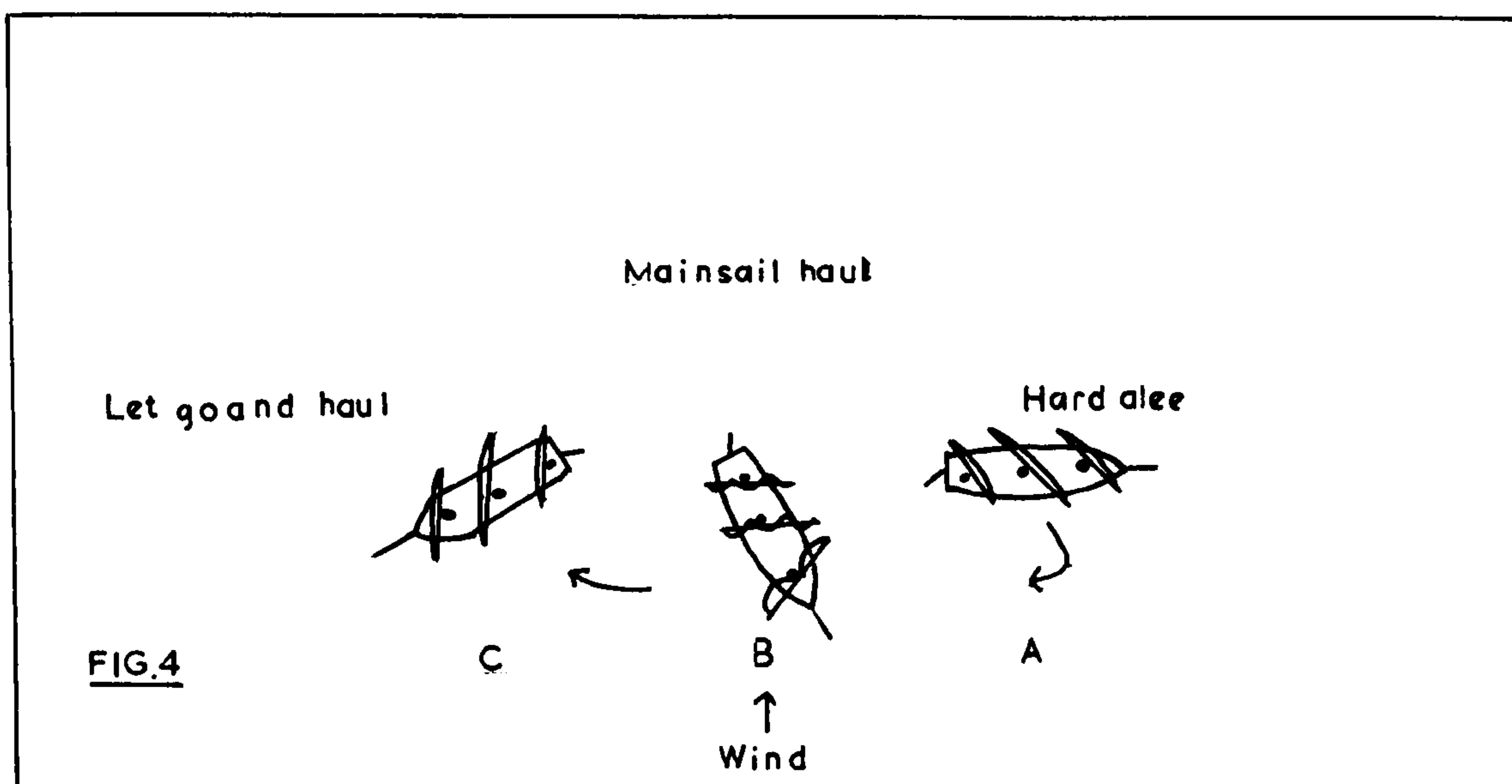
108. TLS, p. 135.

109. TLS, p. 136.

110. See Evans, "Nautical Metaphor", pp. 4-7 and Villiers, Voyaging, pp. 17, and 22-26 for details on the tacking of sailing ships.

it as such or question his superior's judgement.<sup>111</sup> He is bewildered enough to forget his jeering attitude, revealed earlier when asked to open the quarter-deck ports,<sup>112</sup> a move needed for Leggatt's escape but inexplicable in the normal run of things.

With the ship heading for Koh-Ring, the master and his crew must wait as the ship makes slowly for the mass of cliffs looming ahead. The master has to close his eyes at one point because he is determined to go as close as possible before changing tack.<sup>113</sup> The final manoeuvre is to switch from starboard tack to port tack (see Fig.4 below).



The plan has already been explained to Leggatt:

When the ship's way is deadened in stays and all the hands are aft at the main-braces you will have a clear road to slip out and get overboard through the open quarter-deck port.    114

He is to slip overboard when the ship is in position 'B' (see Fig. 4), that is when the ship is neither moving forwards nor backwards, and when

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111. TLS, p. 139.

112. TLS, p. 135.

113. TLS, p. 139.

114. TLS, p. 136.



the entire crew are hauling on the gear to get the mainsail in position. The final crisis occurs because the ship is travelling so slowly. When the ship is deadened in stays the narrator has no way of telling which way she is moving.<sup>115</sup> As Mrs Schenck indicates this is crucial because, as the ship turns towards open sea, her forward momentum will be lost as the southerly wind blows her back towards the shore.<sup>116</sup> The master must know at once when his ship is moving backwards - or "gathering sternway" - because the rudder of the ship has an exactly opposite effect in this case. If, for example, the rudder was moved to the left when the ship was moving forward he will send her back to the shore the way she came; nevertheless he must move the rudder that way as soon as she does begin to travel backwards, and for this he needs a marker. The hat he has given Leggatt supplies the need:

Now I had what I wanted - the saving mark for my eyes . . . . It was drifting forward, warning me just in time that the ship had gathered sternway.

"Shift the helm . . . . 117

The fact that this is a turning point in the narrative is clear to anyone who has bothered to follow the sequence of nautical commands and the ship's movements during the final pages of the story, but the hat and the final manoeuvre have a significance beyond the purely dramatic.

The implications behind the final tack have been discussed by a number of critics and mention has already been made of its metaphorical representation of the master's new confidence.<sup>118</sup> This new maturity is neatly symbolised by the actual details of the movements the ship has made (after the manoeuvre she is heading away from a dangerous coast

115. TLS, p. 142.

116. Schenck, "'Secret Sharer'", pp. 12-13.

117. TLS, p. 142.

118. See above p. 334.

in almost the exactly opposite direction): after all his trials and tribulations the master has experienced an "about-turn" in his fortunes. In addition, the success of the manoeuvre - one of the most frequent a sailing ship would make because of her inability to sail against the wind - can be seen to represent the skipper's acceptance into a body of men united in a single profession with common traditions and expertise.

The final tacking operation also looks back over the preceding events in the narrative and helps to put into perspective the narrator's achievement. The evolution is, for example, a dramatic one simply because it is a vivid representation of the manner in which the master has dominated his crew and made both them and his ship an extension of his own will. The significance of this point can perhaps be best emphasised by referring back to the master-narrator's thoughts at the beginning of the voyage on the emotions attendant upon a seaman in his first command:

This is not the place to enlarge upon the sensations  
of a man who feels for the first time a ship move  
under his feet to his own independent word. 119

It is, perhaps, fortunate that the master cannot indulge in what is obviously a desire to "worship" the idea of being in command (a moment later the mate takes a bearing on the Paknam Pagoda as if to remind us of the idea of worship).<sup>120</sup> At the end of the narrative his leadership can only be the better for the loss of the attendant self-consciousness and he is able to make a most daring bid to free Leggatt and extricate himself from the awkward investigations which would undoubtedly follow the discovery of the fugitive. Thus the manoeuvre reminds us of all that the narrator-master has achieved in the days following Leggatt's arrival and it is difficult not to remember Archbold who had shared his

119. TLS, p. 125.

120. A pagoda is a Buddhist place of worship.



command with two subordinates,<sup>121</sup> and, because he had been afraid of them, had refused to allow Leggatt the chance to escape. In a sense the master-narrator had triumphed over the feelings which conquered Archbold's initiative; the young skipper too had been preternaturally aware of what people were thinking of his actions as master.

This last point is bolstered by the way in which the narrative virtually forces the reader to be aware of the opinions - spoken and unspoken - of the other officers. The extraordinary nature of the deception creates a situation where the reader becomes closely identified with the master-narrator and feels at first hand the hypersensitive anxieties of a man in a new command. We too experience the "unusual roundness" of the helmsman's eyes,<sup>122</sup> the whispering and gestures of the crew,<sup>123</sup> and the awkward silences between the officers at meals.<sup>124</sup>

The fact that the final tack nearly comes unstuck has been variously interpreted: Mrs Schenck takes it as an indication that the master-narrator is missing the help and support of Leggatt;<sup>125</sup> and Robert O Evans sees the consequent crisis as a "micro-cosmos of social relations temporarily upset, in terms of normal ethics, by the captain's rescue of Leggatt".<sup>126</sup> For both these critics the crisis is a moment when the master's career hangs in balance (just as the ship is "hanging in stays").<sup>127</sup> There are weaknesses, however, in the former interpretation. Mrs Schenck, in attributing the master-narrator's failure

121. TLS, p. 107.

122. TLS, p. 126.

123. TLS, pp. 95 and 128.

124. TLS, pp. 113 and 128-129.

125. Schenck, "'Secret Sharer'", p. 14.

126. R.O. Evans, "A Nautical Image", p. 98.

127. R.O. Evans, "A Nautical Image", p. 98.



to plan ahead and to provide a marker to throw into the water to the absence of Leggatt, surely underplays the extent of the tension which he endures over many days as a result of hiding Leggatt and learning his new role of leader. It would seem perfectly natural that a man with so many preoccupations should forget such a detail - especially when he is under the emotional strain of seeing Leggatt depart. In the final analysis "The Secret Sharer" is superbly realistic both as a record of nautical practice and as a study of the psychology of strain.

Frank B. Evans offers a more complex interpretation which also sees the final manoeuvre as a symbolic act of judgement. His article appears to be suggesting a degree of what I can only call symbolic consciousness in the narrator that strains the bounds of credibility. The master is seen to create a nautical situation, the tacking manoeuvre off Koh-Ring, which illustrates to Leggatt both the master's superior conduct (in a scene reminiscent of the murder episode) and his sympathy for the fugitive.<sup>128</sup> Evans argues that when the mate "attacks" the master and grabs hold of him, as the ship nears the cliffs, the reader is observing a symbolic re-enactment of Leggatt's crime but an enactment in which the master shows a superior restraint.<sup>129</sup> Evans then sees the master as being punished for a "Holier-than-thou"<sup>130</sup> attitude by the sudden crisis in the middle of the movement; he is then saved by his former act of pity symbolised by the hat.

The hat is undoubtedly an important symbol and it is pertinent to reiterate at this juncture that its central place in the critical debate owes much to the way in which the tale encourages the reader to take note

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128. Evans, "Nautical Metaphor", pp. 14-15.

129. Evans, "Nautical Metaphor", p. 14.

130. Evans, "Nautical Metaphor", p. 14.

of the nautical action: the hat's significance can only be fully understood when the reason why the skipper needs its presence in the water is appreciated. Its lucky appearance would appear to be a divine mark of approval but I believe that it has a further relevance to the narrative's meaning. It does appear to emphasise the fact that the master's conduct towards Leggatt is ultimately a supreme act of daring and self-confidence. He has thrown himself, without reservation, into Leggatt's cause and the hat, the last thing he can give, is both a mark of his generous and active sympathy and his willingness to take risks. This last point is important: Archbold is a poor master simply because he is afraid to take risks;<sup>131</sup> the master-narrator casts his bread upon troubled waters and he is rewarded by the success of his endeavours. Finally, we might note that the hat would have served for a marker if it had not been given away.

Frank B. Evans raises a more fundamental point about Conrad's sea fiction when he asserts that the depiction of the final manoeuvre is determined not so much by realistic considerations as the needs of metaphor and symbolism:

Although each nautical detail is literally accurate, Conrad by no means treats the nautical events with entire realism. 132

He concentrates attention upon the narrator's despairing comment made at the most critical stage of the tack:

'I was a total stranger to the ship. I did not know her. Would she do it? How was she to be handled? 133

He demonstrates how the master is described as having tacked the ship at least once before. Evans argues that Conrad wanted to exploit fully the metaphorical possibilities of the language of ship-handling. Thus

131. Archbold had been afraid to give the order to set the foresail during the storm (TLS, p. 106) because his "nerve went to pieces" (TLS, p. 107).

132. Evans, "Nautical Metaphor", p. 8.

133. TLS, p. 141.



at the climactic moments of the manoeuvre the fullest possible impact is made out of the master's comment, "I was a total stranger . . . ."

The captain knows the unavoidable difficulty in putting his ship or any square-rigged vessel about and dreads the discovery of his incompetence as a seaman should he ever fail to accomplish the maneuver successfully. But this dread arises less from any qualms about performing the literal maneuver than from his neurotic transfer to the nautical operation of his fear that unless he changes course with respect to Leggatt his incompetence as a responsible commander will sooner or later come to light. Realistically, we can scarcely suppose that in four days of tacking down the Gulf the captain has never performed the operation successfully himself. By suppressing any mention of tacking ship until this point, Conrad is able to establish the relationship between the nautical maneuver and the captain's attitude towards Leggatt as metaphorical from the moment it is introduced. 134

Evans is surely correct in emphasising the master's neurotic fears during the tack but I cannot agree with his contention that the "nautical events" are unrealistic.

There are two reasons why Evans's interpretation is unlikely. First, the master is, and has been, under great stress and it is therefore psychologically plausible that his fears about his ability to execute the manoeuvre should be magnified. The crew are all present and observing his handling of the ship, which, itself, is in danger of running aground. Indeed his fears are almost justified: the manoeuvre nearly does come unstuck; a testimony to the fact that successful ship-handling was a matter of long acquaintance with a particular ship.<sup>135</sup> Secondly, it would seem to be a principle of Conrad's sea fiction that great attention is paid to accuracy in matters of ship-handling and the

134. Evans, "The Nautical Metaphor", p. 11.

135. Conrad's nautical essays are sufficient testimony to the difficulties and uncertainties of handling ships. In MOS he speaks of "humouring" (MOS, p. 51) ships and of their "mysteries" (MOS, p. 56). See also the tale of the skipper who attempted a daring manoeuvre and was "found out" by his ship (MOS, pp. 34-35). In "The Torrens a Personal Tribute" he remarks how a change of master brought an inexplicable series of accidents (Last Essays, p. 26 (referred to below as: LE)).



psychology of the sailor under stress; and there is no reason why he should make an exception of "The Secret Sharer", a story which is built out of the realistic depiction of a sailing master's profession.

V

When reading one of Conrad's sea stories one is always aware of the position of the major characters in relation to the layout - interior or exterior - of a ship. The area involved is usually that part of the ship inhabited by the officers: their quarters below, the bridge (of a steamship), or the poop or quarter-deck (of a sailing-ship).<sup>136</sup> The limitations of space are important in stories like "The Secret Sharer" and Chance because they are used to create and sustain the tensions existing between his characters. The following sections examine four stories and demonstrate how in each one the plot (or sub-plot) is brought to a climax through the means of a ship's layout.

Excluding "The Black Mate",<sup>137</sup> "Falk" is the first story in which Conrad employs the method. Falk, it will be remembered, narrates to an English master the sequence of events which led to cannibalism on the Borgmester Dahl. The ship had broken down and drifted towards the south pole; the crew's food had run out and the life of the ship had begun to disintegrate. Falk finds himself in competition with the

136. An idea of the confined spaces involved can be gained by visiting the Cutty Sark at Greenwich.

137. Interestingly enough, considering that "The Black Mate" is possibly based upon the earliest sea story Conrad ever wrote (see above), "The Black Mate's" plot is brought to a climax by means of the layout of the ship involved (the Sapphire). Bunter, the chief mate of the Sapphire, serves a particularly uncongenial master, Captain Johns, who dislikes elderly sailors. Bunter's magnificent head of jet-black hair is, however, turning grey. He conceals this by dyeing his hair but his bottles of dye are smashed in heavy seas. Bunter, worrying about the predicament he is in, falls down a poop-ladder made dangerous by a set of half-round brass plates fixed on the orders of Johns. Confined to his bunk Bunter manages to deceive him by claiming that his hair turned grey after a ghostly visitation.

carpenter for the position of "best man" on board - the man who will live by eating the others. He narrowly escapes death when the carpenter strikes at him with a crowbar, as he is drinking at the freshwater-pump.<sup>138</sup> He runs into his cabin to get his revolver, but, instead of seeking out the carpenter, he stays put because he notices that one of his ports "commanded the approaches to the fresh-water pump".<sup>139</sup> Falk waits patiently all night and, in the morning, carefully unlocks his door:

But during the night the carpenter, without even trying to approach the pump, had managed to creep quietly along the starboard bulwark, and, unseen, had crouched down right under Falk's deck port. When daylight came he rose up suddenly, looked in, and putting his arm through the round, brass-framed opening, fired at Falk within a foot. He missed - and Falk, instead of attempting to seize the arm holding the weapon, opened his door unexpectedly, and with the muzzle of his revolver nearly touching the other's side, shot him dead. 140

There are two important points to notice at this juncture. First, Falk's triumph over the carpenter, achieved by superior cunning, leads directly to his cannibalism - the incident is central to the plot. Secondly, the drama depends upon the use each man makes of the plan of the ship.

The climax of "The End of the Tether" is reached in an equivalent fashion to that of "Falk". An earlier section has already dealt with the state of high tension existing on the bridge of the Sofala.<sup>141</sup> By the close of the story Massy is sufficiently embittered and dispirited, by his failure to persuade Whalley to finance him for a further year, that he decides to wreck the Sofala and claim the insurance. He intends to use iron to deflect the ship's compass but, first, he must collect unobserved. The plan of the Sofala aids him:

138. T, p. 233.

139. T, p. 233.

140. T, p. 234.

141. See above pp. 330-333.



Almost opposite his berth, across the narrow passage under the bridge, there was, in the iron deck-structure covering the stokehold fiddle and the boiler-space, a store-room with iron sides, iron roof, iron-plated floor, too, on account of the heat below. All sorts of rubbish was shot there . . . . 142

Massy slips in and stuffs his pockets with small pieces of soft iron and then, "He slipped out swiftly - two strides sufficed . . . ." <sup>143</sup> It is neatly done - by both character and author.

Massy is now faced with the problem of smuggling his jacket on to the bridge. Here the tensions already established come into play. At the beginning of Whalley's tenure as master Massy had frequently hung his jacket on the bridge:

It would be seen swinging on belaying-pins, thrown over the heads of winches, suspended on people's very door-handles for that matter. Was he not the owner? But his favourite place was a hook on a wooden awning stanchion on the bridge, almost against the binnacle. 144

Whalley had, however, complained about this because he wanted the bridge kept tidy, <sup>145</sup> but, now that his sight is failing, he "never seemed to notice anything". <sup>146</sup> Massy is consequently able to steal on the bridge and place the coat, stuffed with iron, on his favourite hook. <sup>147</sup> While placing the coat the quartermaster's vision (he is steering) of the compasses is obscured and he does not see the sudden swing of the needle as the iron takes its effect. Once he does regain sight of the needle he observes that he has lost his bearing, assumes that it is his own fault, and "corrects" the course. <sup>148</sup> Whalley finds the coat when he

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142. Y, p. 321.

143. Y, p. 322.

144. Y, p. 311.

145. Y, p. 311.

146. Y, p. 311.

147. Y, p. 326.

148. Y, p. 326.



stoops to look at the needle and puts a hand out to steady himself. The coat's loop breaks and the jacket falls to the deck with a dull thump. At that moment the Sofala strikes a reef.<sup>149</sup>

Conrad uses the events on the Sofala's bridge to render more forceful the representation of the moral problem created by Whalley's behaviour after the onset of his blindness. Massy is only able to place the coat on the bridge because Whalley is nearly blind. The implication is plain: the master is not in complete control of the ship, and must therefore share part of the blame. Whalley recognises this when he commits suicide by weighting his pockets with iron as the ship sinks;<sup>150</sup> the iron is an appropriate symbol of his lack of authority on the bridge.

## VI

"The Secret Sharer" develops the technique further. As we have seen the captain-narrator has to hide Leggatt in his quarters from the rest of the crew. The drama, as to whether his presence will be discovered, is heightened by two factors: the steward has right of access to the quarters; and the chief mate, as well as distrusting the young master's ability, is an inquisitive man:

His dominant trait was to take all things into earnest consideration. He was of a painstaking turn of mind. As he used to say, he 'liked to account to himself' for practically everything that came his way, down to a miserable scorpion he had found in his cabin a week before. 151

He is the last sort of person one would choose as a colleague in the venture that the narrator embarks upon when Leggatt climbs aboard a few hours later. The second mate's presence is also threatening. He is

149. Y, p. 329.

150. Y, p. 333.

151. TLS, p. 94.

observant and "clever" and likes to impress his colleagues with bits of information which have escaped their notice - as when he reveals the reasons for the Sephora's presence after the master and chief mate have fruitlessly speculated on the subject for some time.<sup>152</sup>

Once a little knowledge of sailing ships is applied to the close description of the narrator's ship it is possible to construct a plan of the cuddy and the captain's quarters.<sup>153</sup> These would be situated underneath the quarter-deck (so called because it covers the officers' quarters) at the stern of the vessel. An officer and a helmsman would be continually on duty above the captain's cabin - where Leggatt is hidden. The master and Leggatt have to whisper their conversations and the narrator makes a number of references to the strain of sustaining the deception.<sup>154</sup> The following diagram (fig. 5) gives an idea of the shape and plan of the sort of area in which the drama of "The Secret Sharer" ensues. The thin partitions dividing the cabins and the small space involved all contribute to the stress of the situation; in addition, "The cabin was as hot as an oven . . . ." <sup>155</sup>

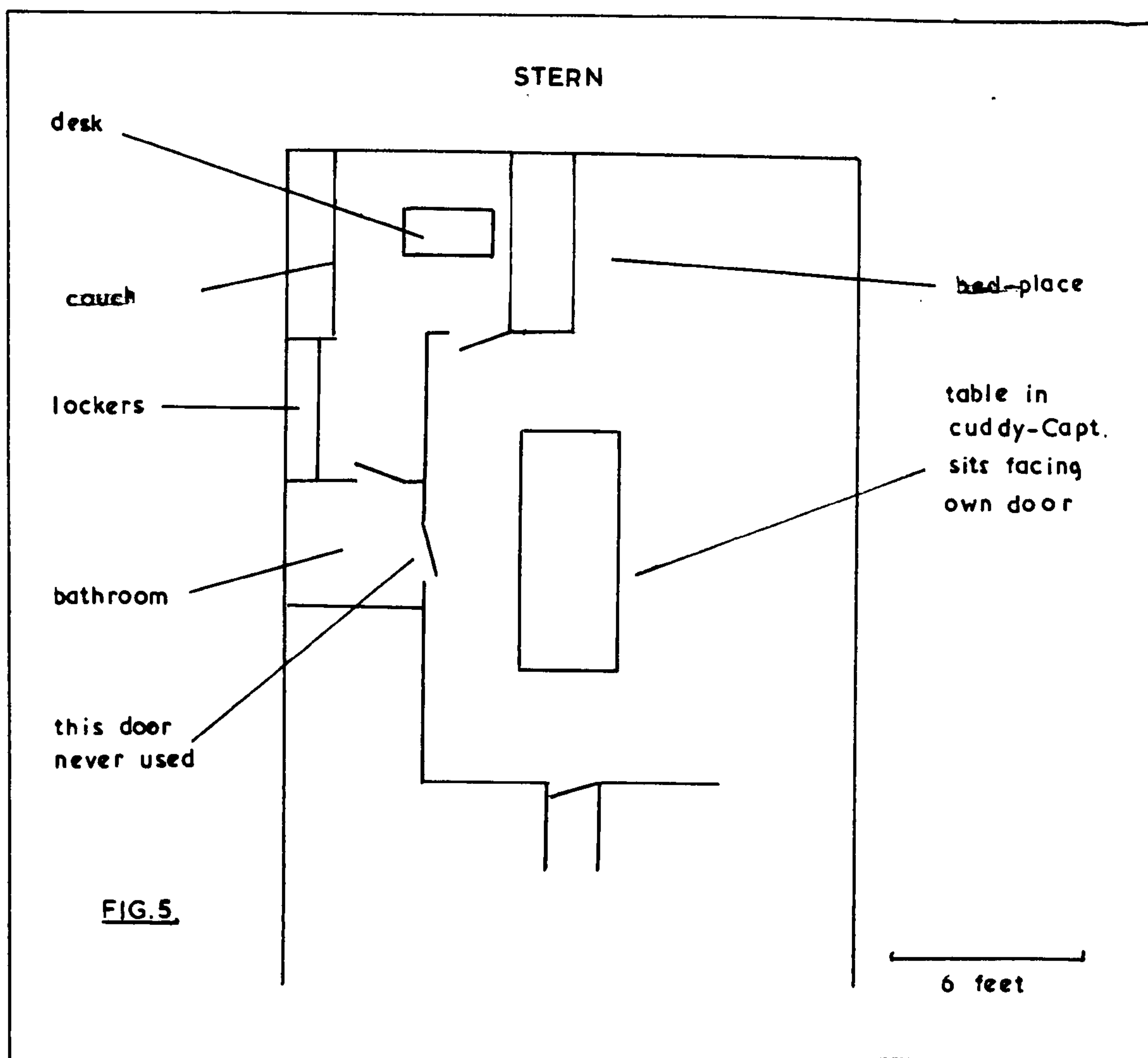
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152. TLS, pp. 94-95.

153. My own researches have been helped by a visit to the Cutty Sark at Greenwich and the plan of the officers' quarters printed in Lubbock, Cutty Sark, facing p. 44.

154. e.g., TLS, pp. 125-126 and Leggatt's anxious comment p. 109.

155. TLS, p. 112.



In many ways the cabin is ideal for the narrator's purpose.

It must be explained here that my cabin had the form of a capital L the door being within the angle and opening into the short part of the letter. A couch was to the left, the bed-place to the right; my writing-desk and the chronometers' table faced the door. But anyone opening it, unless he stepped right inside, had no view of what I call the long (or vertical) part of the letter. It contained some lockers surmounted by a book case; and a few clothes, a thick jacket or two, caps, oilskin coat, and such like, hung on hooks. There was at the bottom of that part a door opening into my bath-room, which could be entered also directly from the saloon. But that way was never used. 156

The steward has a certain right of access because he is the captain's personal servant. The master is made uncomfortably aware of the



implications of this when, sitting next to the door and opposite Leggatt (who is asleep on the couch), the steward enters with his coffee:

Before I could collect myself the words 'Come in' were out of my mouth, and the steward entered with a tray, bringing in my morning coffee. I had slept, after all, and I was so frightened that I shouted, 'This way! I am here, steward,' as though he had been miles away. 157

The steward is understandably surprised and puzzled by the new master's behaviour. When he goes out on deck - ". . . hooking the door open as usual",<sup>158</sup> as if to establish his right of access - he conveys his impression of the master's odd behaviour to the officers.<sup>159</sup>

The master-narrator gradually devises a set procedure to allow the steward to carry on his duties as normal. Over breakfast each morning he presides with such "frigid dignity that the two mates were only too glad to escape from the cabin as usual as soon as decency permitted . . . ." <sup>160</sup> Afterwards he rings for the steward who, after fetching his gear, cleans out the cabin while the master has his bath in the bathroom with Leggatt hiding beside him.<sup>161</sup> After his bath he entertains the mate in the cabin; when he leaves he gets Leggatt back into the cabin while the steward, entering from the saloon, cleans out the bathroom.<sup>162</sup> Nevertheless, very real problems arise when the master is out of his cabin. At one evening meal, the master sat at the head of the table, the steward - "that man, whose slightest movement I dreaded"<sup>163</sup> - comes down from the deck with a wet coat belonging to

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157. TLS, p. 112.

158. TLS, p. 112.

159. TLS, p. 113.

160. TLS, p. 113.

161. TLS, p. 114.

162. TLS, pp. 114-115.

163. TLS, p. 128.

the master. He makes for the master's cabin. The master manages to warn Leggatt by loudly questioning the steward as to what he is doing but he is unable to prevent him hanging the coat up in the bathroom where Leggatt is hiding.

It was the end. The place was literally not big enough to swing a cat in. My voice died in my throat and I went stony all over. I expected to hear a yell of surprise and terror . . . . 164

Leggatt and the master are lucky; the steward had not looked in the bathroom; he had merely put his arm in to hang up the coat.

Leggatt is hidden by the master for five days at the end of which time he sees an opportunity for putting him ashore. He sends the poor steward, who has had a rough time, upstairs on the pretext of fetching a cup of hot water.<sup>165</sup> While he is occupied Leggatt and the master slip out of the cabin and down the passage (running down the middle of the quarters) into the lobby, where stairs communicate with the quarter-deck above.<sup>166</sup> The lobby also connects with the sail locker. The master intends to sail close to the shore while Leggatt slips overboard from the sail locker where:

there is an opening, a sort of square for hauling the sails out, which gives straight on the quarter-deck and which is never closed in fine weather, so as to give air to the sails. 167

He has the quarter-deck port opened in advance. Leggatt slips overboard while the master employs the crew in executing the final manoeuvre.

"The Secret Sharer" is a masterly suspense-story and its effects are achieved through the reader's having a clear idea of the plan of the ship and the corresponding position of the major characters. A full

164. TLS, p. 129.

165. TLS, p. 138.

166. TLS, pp. 136 and 138.

167. TLS, p. 136.



awareness of these aspects of the story has an illuminating effect on our appreciation of the narrator's character and the kind of stress he is enduring. This in itself is a valuable point because it serves to put into perspective a number of passages which make the narrator seem excessively neurotic:

I went slowly into my dark room, shut the door, lighted the lamp, and for a time dared not turn round. When at last I did I saw him standing bolt-upright in the narrow recessed part. It would not be true to say I had a shock, but an irresistible doubt of his bodily existence flitted through my mind. Can it be, I asked myself, that he is not visible to other eyes than mine? It was like being haunted. 168

These thoughts are easily explained by the strain he is under: the worry of keeping Leggatt hidden; the hot, cramped conditions of the cabin; and the necessity of whispering. It is little wonder that he feels distracted.

## VII

Although Chance (1915) is a late sea-novel, certain sections, and especially those associated with the sea and sailors, bear the stamp of the earlier narratives.<sup>169</sup> Present, once again, is the old antagonism between master and mate (Captain Anthony and Franklin), and the plot is resolved through the shape of the ship. There are developments, however, and the narrative contains more than the customary detail about the interior fittings of the officers' quarters and, for the first time since "The Rescuer", a woman appears in seagoing episodes.

Anthony's passion for the young and friendless Miss Flora de Barral has unexpected repercussions for the Ferndale and her crew,

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168. TLS, p. 130.

169. This seems a reasonable conclusion since the first parts of the novel were based on the earlier sea narrative "Dynamite" (later called "Explosives") about a dynamite ship. See Baines, Conrad, p. 382.



and these are reflected in the physical layout of the ship. Conrad's description of the Ferndale recalls his last ship the Torrens, of which there is a model in the National Museum of Wales. Like the Torrens<sup>170</sup> the Ferndale is spacious and well-appointed. The Torrens was designed to accommodate passengers and the Ferndale, if not a regular passenger-ship, has ample accommodation.

The Ferndale had magnificent accommodation. At the end of a passage leading from the quarter-deck there was a long saloon, its sumptuousity slightly tarnished perhaps, but having a grand air of roominess and comfort. The harbour carpets were down, the swinging lamps hung, and everything in its place, even to the silver on the sideboard. Two large stern cabins opened out of it, one on each side of the rudder casing. These two cabins communicated through a small bathroom between them, and one was fitted up as the captain's state-room. The other was vacant, and furnished with arm-chairs . . . . 171

When Anthony returns to the ship a married man, Franklin is astounded,<sup>172</sup> for his captain had always been a typical bachelor-seaman of a particularly solid and uninspiring character. His return from the shore and his tour of inspection round the ship with his new wife is observed by an elderly ship-keeper, who watches the pair from the deck:

as they went in and out of the various cabins, crossing from side to side, remaining invisible for a time in one or another of the state-rooms, and then reappearing again in the distance. 173

The ship-keeper is only able to indulge his curiosity because of a long passage which runs half the length of the Ferndale's quarters<sup>174</sup> (see fig. 6).

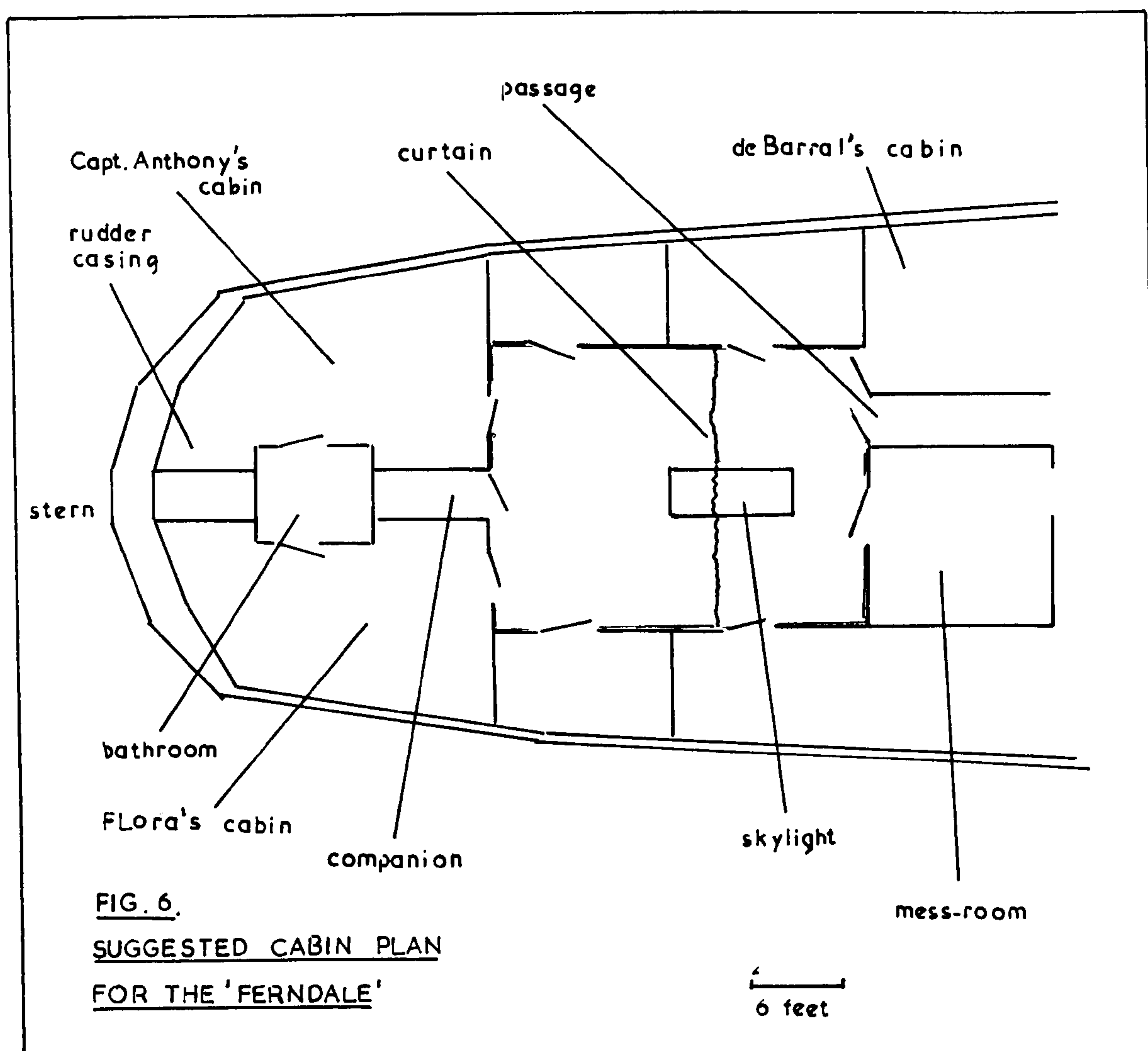
170. The Torrens was a popular passenger ship (Baines, Conrad, p. 127). See also LE, pp. 25-26.

171. C, p. 265.

172. C, p. 267.

173. C, p. 266.

174. C, p. 265.



Anthony makes a number of changes to the interior of the Ferndale. The entire aspect is brightened up for his new bride<sup>175</sup> but the biggest changes affect the actual plan of the quarters. He begins by cutting the large saloon in two (marked in red on fig. 6 above) with a dividing curtain which not only keeps his quarters secluded from the other cabins but also affords a new private entrance on the deck by means of the companion stairway.<sup>176</sup> When young Powell joins the Ferndale for a later voyage the reader learns more about the situation as it affects the officers. Franklin, for example, had been disgusted to find that

175. C, pp. 271 and 297.

176. C, p. 349.

he was no longer expected to dine with the master; instead he was to dine with the second mate in a small mess room.<sup>177</sup> Flora's presence has also affected Anthony's arrangements:

'Of course the starboard cabin is the bedroom one, but the poor captain hangs out to port on a couch, so that in case we want him on deck at night, Mrs Anthony should not be startled. Nervous! Phoo! A woman who marries a sailor and makes up her mind to come to sea should have no blamed jumpiness about her, I say.' 178

Furthermore, two cabins have been knocked into one and given over to Flora's father. These cabins are on the opposite side of the curtain.<sup>179</sup>

The internal arrangements are appropriately representative of the barrier that the new master has erected between himself and his crew. Franklin, who had been a great friend of Anthony's is particularly hurt:

'There was a time, young fellow [Franklin tells Powell], when I would have dared any man - any man, you hear? to make mischief between me and Captain Anthony. But not now. Not now. There's a change! Not in me though . . . .' 180

There are other masters who have their wives on board ship in Conrad's sea narratives - Archbold of the Sephora, for example - but Chance is one of the few in which this topic is exploited as a major theme. The situation is not as straightforward as Franklin believes. He thinks that Anthony is being used by his wife,<sup>181</sup> but his feelings are further complicated when the steward and his wife discover that their master's relationship with Flora is not what it should be: "'Wife! Call her wife, do you? . . . My old woman has not been six months on board for nothing.'"<sup>182</sup> The surmise - that the marriage has not been consummated -

177. C, p. 278.

178. C, p. 297.

179. C, p. 349.

180. C, p. 391.

181. C, pp. 304-305.

182. C, p. 390.



is correct, because Anthony, painfully aware that Flora married him under the duress of poverty and loneliness, has done nothing more than provide her with a home.<sup>183</sup> He, Flora, and her father live in separate cabins which form a triangle in the plan of the vessel; her father is extremely jealous of Anthony's generosity to her.

That the master's conduct is misguided and liable to breed mischief is made obvious in an incident on Powell's first voyage. He is on duty in a night watch when he realises that a ship, running before the wind and therefore travelling at some speed, is heading straight for the Ferndale. He decides to rouse the captain:

He crossed the deck in one bound. By the immemorial custom and usage of the sea the captain's room is on the starboard side. You would just as soon expect your captain to have his nose at the back of his head as to have his stateroom on the port side of the ship. Powell forgot all about the direction on that point given him by the chief. He flew over as I said, stamped with his foot and then putting his face to the cowl of the big ventilator shouted down there . . . . 184

Unfortunately Anthony's cabin is on the port side and Powell hears Flora's "faint exclamation".<sup>185</sup> There is a near collision and the master can only mumble an explanation about not wanting Flora frightened.<sup>186</sup> The incident does, however, serve to bring the married couple closer together, but the one remaining obstacle to their happiness is Flora's father who is possessively jealous of her.<sup>187</sup> The climax of the novel involves an attempt by him to poison Anthony. The entire episode is closely bound up with the plan of the vessel.

183. C, pp. 396-397.

184. C, p. 316.

185. C, p. 316.

186. C, p. 322.

187. C, pp. 361-362.

Franklin, the mate, always complained to Powell that Flora had "enchanted" the captain.<sup>188</sup> His opinion seems justified when, one morning, ". . . the mizzen topsail tie . . . carried away". Although the heavy gin-lock misses Anthony's head "by an inch",<sup>189</sup> he does not stir: "'I believe he didn't even blink. It isn't natural. The man is stupified.'"<sup>190</sup> The incident, however, has other, more far-reaching consequences for, in carrying away, the gear smashes a "coloured glass-pane at the end of the skylight".<sup>191</sup> It is repaired by a carpenter using a pane of clear glass.<sup>192</sup> Later that evening Powell, the officer of the watch, is talking to Flora's father, de Barral. When de Barral leaves him he goes below and Powell sees through the dead lights (wooden covers surrounding the cabin lights fixed in the skylight) de Barral's lights go out.<sup>193</sup> He walks aft and stoops to pick up a length of rope left by the damaged skylight.<sup>194</sup> Through the new clear pane of glass he observes the master reading a book in the saloon below, sitting beside the heavy curtain.<sup>195</sup> An idea of the sort of skylight Conrad is referring to can be gained from the model of the Torrens in Cardiff. As he describes it, it has a seat running the length of the raised structure above the glass panes (see fig. 7). The position of the major features involved are shown in the plan below (see fig. 8).

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188. C, p. 303.

189. C, p. 402.

190. C, p. 403.

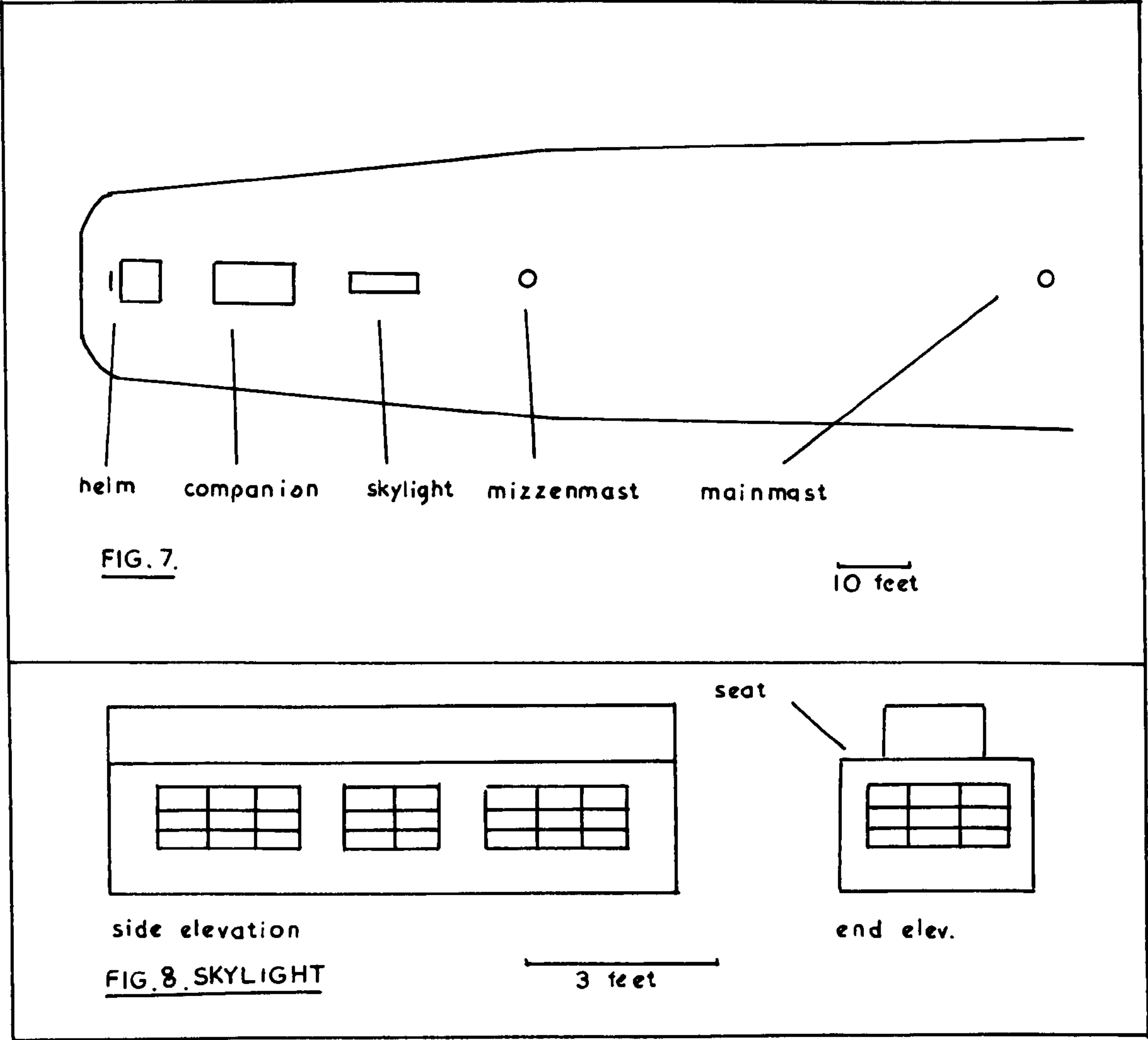
191. C, p. 411.

192. C, p. 411.

193. C, p. 409.

194. C, pp. 410-411.

195. C, pp. 412-413.



Powell is unable to restrain his curiosity and continues to watch Anthony reading. The master is also drinking and this serves to make Powell more curious because Franklin had warned him that the next step in Anthony's decline (the first was his marriage) would be an inordinate liking for drink.<sup>196</sup> Suddenly, Anthony gets up and leaves the table and Powell has to back away hurriedly in case he is seen. His curiosity gets the better of him, however, and he returns to the skylight, but this time, so as not to be caught by the helmsman, he sits on the skylight seat and watches with his head between his legs.

196. C, p. 412.



'But in that way my angle of view was changed. The field too was smaller. The end of the table, the tray and the swivel-chair I had right under my eyes. The captain had not come back yet. The piano I could not see now; but on the other hand I had a very oblique downward view of the curtains drawn across the cabin and cutting off the forward part of it just <sup>the</sup> about level of the skylight-end and only an inch or so from the end of the table.' 197

From this vantage point he sees de Barral's hand slip through the curtain and poison the drink.<sup>198</sup> De Barral comes from the forward end of the quarters and has only to slip back across to his cabin on the other side of the saloon. It is in this room that he hears Powell rush down through the quarter-deck door and into the curtained-off part of the saloon where he seizes Anthony's drink.<sup>199</sup> The episode shocks Anthony and Flora into an awareness of each other<sup>200</sup> and de Barral poisons himself.<sup>201</sup>

De Barral's suicide and the smashing of the skylight are open to the charge of melodrama. The broken skylight - an unusual event - gives rise, for example, to the crucial sequence of events which leads to de Barral's death. It would seem that Conrad relies too heavily upon the technique of allowing events to be determined by the shape of the ship. In other stories the events which develop in this fashion are determined by additional influences: the routine procedures of shipboard life in "The Secret Sharer" and "The End of the Tether"; and the actions of the crew of the Borgmester Dahl in "Falk". In this sense Chance recalls "The Black Mate".

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197. C, pp. <sup>414-</sup>415.

198. C, p. 417.

199. C, pp. 419-420.

200. C, p. 430.

201. C, pp. 433-434.

## VII

There is one further aspect of Conrad's use of nautical detail which has not yet been mentioned, though it has featured in Parts I and II of the thesis. Stevenson and Kipling utilised maritime commercial material quite frequently in their plots but, possibly because Conrad had so great a knowledge of seamanship and sea-going practice, such detail does not bulk so large in his fiction. Nevertheless it does figure in a number of stories,<sup>202</sup> and nowhere more prominently than "The Partner" (1911). "The Partner's" plot involves insurance fraud (or barratry as Stevenson calls it). It is the story of an attempt by an American shipowner to gain ready capital by arranging the loss of a ship so that he can claim the insurance. An accomplice secures the position of chief mate on board and the vessel duly runs ashore. Unfortunately for the American the scheme goes radically wrong (the chief mate murders the master)<sup>203</sup> and he gains little by his crime. The tale is concluded by a short apology for the improbability of the affair:

For it is too startling even to think of such things happening in our respectable Channel in full view . . . of the luxurious continental traffic to Switzerland and Monte Carlo. This story to be acceptable should have been transposed to somewhere in the South Seas. But it would have been too much trouble to cook it for the consumption of magazine readers. <sup>204</sup>

The author figure's scorn for the South Sea magazine tale is interesting: it might easily be an intended insult directed at Stevenson's The Ebb

202. To "The Partner" may be added "A Smile of Fortune" and "Talk" (the negotiations for the tug).

203. Within the Tides, pp. 118-119 and 124-125 (referred to below as: WT).

204. WT, p. 128.



Tide which, as we have seen, involves insurance fraud.<sup>205</sup> Nevertheless, "The Partner" is not a successful story: it is melodramatic and lacks serious content. The main narrator, a master-stevedore, is wooden and unconvincing, though Conrad seems to have regarded him as the centre-piece of the story.<sup>206</sup>

The apologetic ending to "The Partner", which implies that it is employing material seldom used by Conrad in his sea fiction, serves as a reminder of the importance of the world of the Merchant Service in his work. Unlike Stevenson his best marine narratives draw their strength from his own experience of a closely-knit profession with shared traditions. This should not be surprising when Conrad's interest in the group values of heroism, manliness, and altruism is considered. Furthermore, as this chapter has attempted to demonstrate, his nautical fiction employs the conditions and working techniques of his own sea years as the raw material for metaphor and symbolism with a natural facility. More importantly, perhaps, he found a lasting inspiration for an imaginative analysis of the psychology of work and leadership.

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205. See above pp. 97-98. Conrad may also have had Cutcliffe Hyne's Captain Kettle stories in mind a number of which involve barratry. See e.g., The Little Red Captain (1902) and "Mr Gedge's Catpaw" in The Adventures of Captain Kettle (1898). The question as to the nature of Conrad's probable opinions on Stevenson's work is more problematical. One of his few references to Stevenson's Pacific work concerns In the South Seas which he evidently admired (see Aubry, Life and Letters, ii, 223). In the same letter he denies that he did not respect Stevenson as a "creator" and writes of him as "the generous great artist in prose"; nevertheless there is no evidence of him ever praising his imaginative work.

206. WT, p. 128.



## CHAPTER FIVE : Conrad and the Romance Tradition of the Sea Story

## CHAPTER FIVE : Conrad and the Romance Tradition of the Sea Story

### I

The last three chapters investigated what are usually regarded as Conrad's best sea stories. In the main these are realistic (in a nautical sense) and they employ his knowledge of his first profession as a basis for character, plot and theme. There are a number of stories, however, which form a quite different group. Conrad, for example, made a distinction between types of his own sea stories in his "Preface to the Shorter Tales":

Thus the characteristic trait of the stories included in this volume consists in the central figure of each being a seaman presented either in the relations of his professional life with his own kind, or in contact with landsmen and women, and embroiled in the affairs of that larger part of mankind which dwells on solid earth. 1

The first type he describes very obviously relates to the majority of realistic stories examined in previous chapters. The second type may be defined on a different basis. His narratives involving "contact with landsmen and women" habitually employ romance techniques other than dramatised narrators and broken time-schemes. Stories like

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1. LE, p. 143. The Shorter Tales of Joseph Conrad contains eight stories: "Youth", "The Secret Sharer", "The Brute", "Tomorrow", "Typhoon", "Because of the Dollars", "The Partner", "Falk".

"Tomorrow" and "Freya of the Seven Isles" use colourful and larger-than-life characters, symbolic landscapes, and generalised themes. This second group is examined in the following chapter.

At the same time the contribution that the romance tradition made to Conrad's work as a whole must not be forgotten. Much has already been said about his use of sophisticated narrative techniques and his moulding of essentially dramatic and colourful incident to make serious statements about man and society, but in order to emphasise the blend of romance and realism in his work, I have included an examination of voyage-imagery in his sea fiction.

## II

Although "Freya of the Seven Isles" was written many years after Conrad began The Rescue the germ of the short story's plot appears in the novel;<sup>2</sup> he may have wished to remind the critic that, when "The Rescuer" was laid aside in favour of The Nigger, he had made a choice between two different types of sea fiction. "Freya", unlike the other sea stories, does not attempt to examine closely the professional skills of the seaman or to dissect, in the manner of Lord Jim, a moral conundrum. It is a tale which lays out, directly, but with an accompanying symbolism, the sadness of a love-affair that comes to a tragic end. Its moral structure, divided between good and evil, is simple.

The plot is set in the same world of intrigue and commercial rivalry as The Rescue, although the Dutch authorities play a larger and more significant role in "Freya". The core of the story is the relationship between a young trader, who owns his own brig, the Bonito, and a young woman, Freya, who lives with her father and maid in a bungalow on an island forming part of the Seven Isles group. The trader, Jasper

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2. TR, p. 101. The story is that of Dawson whose brig was towed ashore during a legal wrangle with the Dutch authorities.



Allen, falls foul of a Dutch naval lieutenant, Heemskirk, who is jealous of Freya's love for him. Heemskirk eventually impounds the Bonito and has it run ashore on a reef; Allen's heart is broken and he becomes a derelict "on the beach".<sup>3</sup>

Allen, unlike Lingard, has no colonial ambitions, but the way in which his character is inextricably caught up with the brig - he spends his time painting it and embellishing it with gold leaf<sup>4</sup> - makes him a close relation of Lingard's. In fact the sailing-ships in "Freya" and The Rescue, more so than anywhere else in Conrad's work, have much the same mystique and sacredness about them as swords in Medieval legend.<sup>5</sup> They are intensely personal things and are always the fastest, most beautiful, and the most responsive of their kind.

Allen derives his energy and his charisma from the craft; Freya herself says: "'But it will be no man who will carry me off - it will be the brig, your brig - our brig . . . I love the beauty!'"<sup>6</sup> The brig is a central symbol: it represents Allen's youth, strength, devotion, and skill; later, a decaying wreck on the reef, it is a "symbol of despair".<sup>7</sup> Above all the brig represents Jasper and Freya's relationship:

Dependent on things as all men are, Jasper loved his vessel - the house of his dreams. He lent to her something of Freya's soul. Her deck was the foothold of their love. 8

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3. TLS, pp. 225, 232, and 236.

4. TLS, p. 158.

5. Burgess, Fellowship of the Craft, pp. 52-80 examines the significance of ships in Conrad's fiction. Burgess emphasises the fashion in which they are idealised and loved as feminine creatures by their owners.

6. TLS, p. 190.

7. TLS, p. 229.

8. TLS, p. 210; see also pp. 156 and 158.

Like Arthur's Excalibur the brig has a mysterious history: Allen had bought it from a Peruvian and the narrator guesses that she "was old enough to have been one of the last pirates, a slaver perhaps, or else an opium clipper . . . ." <sup>9</sup>

"Freya" recalls Stevenson's and Kipling's romantic short stories and supernatural fables. It would be easy, but unfair, to dismiss it as an attempt, on Conrad's part, to capture popular success by including a feminine interest and evocative descriptions of beautiful ships and exotic settings. In fact it is a haunting and powerful story; Conrad can be seen consciously polarising the moral issues by building up characters representing good and evil: Freya is both beautiful and good; Heemskirk is old, ugly, and evil - "beetle", Allen calls him. <sup>10</sup> As befits a fable, the good characters die heartbroken at the revelation of the malice and misfortune of life.

The story has a strong sense of inevitability which is sustained, not merely by the idea that fortune is set against the pair, but by their very vivacity, high spirits, and devotion to each other. Hubris features in the central episode of the narrative which occurs at the close of Chapter Four. Freya, standing on the verandah of her father's bungalow, waves to the Bonito, conscious that Heemskirk is observing her from behind. <sup>11</sup> The scene captures Freya's provocative sexuality as well as her desire to end once and for all Heemskirk's hounding of her affections. She waves her "beautiful white arms above her head":

In that attitude of supreme cry she stood still,  
glowing with the consciousness of Jasper's adoration  
going out to her figure <sup>hwa</sup> in the field of his glasses  
away there, and warmed, too, by the feeling of evil  
passion, the burning covetous eyes of the other,  
fastened on her back.      12

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9. TLS, p. 157.

10. TLS, p. 218.

11. TLS, pp. 203-204.

12. TLS, p. 204.

Unfortunately her playfulness is carried too far when she rushes to the piano in order to taunt Heemskirk with "a fierce piece of love music";<sup>13</sup> he is determined to be revenged on Jasper at once.

Heemskirk gains his chance as a result of Jasper's carefree, generous nature. When his regular mate unexpectedly leaves him he engages a local kleptomaniac, Schultz, in his place.<sup>14</sup> Despite Allen's generosity he is unable to stop himself stealing, and subsequently selling, eighteen rifles kept on board the Bonito. It is the absence of these rifles which enables Heemskirk to impound the ship under suspicion of gun-running.<sup>15</sup>

That the story hinges, if only partly, on the presence of a kleptomaniac may appear an unfortunate stroke which reduces a potentially sublime story to the proverbially ridiculous; nevertheless, seen in the proper perspective, the comedy is not misplaced. The tale is indeed often humorous: the strong passions of the characters, Heemskirk "gnashed his teeth";<sup>16</sup> the presence of the piano and Freya's music ringing out over the seascape; and the narrator's rather whimsical humour. If it all does seem larger than life then the old truism that comedy and sadness are close relatives is relevant. The essence of this type of romance is hyperbole. Indeed the humour and the exaggeration are far from haphazard elements: even Schultz's role as a kleptomaniac is appropriate because it relates to Heemskirk's attempted "theft" of Freya from Allen, and the very real theft of the brig which effectively deprives Freya of Allen's love.<sup>17</sup>

13. TLS, p. 206.

14. TLS, p. 168.

15. TLS, p. 227.

16. TLS, p. 203.

17. Critics have not been impressed however. Graver, Conrad's Short Fiction, p. 163 refers to the story as "flamboyant melodrama" and even Thorburn, Romanticism, p. 20 criticises the "embarrassing operatics".



It is in respect of these romance elements that Conrad's narrative recalls Kipling's "The Disturber of Traffic",<sup>18</sup> which also blends the serious and the comic. Both use a surrealistic setting in a similar fashion. This surrealism is particularly evident in the episode where Freya taunts Heemskirk:

The green islets appeared like black shadows, the ashen sea was smooth as glass, the clear robe of the colourless dawn, in which even the brig appeared shadowy, had a hem of light in the east . . . . Her repeated, passionate gesture seemed to fling kisses by the hundred . . . while the slowly ascending sun brought the glory of colour to the world, turning the islets green, the sea blue, the brig below her white - dazzlingly white in the spread of her wings - with the red ensign streaming like a tiny flame from the peak. 19

The picture is a forceful accompaniment to the vivid emotions of the characters; indeed the stylised, almost formulaic segments - "the clear robe - hem of light - spread of her wings" - gain a credence from their singular appropriateness to the characterisation and the themes involved.

"Freya" belongs very obviously to a particular group of Conrad's sea stories and, in comparison with the vividly technical, psychologically and morally subtle group, illustrated by stories of the nature of "The Secret Sharer", its landscape may seem to represent not the sea of the real world but of a "sea" surrounding a model ship in a glass case - a simile used by the narrator to describe the Bonito.<sup>20</sup> In fact this last image is very appropriate; the Bonito is caught and destroyed by malice and her "timeless" beauty is shown to exist only as part of an ideal and fragile world.<sup>21</sup> These large scale evocative effects make the tale quite different from the main-line Conradian sea story in which

18. See above pp. 121-124.

19. TLS, p. 204.

20. TLS, p. 165.

21. See e.g., p. 163: Jasper's possession of the brig and the love of Freya is described as "not exactly safe in a world like ours".

the reader is locked in the often claustrophobic environment of the ship, vividly aware of the nautical problems facing the master, and presented with subtle moral distinctions. That "Freya" is so different should identify Conrad's purpose; the narrative is not "inferior"<sup>22</sup> Conrad but an attempt to express the beauty, sadness, and malice of the world in a different medium. At the same time "Freya" does possess some of the characteristics of the other sea stories. The bond between man and ship, for example, exists in The Shadow Line, "The Secret Sharer", The Nigger and even in the steamship story, "Typhoon". Finally we might note that the humour of caricature is a common feature of Conrad's fiction as a whole.

### III

"A Smile of Fortune" opens in the manner of the main-line Conradian sea story and there is the characteristic opening describing the officers on a sailing ship's quarter-deck. It is, however, very different and belongs to the same class of tale as "Freya".

Paul Kirschner's work on "A Smile of Fortune" emphasises Conrad's debt to Maupassant's "Les Soeurs Rondoli" (1884)<sup>23</sup> and, indeed, it is a rather curious tale to find among his work; nevertheless, as a sea tale, it belongs to a distinct tradition. It illustrates an archetypal pattern identified by W.H. Auden in his study of the sea in romantic literature, The Enchafed Flood. This pattern has already been mentioned in connection with The Wrecker.<sup>24</sup> Auden notes that the recurrence of the island theme in literature is very common.<sup>25</sup> In the classics the

22. Conrad often made the distinction between those stories in which he was striving for a complex effect and those in which he was trying to be "simply entertaining" (See Aubry, Life and Letters, ii, 66).

23. Kirschner, Conrad, pp. 220-229.

24. See above p. 92.

25. W.H. Auden, The Enchafed Flood, or the Romantic Iconography of the Sea, London (1931), p. 28-29 (referred to below as: Auden, Enchafed Flood).

island (and its land counterpart, the rose garden) is a place of safety and solitude, but, above all, "It is the earthly paradise where there is no conflict between natural desire and moral duty".<sup>26</sup> The romantics developed one particular aspect of the myth, that of the island or garden existing as a mirage to tempt the protagonist from his quest; when the spell of attraction is broken the island is seen as it really is: a desert or a place of horror.<sup>27</sup> "A Smile of Fortune" illustrates, in varying degrees, each of the archetype's features and this correspondence emphasises the symbolic and evocative aspects of the story; consequently it is similar in tone and form to "Freya".

When the tale begins the master-narrator is eagerly (he has been sixty days at sea) approaching an island described as "fertile and beautiful" and known as "The Pearl of the Ocean".<sup>28</sup> As the ship nears land the master is favoured by the appearance of an apparently rare phenomenon in which special conditions of light give the island an entrancing appearance, making it appear almost transparent:

And I wondered half seriously whether it was a good omen, whether what would meet me in that island would be as luckily exceptional as this beautiful, dreamlike vision so very few seamen have been privileged to behold.      29

When the ship makes for her anchorage the atmosphere changes:

Ah, but it was an exasperating, weary, endless night, to be lying at anchor close under that black coast!      30

The wind on the rigging seems like the "wail of a forsaken soul".<sup>31</sup>

26. Auden, Enchafed Flood, p. 29.

27. Auden, Enchafed Flood, pp. 29-30. Auden cites Calypso's Island and Klingsor's Garden (the isle of Venus).

28. TLS, p. 3.

29. TLS, p. 3.

30. TLS, p. 4.

31. TLS, p. 5.



This opening of suggestive imagery, which follows the archetypal pattern, prepares the reader for an island where appearance belies reality and fair prospects are succeeded by a harsher truth.

The plot rapidly fulfils these expectations (and the pessimistic predictions of the chief mate) when the narrator learns that the lately arrived Stella has suffered the loss of her mate and the skipper's little child.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless the master is determined to achieve some success on the island and plans to do this by concluding a profitable business deal. With his eyes set on a commercial advantage he associates with the pushing Alfred Jacobus who, at first unknown to the narrator, is passing himself off as his brother, Ernest, a business associate of the narrator's owners.<sup>33</sup> Alfred's threatening, but at the same time friendly, aspect is symbolised by his garden - "a very fine old garden"<sup>34</sup> - with mysterious associations, "He keeps a girl shut up there".<sup>35</sup> The master is inexorably drawn into a closer association with Alfred, an association symbolised by his entry into the garden and subsequent visits to the girl. He is led on by his own sympathy for the outcast Alfred, formerly a married and respectable man, but now ostracised because of his adultery with a circus artiste.<sup>36</sup> (the girl, Alice, is the illegitimate daughter of Alfred and the artiste). The narrator is driven into Alfred's hands when he alienates Ernest Jacobus, the sole supplier on the island of the sugar-bags the narrator needs. It is therefore both natural and inevitable that the master and Alfred should meet in the garden, despite warnings from an old inhabitant of the island.<sup>37</sup>

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32. TLS, p. 11.

33. TLS, pp. 11-12.

34. TLS, p. 23.

35. TLS, p. 21.

36. TLS, p. 36.

37. TLS, pp. 35-36.

Alfred's garden, and the house with which it is always associated, has a moral significance within the terms of island society. It belongs to Alfred and is a symbol of his moral and social isolation. From the moment the master arrives on the island he displays - appropriately enough for a sailor - a marked sense of enlightened superiority in the matters of conventional morality<sup>38</sup> and refuses to avoid an association with Alfred. Both brothers have illegitimate children but, whereas the unmarried Ernest pays lip service to island susceptibilities, Alfred acts openly and unrepentantly. By favouring Alfred and scorning Ernest, the master flouts the accepted opinions of the islanders; his entry into the garden becomes a symbolic step into a world of different values. In the garden Alfred plays an ambiguous role which makes the narrator unsure of his friendship and approbation.<sup>39</sup> He is never sure why Alfred is soliciting his company: is it as a businessman attempting to sell potatoes to a visiting ship; or is he, as a father, sensitive to his daughter's lack of company? At times his motives appear more sinister and complex and he appears to be attempting to remove the one obstacle to his re-acceptance into island society by marrying his daughter to a seaman.<sup>40</sup> Within this web of ambiguity, the narrator is drawn into complicity both with Alfred and his daughter - whom he suddenly kisses on one of his visits.<sup>41</sup>

Alice is an innocent girl. Secluded from the world, she is contemplating entering a nunnery and the knowledge of the outside world she does possess is derived from the disaffected Miss Jacobus<sup>42</sup> and

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38. e.g., TLS, pp. 38 and 44-45: "a mind not enslaved by narrow prejudices".

39. TLS, p. 51: "A sort of shady, intimate understanding seemed to have been established between us".

40. TLS, p. 52.

41. TLS, p. 69.

42. TLS, p. 45.

sensational reports in old newspapers.<sup>43</sup> The master, despite his enlightened morality and superior attitude, behaves in an extremely questionable fashion; in effect he demonstrates that he does not possess the restraint necessary in the freedom and innocence of the garden.

He is conscious that he may treat the girl as he pleases and the secluded atmosphere appears to encourage his approaches to her:

All the jealousies were tightly shut, like eyes,  
and the house seemed fast asleep in the afternoon  
sunshine. <sup>44</sup>

At first his attitude to the girl is one of amusement, and he lightly accepts an invitation to dinner: "I couldn't help thinking that it had procured me a more amusing evening."<sup>45</sup> He courts her as if she were a normal young woman - despite his recognition that "She did not know how men behaved",<sup>46</sup> and his conviction that he will never marry.<sup>47</sup> Even after the sugar bags have been obtained and his business on the island concluded, he continues to act like an aesthete of the nineties:

I was looking at the girl. It was what I was coming  
for daily; troubled, ashamed, eager; finding in my  
nearness to her a unique sensation which I indulged  
with dread, self-contempt, and deep pleasure, as if  
it were a secret vice bound to end in my undoing,  
like the habit of some drug or other which ruins  
and degrades its slave. <sup>48</sup>

The passage contains a clear suggestion of the Circe episode in Book X of the Odyssey (Circe being the sorceress who turned men into beasts); Alice lacks her malice but her effect is analogous for the master begins to act in an unthinking, indeed animal, fashion. He presses his

43. TLS, pp. 61-62.

44. TLS, p. 42.

45. TLS, p. 50.

46. TLS, p. 17.

47. TLS, p. 17.

48. TLS, p. 62.



attentions even after he fails to answer her question: "'Why do you keep on coming here?'"<sup>49</sup> He later forces a kiss on her:

She had no time to make a sound, and the first kiss  
I planted on her closed lips was vicious enough to  
have been a bite.      50

His desire for the girl is revealed as shallow once he has broken through her indifferent facade; his desire satisfied, he realises that he has no feeling for her. Her proffered kiss completes the revelation of his "cruel self-knowledge" and he leaves the house like a thief.<sup>51</sup>

Once at sea the mountains of the island no longer appear as a "blue, pinnacled"<sup>52</sup> apparition but a harsher reality: "the black mass of the mountain on the south side of the harbour".<sup>53</sup> Fortune brings a further twist to the narrator's self-knowledge when the potatoes, bought from Alfred to salve his own conscience, yield a good profit in the next port of call. He is offered a chance of adding to his good fortune when his owners suggest he returns to the island; nevertheless, from a mixture of pride and self-recrimination, he feels compelled to turn the offer down and resign from his command.<sup>54</sup>

Notwithstanding its subtle moral theme, "A Smile of Fortune" belongs to the same group as "Freya". Its character is created by its use of an archetypal pattern, a symbolic landscape and an evocative atmosphere. As Conrad recognised when he subtitled it a "Harbour story", it is not purely a sea story; nevertheless the sea and sailors are important: they create a satisfyingly rounded framework: the

49. TLS, p. 63.

50. TLS, p. 69. Cf. Milton's Garden of Eden in Paradise Lost.

51. TLS, p. 79.

52. TLS, p. 3.

53. TLS, p. 80.

54. TLS, p. 87.

arrival and departure from an island which holds a lesson for one of the voyagers. The early appearance of the island prepares the reader for what is to come, and its changing aspect comments upon the protagonist's actions.

## IV

The days are sick and cold, and the skies are grey and old,  
And the twice-breathed airs blow damp;  
And I'd sell my tired soul for the bucking beam-sea roll  
Of a black Bilbao tramp,  
With her load-line over her hatch, dear lass,  
And a drunken Dago crew,  
And her nose held down on the old trail, our own trail, the out trail  
From Cadiz south on the Long Trail - the trail that is always new. 55

'It is the song of the Gambucinos. You don't know? The  
song of restless men. Nothing could hold them in one  
place - not even a woman. 56

The majority of Conrad's sea stories celebrate the sailor who is not a wanderer; the sailor who is essentially a worker and sees little beyond the ship. His fiction frequently emphasises the institutional nature of the officer's life: the rigid hierarchy; the examinations and essential certificates; and the ever-present shore officials and their talk of pensions and promotions. Even an outlandish incident like the Patna affair is investigated within the framework of mundane legal proceedings. On the other hand much of Kipling's poetry hymns the antithesis of this type - the wanderer, the drifter, the "tramp-royal" - who travels in order to see the world. Conrad's story "Tomorrow" also celebrates the wanderer but, like Kipling's poem "The Harp Song of Dane the Women", it balances the glamour of the wandering life against the sorrow of the women who must stay at home. 57

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55. Rudyard Kipling, "The Long Trail", Rudyard Kipling's Verse : Inclusive Edition, 1885-1932, 4th Edition, London (1933), pp. 165-166 (referred to below as: Kipling, Inclusive Edition).

56. T, p. 270.

57. Kipling, Inclusive Edition, p. 515. Conrad wrote of "Tomorrow" in his "Preface to the Shorter Tales": "[The story] renders the effect of the fascination of a roving life, has the hard lot of a woman for its principal interest" LE, p. 145. He denied that it was a "potboiler". (Baines, Conrad, p. 269).

The narrative concerns a retired coasting skipper, Hagberd, who is searching for his son, Harry, presumably lost at sea. Hagberd later receives a letter<sup>58</sup> which suggests his son is at Colebrook, a small coastal town. He moves there; buys a pair of cottages and settles down because, as he so simply reasons, his son must have fancied the place. Next door to Hagberd lives a retired boat-builder, Carvil, and his daughter, Bessie. Hagberd strikes up a friendship with Bessie and confides in her that he expects his son to return - at first within a year, then months, and finally "tomorrow". Initially Bessie is a little disturbed at what she regards as a fond illusion but when she attempts to enlighten the old man he is horrified by the thought - "as though he had seen a crack open out in the firmament".<sup>59</sup> Eventually she becomes caught up in his hopes: "'It was easier to half believe it myself'".<sup>60</sup> Ironically Harry does return but his father refuses to believe that he is genuine; his son's attitude is equally uncompromising and he makes no secret of his dislike for his father, who seems to have been a petty domestic tyrant.<sup>61</sup> Harry despises the limited, sedentary life of the town, and wants nothing of his father's plans for his marriage to Bessie, and life in the houses which he describes as "rabbit hutches".<sup>62</sup> At the end of the story he leaves Bessie tragically aware of her claustrophobic and servile existence but he makes it quite plain that he has no intention of either loving or helping her.

"To-morrow" operates as a contrast between the restless activity and energy of youth and the staid, limited world of the old. Harry's

58. T, p. 245.

59. T, p. 251.

60. T, p. 263.

61. T, p. 269.

62. T, p. 261.



love of travel and excitement is contrasted to the mundane personalities of his father, Bessie, and Carvil. Both the fathers are wilful and materialistic. Carvil, for example, is extremely domineering and bad tempered: he was always shouting that "he had made enough money to have ham and eggs for his breakfast every morning . . . ." <sup>63</sup> Hagberd wishes to dominate his son by providing all the material possessions needed for a "rabbit-hutch" existence. Harry remains unimpressed but will do nothing for Bessie: "'You can't buy me in . . . and you can't buy yourself out.'" <sup>64</sup>

Each male character is related to the sea and ships. Carvil, as a boat-builder, is appropriately blind, as though he sees nothing of the sea but the profit he has made from boatbuilding. Harry, the wanderer, finds his father's career as a coasting sailor ridiculous: "a standing charter from the gas-works". <sup>65</sup> Hagberd had in fact disliked the sea with "a profound and emotional animosity": <sup>66</sup>

One might have thought him weary of distant voyages; and the longest he had ever made had lasted a fortnight, of which the most part had been spent at anchor, sheltering from the weather . . . . "I have never been further than <sup>67</sup> eighty fathoms from <sup>the</sup> land," was one of his boasts.

His coasting career is representative of his limited nature and narrow horizons; similarly, his ridiculous Canvas, No. 1 suit (he had made it himself) <sup>68</sup> captures his desire for protection and security.

Conrad's visual effects reinforce his meaning and the Colebrook environment - a town where travel has been forgotten - is seen as a

63. T, p. 253.

64. T, p. 275.

65. T, p. 265.

66. T, p. 249.

67. T, pp. 249-250.

68. T, p. 244.

threatening trap:

[Carvil] weighed heavily on her arm. During their slow toilful walks she appeared to be dragging with her for a penance the burden of that infirm bulk. Usually they crossed the road at once . . . and for a long, long time they would remain in view, ascending imperceptibly the flight of wooden steps that led to the top of the sea-wall. It ran<sup>o</sup> from east to west, shutting out the channel like a neglected railway embankment, on which no train had ever rolled . . . . Groups of sturdy fishermen would emerge upon the sky, walk along for a bit, and sink without haste. Their brown nets, like the cobwebs of gigantic spiders . . . . 69

It is a vivid scene integrated into the heart of the story's meaning by its underlining of the idea of a sterile, threatening land existence - the railway bank simile and the threatening nets of the fishermen - and the limitless horizons his son envisages.

Despite the presence of starkly delineated themes there is essentially only one really simple character in the story, Carvil, the boat-builder. The other characters are cleverly drawn so that the reader becomes aware of the way in which their lives have been determined by their upbringing. Hagberd's limitations so obviously stem from his forced service in a profession he detested. He had been apprenticed as a sailor after his father had been bankrupted, and retired as soon as he could afford to.<sup>70</sup> He engages our sympathy because of his vulnerability - he is ridiculed by the townspeople - and because of the drab landscape he inhabits. On the other hand, Harry, who asks for nothing except his freedom, appears as selfish and heartless - one critic refers to him as a "rascal and a womaniser".<sup>71</sup> The story,

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69. T, p. 254. The description has something of the atmosphere of Stephen Reynolds's work which Conrad praised in a letter of 1908 (Aubrey, Life and Letters, ii, 84-85). For Reynolds's work see above pp. 168-171.

Reynolds was a friend of the Conrads (see Jessie Conrad, Joseph Conrad and His Circle, London (1935), p. 192).

70. T, p. 249.

71. Baines, Conrad, p. 269.

therefore, questions the tendency for the wanderer to be idealised in poetry and fiction, and focusses attention on the ambivalent nature of a freedom which, enjoyable enough, is essentially selfish. Harry needs a little money and so he returns to his father, but he is not willing to sacrifice his freedom for the complete home - including a wife - that has been planned for him.<sup>72</sup> It is little wonder that he kisses the girl and leaves: the wanderer's life, despite the fond illusions of "The Long Trail", has no room for a woman and, short of imprisoning himself, he can do nothing for Bessie. Nevertheless, in kissing Bessie, he reveals the egocentricity of his wandering existence; he takes what he can, abjures responsibility for his actions, and has little pity for others less fortunate than himself.

# V

The two final sections concentrate not so much on a particular story, although "Falk" figures largely in the argument, but on Conrad's use of the voyage as metaphor. Although a number of Conrad's sea tales do contain narratives based upon the events of a voyage, it is true that he does not make as much of its metaphorical and symbolic potential as his fellow sea-story writers Melville, Cooper, and Stevenson.

It is often the case that the mark of the sea-adventure story, with substantial romance elements, is an attempt to extract as much symbolic significance from the broad facts of a voyage as is commensurate with an exciting narrative. The Wrecker, it may be remembered,<sup>73</sup> saw the voyages of Dodd and Carthew in the terms of a social significance.

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72. In contrast to the sailors in the short stories of W.W. Jacobs (see above p. 7, n. 20). Jacobs's sailors are always on the look-out for a secure home (preferably a public-house) owned by a rich widow. See e.g., "A Marked Man", in Light Freights (1901). Nevertheless "Tomorrow's" small-port atmosphere, local tradesmen, and caricature old men has some affinities with Jacobs's work.

73. See above pp. 76-96.



Dodd's wrecking activities on Midway represent an investigation into man's destructive nature. In Melville's Moby Dick the significance of the voyage grows from the idea of a quest: Ahab is driven on by a desire to catch the white whale; the reader is drawn into a fresh consideration of man's desires. In Conrad's sea fiction these aspects are challenged and, in a number of cases, superseded by his desire to render the realistic aspects of life at sea; consequently the large-scale symbolism of the voyage gives way to an emphasis on particular nautical incidents which relieve the narrative of its rounded and complete shape and suggest instead the relentless and continuing struggle of man to confront himself in the terms of the maritime society in which he works. The large-scale symbolism - the ship as society, the voyage as spiritual progression - make way for the small-scale imagery of incident and speech which, as I have shown, finds a ready and suggestive environment in the close and detailed descriptions of nautical practice and the shipboard setting.

In fact the voyage in Conrad is rarely a quest and his suggestion in The Mirror of the Sea, that a "deliberate quest for adventure"<sup>74</sup> is a futile exercise holds firm, and we are continually reminded that adventure or knowledge comes to the protagonist unawares; his sea stories are essentially revelatory. The narrative structure of his fiction, in which an older man looks back on his own conduct or, alternatively, on the conduct of another, reinforces this characteristic; it is the contemplative aspect of Marlow or the protagonist which often evokes the significance of an incident. Furthermore, because the protagonist is, more often than not, a career-seaman engaged in his daily chores, he is not seen to be an aggressive seeker for the truth. His responses are not governed by a searching faith but determined

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74. MOS, p. 155.

along traditional and well-established lines and laid down by the dictates of manliness and the profession he serves. Captain MacWhirr in "Typhoon" illustrates the pattern: although a master of many years standing, he still has to experience the power of the sea: "But he had never been given a glimpse of immeasurable strength and of immoderate wrath . . . the wrath and fury of the passionate sea".<sup>75</sup> The experience is not sought and, when encountered, it is endured.

Of course there are those among Conrad's sea narratives which display evidence of large-scale symbolism and, in The Nigger, for example, he appears to be making an effort to introduce symbolic associations into the portrayal of the ship and the crew. A representative passage sees the Narcissus as a self-contained world, a smaller image of a larger reality:

Our little world went on its curved and unswerving path carrying a discontented and aspiring population.<sup>76</sup>

The world has its own universe:

A great circular solitude moved with her, ever changing and ever the same, always monotonous and always imposing . . . . The sun looked upon her all day, and every morning rose with a burning, round stare of undying curiosity. 77

The effect of this imagery is to reinforce large-scale generalisations about man's loneliness and the impassivity of the natural world in the face of human activity: the "mirror of the sea". In the face of such imagery The Nigger, despite the high incidence of nautical detail, often resembles a fable extolling the virtues of collective effort and the sublimation of personal fears and desires.

75. T, pp. 18-19.

76. NN, p. 103.

77. NN, p. 29. This description recalls a passage in one of Conrad's letters to Marguerite Poradowska (17 May 1893), Gee and Sturm, Letters, p. 52, couched in particularly metaphorical language: ". . . and think of you who live in the midst of spiritual unrest where the storms that rage spring from the surge of ideas . . . ."

The social organisation of the vessel's life is celebrated in the imagery: the master is the "ruler of that minute world"<sup>78</sup> and the ship's bells, which are the sailor's clock and the regulator of his life, become symbols of the manner in which man has organised himself against the hostile environment:

A bell was struck aft, another, forward, answered in a deeper tone, and the clamour of ringing metal spread round the ship in a circle of wide vibrations that ebbed away into the immeasurable night of an empty sea. 79

The situation is made even more suggestive when the two crew members, Wait and Donkin, are drawn in terms related to the ship as a microcosm of the world. Wait, who arrives on board with a "metallic"<sup>80</sup> cough and a dislike of music,<sup>81</sup> threatens the harmonious life of the vessel by his ignominious attitude to death. Donkin, an exponent of reforming and egalitarian ideas, ferments a riot on board in which the helmsman leaves his post and the ship loses direction and way - a potent symbol of the bankruptcy of Donkin's ideas.<sup>82</sup> The next, and seemingly logical step, is to equate the ship and the events which occur on her voyage more closely with society: is the master's authority an objective lesson in political science and the men's obedience a lesson in social behaviour?<sup>83</sup>

Such an interpretation is more compelling than correct. W.H.Auden has suggested a number of reasons why the ship as a unit is suitable for

78. NN, p. 31.

79. NN, p. 126. See also NN, p. 30.

80. NN, p. 27.

81. NN, p. 36.

82. NN, p. 124.

83. The question as it relates to Conrad's ideas has already been discussed above p. 299. The following paragraphs concentrate upon the question of large-scale symbolism in The Nigger.



symbolic use. First, he shows how the ship is an ideal symbol of mankind and human society;<sup>84</sup> secondly, he reminds us that the ship, like land communities, has a variety of "citizens" pursuing numerous vocations - carpenter, blacksmith, steward, labourers, and "managers" - each accorded a particular status.<sup>85</sup> If we pursue this connection within Conrad's work there are ships' companies, in addition to the Narcissus, which offer scope for an interpretation of this nature. The Patna, scene of Jim's desertion in Lord Jim, not only has the normal variety of skilled seamen fulfilling various roles but also a substantial number of passengers (the pilgrims) - men, women, and children - similar in their helplessness to the larger proportion of most societies. The coolies, battened down in the hold of the Nan-Shan during the typhoon, furnish an almost exact parallel; indeed, MacWhirr, the master, even assumes the civic role of judge at the end of the voyage when he decides what proportion of the collected possessions, scattered in the typhoon, should go to each Chinaman.<sup>86</sup>

Nevertheless, Conrad cannot be said to be exploiting the nuances and connections so obviously at his reach; he makes no distinctions among the men, officers, and passengers other than those normally present on board ship at that time. Furthermore he makes no play with the functions and duties of the crew; his carpenters, sailmakers, and officers express few opinions beyond the confines of shiptalk. The one exception is Donkin in The Nigger and his ideas do in any case focus almost entirely on the purely maritime aspects of reform.<sup>87</sup> What is true is merely that the problems men face on board ship and the manner

84. Auden, Enchafed Flood, pp. 61-63.

85. Auden, Enchafed Flood, pp. 62-63.

86. T, pp. 100-102.

87. See above p. 293.

in which they are solved are vividly representative of human problems everywhere, indeed Conrad wrote that the problem facing the men of the Narcissus was,

merely a problem that has risen on board<sup>a</sup> ship where the conditions of complete isolation from all land entanglements make it stand out with<sup>a</sup> particular force and colouring. 88

The reasons for this particular force are not hard to find and we should be incorrect in asserting that it is altogether unrelated to large-scale symbolism. In every story there is an appropriate emphasis. Each man's personal development, for example, is accompanied by a physical progress through space and time. Alternatively Wait's untimely influence on the crew and therefore on the social harmony of the Narcissus is superbly illustrated by the headwinds which delay the ship. Symbolism of this sort is often present in Conrad's sea fiction and it may take a number of forms drawn from the events surrounding a voyage or a ship at sea. Natural phenomena, such as the storms in The Nigger and "Typhoon", are frequently representative of the hostile universe in which man lives.<sup>89</sup> The calms of the Gulf of Siam in The Shadow Line parallel feelings of detachment and loss of motivation in the narrator.

## VI

"Falk" has already featured prominently in the preceding chapters and this in itself is a testimony to its central importance in Conrad's fiction.<sup>90</sup> It is a highly realistic narrative which draws on his close personal acquaintance with the life and working atmosphere of a large port. Chapter Three above dealt with the story's examination of the

88. Aubry, Life and Letters, ii, 342.

89. See e.g., NN, p. 54: "Nothing seems left of the whole universe . . . ."

90. of "Falk" and "Amy Foster", Conrad wrote: "Later on [people] will understand me better and recognise the [ir] . . . artistic finish - two of the most highly finished of my stories." (Aubry, Life and Letters, ii, 150).

differing moral codes of the hero and the adventurer,<sup>91</sup> the latter a key character type of the romance-adventurer narrative. Nevertheless the story's success does not lie solely in these areas.

"Falk" illustrates one traditional use of the voyage as symbol: for Falk himself the Borgmester Dahl's journey south is a personal revelation; and, for the narrator and his listeners, Falk's story becomes a "journey" into the primitive heart of man and society. The narrator, who relates the events to a group of seamen in a Thames river hostelry, remembers being stranded in an Eastern port where he could only get his ship to sea by means of a harbour tug commanded by Falk, a Norwegian sailor. Unfortunately Falk believed that the Englishman was a rival for the love of the niece of the German ship owner and master, Hermann, of the Diana of Bremen. Falk consequently refuses to convey the narrator's ship to sea and, in what has been seen as a symbolic rope,<sup>92</sup> tows instead the protesting and completely unprepared Diana to sea.<sup>93</sup> The Englishman is forced to negotiate and, finally, he has to explain to Hermann that Falk wishes to marry his niece but feels bound to admit that he has "eaten man".<sup>94</sup>

The narrative , set on the Thames, prepares the reader for a story that deals with man's primitive self. Tony Tanner has effectively summarised the significance of the setting:

Conrad uses the setting to relate the narrative moment to the notional beginning and end of man. Everything about it seems to portend some terminal dissolution, since the emphasis is on decay, deterioration, decline . . . . The waiter and the building alike are "tottering" with age.

91. See above pp. 310-313.

92. Tony Tanner, "'Gnawed Bones' and 'Artless tales' - Eating and Narrative in Conrad", Joseph Conrad. A Commemoration, ed., Norman Sherry, London (1976), p. 19 (referred to below as: Tanner, "Eating and Narrative in Conrad").

93. T, pp. 170-171.

94. T, p. 218.



Poised precariously on the mud of the river shore, the dining-room seems on the verge of returning to the primordial slime . . . . On the other hand prehistoric and antediluvian times are brought to mind leading to the idea "primeval man" just beginning to cook and to narrate . . . . 95

As Tanner indicates, the tale conflates "the prehistoric and the present".<sup>96</sup>

Falk's case demonstrates how a talented, conscientious, sociable man can be brought to the most primitive of acts - cannibalism - by an overwhelming desire for personal survival; the narrator's story contrasts Falk, in his "fallen" state, to the civilisation which instinctively dismisses him as an animal.<sup>97</sup>

The Borgmester Dahl's voyage thus possesses symbolic connotations; we are presented with a self-confessed cannibal and the consequent horror of a civilised family man who lives on board a ship under an illusion of stability and security which he maintains in defiance of the real nature of life at sea:

This Diana of Bremen was a most innocent old ship, and seemed to know nothing of the wicked sea, as there are on shore households that know nothing of the corrupt world. And the sentiments she suggested were unexceptional and mainly of a domestic order. 98

The key clause begins, "as there are on shore . . .", and it prepares the reader for the symbolic aspects of Falk's narrative. His voyage consequently becomes a journey of discovery with implications stretching far beyond his own, purely personal, problem. In such a context the actual events surrounding the journey are seen to have a particular significance. The Borgmester Dahl's mechanical breakdown,<sup>99</sup> for example, suggests the

95. Tanner, "Eating and Narrative in Conrad", pp. 24-25.

96. Tanner, "Eating and Narrative in Conrad", p. 25.

97. See Hermann's comments, T, p. 97.

98. T, p. 149.

99. T, p. 227.

breakdown of the industrial, civilised, and commercially thriving society of which Hermann is a member, and the fact that the voyage was well-planned, undertaken in a new ship, and the vessel crewed with hand-picked men a salutary warning. Other incidents postulate man's basic selfishness and the strength of the drive for self preservation. At one point, when the ship is drifting with her tailshaft broken, a British ship attempts a rescue; nevertheless a brave action ends when she has to look to her own safety.<sup>100</sup> The incident reminds us that the self-sacrifice demanded by communal values is a fragile presence; in the old sea phrase, there comes a time when it is "every man for himself". The ultimate representation of man's egoistic drives occurs when the carpenter and Falk fight for supremacy.<sup>101</sup> It is an incident which produces ironic associations: the carpenter parodies Jesus of Nazareth, in this case demanding rather than dispensing flesh and blood.

The Borgmester Dahl narrative contains only part of the story's message. Equally important are the issues raised by the negotiations which follow Falk's refusal to tow the narrator's ship out to sea. The narrator's difficulties, followed by his success, suggest that man must come to some sort of understanding regarding the nature of his drives and energies. Tanner has comprehensively investigated the broader aspects of this question;<sup>102</sup> what the following paragraphs do is to relate "Falk" more directly to The Wrecker.

In The Wrecker, it will be remembered, Stevenson had shown how man's primitive and violent energies had found expression in the "dollar hunt", a term loosely suggestive of capitalism. The novel is indeed an indictment of a materialistic culture.<sup>103</sup> Hermann of "Falk" is no

100. T, p. 229.

101. T, pp. 233-234.

102. Tanner, "Eating and Narrative in Conrad's Fiction", pp. 17-36.

103. See above pp. 81-86.

capitalist, he is the much less romantic bourgeois, but he belongs to the same world of which he is a reasonably affluent, stable, and self-confident member. He too has a less pleasant side which is revealed in his relationship with his niece whom Falk wants to marry. As Tanner indicates,<sup>104</sup> Hermann is an exploiter of cheap labour and, when Falk first proposes marriage, his hurried refusal is related more to her usefulness in looking after his children than any moral consideration. He eventually releases her when he realises he can save money - he will not have to pay for her passage home when the Diana is sold.<sup>105</sup>

It is Hermann's condemnation of Falk that most ruthlessly exposes the true nature of the German's character. At first Hermann is astounded and disgusted at the very idea of cannibalism but the narrator is convinced that, "Hermann", too, would do his best to survive";<sup>106</sup> the remark captures the essential egocentricity of his nature. Hermann is unable to make an objective assessment of Falk's story and can only come to a decision on his proposal based upon the amount of advantage he can obtain.

In comparison Falk has only cruelly-sincere opinions wrung out of him by experience. He is a testimony to the strength of the personal desire - "the mighty truth of an unerring and eternal principle"<sup>107</sup> - which manifested itself in the will to live and, once he has seen Hermann's niece, to marry the woman of his choice. He makes no excuse for his conduct - neither his cannibalism nor his uncompromising attitude to the narrator - and accepts no blame; for him, although he suffers from the memory of his cannibalism, his desires existed and therefore

104. Tanner, "Eating and Narrative in Conrad's Fiction", p. 21.

105. T, p. 238.

106. T, p. 236.

107. T, p. 235.



had to be satisfied. In this respect Falk is reminiscent of the Stevensonian adventurer who pursues his largely material desires with directness, energy, and complete unselfconsciousness. There is a parallel, too, between the characters of Stevenson's and Conrad's narrators who admire this impetus and directness - Conrad's master-narrator bemoans Hermann's indecision and hysterics.<sup>108</sup> Falk's energy, like Pinkerton's, is carried over into the commercial field. His tug boat is perpetually active and he is a good businessman:

I daresay there are *yet* a few shipmasters afloat who remember Falk and his tug very well. He extracted his pound and a half of flesh from each of us merchant-skipppers with an inflexible sort of indifference which made him detested and even feared. 109

His commercial strength is built on the characteristics of the local river which mean that certain vessels have to be loaded outside the river mouth in order that they might cross a shallow sand-bar, after negotiating a difficult channel to open sea. Falk's is the only tug and this gives him a monopoly of services. This ability to wield a monopoly had also enabled him to defeat the Borgmester Dahl's crew: he was a "born monopolist"<sup>110</sup> (he had thrown the only revolver, apart from his own, overboard and, as we have seen,<sup>111</sup> defeated the carpenter by commanding the approaches to the freshwater pump).

It is Falk's business-acumen and his self-confidence which make him a close relative of Pinkerton, Carthew, and their business associates in The Wrecker. Like them Falk is not directly culpable: the narrator makes plain that he is at the mercy of forces greater than his "better" self. In addition, the narrator's view of Hermann also recalls the

108. T, p. 223.

109. T, p. 161.

110. T, p. 234.

111. See above pp. 349-350.

picture of capitalism rendered in Stevenson's novel: Hermann regards himself as civilised and cultured, in a similar fashion Pinkerton had an exaggerated reverence for culture and a belief that his financial and business operations were essential to Western civilisation. What is significant, in the present context, is that both narratives make their points through like methods: dramatised narrative comment; contrast produced by the presence of two narrative situations (Falk's voyage and the Eastern port, the Currency Lass's voyage and Dodd's investigation); and symbolism.

"Falk" also belongs to something of an apocalyptic strain in the sea story, a type represented by Kipling's "A Matter of Fact".<sup>112</sup> To describe these tales as apocalyptic might seem over-dramatic and yet that is exactly what they are: the smugness of Kipling's journalist-narrator over the magnificence of London serves only to emphasise the dire warnings for mankind revealed by the fate of the sea creatures; the breakdown of the modern steamship, Borgmester Dahl, is a warning that modern society too is vulnerable to the destructive forces unleashed on Falk and his companions. If it is the romance elements that provide the means by which these large-scale generalisations are made then it is often through meticulous realism that they are sustained: "Falk", Lord Jim, The Wrecker, and, to a lesser extent, "A Matter of Fact" present the reader with a combination of the entertaining, the particular, and the general.

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112. See above pp. 124-128.

## CONCLUSION



## CONCLUSION

The Introduction to this dissertation emphasises the challenge that the sea story presents the author who wishes to write serious and enduring sea fiction and it is important not to underestimate the impulse in sea narratives towards the ephemeral and the insubstantial. This last tendency is evident even in the writings of the three authors with whom the thesis has been concerned: Stevenson's early critical work stresses the purely sensuous elements of adventure fiction;<sup>1</sup> Conrad wrote of stories "in which I've tried my best to be simply entertaining";<sup>2</sup> and Kipling published narratives which were little more than ephemera - "The Ship that Found Herself", "An Unqualified Pilot", and "The Burning of the Sarah Sands".

The reasons for these "aberrations" are not hard to find - financial pressures in Conrad's case, Stevenson's youthful enthusiasm, Kipling's love of boys' stories - but the most significant is probably the fact that the sea story by its very nature can attract a wider reading public than most fiction simply because its subject matter is inherently exciting; consequently a writer has the temptation to ignore his artistic conscience and produce a pot-boiler. Furthermore a seaman-author is faced with

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1. See above p. 46.

2. See above p. 373 n. 22.

another temptation: he can command an audience simply by capitalising on his own nautical expertise and the avidity of many readers for maritime detail.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, if W. Clark Russell had had his way<sup>4</sup> sea fiction would be inaccessible and unattractive to the majority of readers and function as little more than autobiography and documentary. Stevenson and Conrad rarely misuse their expertise though Kipling's sea fiction frequently moves uneasily between what Stevenson called "smart journalism"<sup>5</sup> and artistic brilliance.

The preceding pages have revealed enough to demonstrate that for some thirty-six years, between 1881 and 1917, Conrad, Kipling, and Stevenson made nautical fiction a central medium for the expression of their ideas. What is less heartening is that in English literature today this tradition has not been continued, indeed, the adventure story itself is at a low ebb - excepting of course in the work of Graham Greene whose fiction, as he himself admits, bears a resemblance to Conrad's.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless the lack of serious sea fiction is not confined to contemporary literature, and before 1881 there was a similar dearth. This in itself is surprising, considering Britain's status as a maritime nation - a land where sea and life "interpenetrate" as Conrad put it.<sup>7</sup> The reason probably lies in the lack of nautically experienced authors and the general slowness of English writers of fiction to become involved in the world of work.

Much has already been said of the methods by which the three writers made their sea fiction serious: broken time-schemes, dramatised-narrators,

3. Hence the popularity of the late C.S. Forester's Hornblower novels.

4. See above pp. 15-16.

5. Quoted in Charles Carrington, Rudyard Kipling : His Life and Work, London (1955) p. 338.

6. Graham Greene, A Sort of Life, Harmondsworth (1974), p. 151.

7. Youth, p. 3.

metaphor, and symbolism. What cannot be so closely investigated is the extent to which they learnt from one another; we know that Kipling read Stevenson's work - and in particular The Wrecker<sup>8</sup> - and that Conrad read Stevenson's and Kipling's fiction, but there is little evidence of their response - little enough for it to cause a certain amount of suspicion: is Conrad's silence on Stevenson's sea fiction a sign that he felt that his own "method" - of which he was so proud<sup>9</sup> - was uncomfortably paralleled in his contemporary's work; or Kipling's silence on Conrad the reaction of a man who felt overshadowed by a writer with a greater fund of actual experience - indeed did Kipling withdraw from the maritime field for this very reason? These questions are difficult, almost impossible, to answer; but Conrad's and Kipling's silence on Stevenson's nautical fiction in general, and his use of the romance techniques they were to employ so successfully in particular, has had an important effect in retarding the rehabilitation of Stevenson's reputation. Furthermore, the silence of all three authors on the specific subject of their common interest in sea narratives makes it impossible to speak of a conscious movement in the area of maritime fiction.

Although Kipling and Stevenson were popular authors in their day, Conrad, as we have seen, was not - even though he was working in a potentially popular form. All three authors, however, shared an awareness of what made a "rattling good yarn" and we may even make a distinction between complex narrative structures - The Wrecker and the sea-half of Lord Jim - and more direct narratives - The Ebb Tide and "The Secret Sharer" - which lack nothing in seriousness but share many of the characteristics of the popular sea tale; indeed their plots are developed with greater facility, and Conrad's tales written in this vein are frequently

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8. Something of Myself, p. 124.

9. See above p. 3.



masterpieces of narrative economy and dramatic immediacy. To recognise this simple division is also to be aware of the important part that romance elements play in each writer's work: the complex narratives use romance techniques; the direct narratives employ romance subject-matter - colourful incident and high adventure - as well as the more subtle techniques of metaphor and symbolism.

For W. Clark Russell seriousness in sea fiction meant nautical realism but, given Kipling's lapses, our three writers were mostly too aware of their responsibilities as imaginative artists to leave other aspects undeveloped. I have tried to demonstrate that whilst acknowledging a duty to be realistic, they used nautical material primarily to underpin the more serious elements in their narratives. It is true therefore that, though nautical realism is more generally associated with content rather than method, the best sea stories handle subject matter in such a way that it contributes to their impact. Kipling's knowledge of maritime law and shipping-line procedures in "Bread Upon the Waters" sustains his investigation into human relationships by providing a background and a world which convinces the reader of the accuracy of the story's observations. This is a process common to much realistic fiction but it is of particular importance in narratives depicting a working world. So much sea fiction - past and present - has stretched fact into fantasy that it seems that a writer who wishes to examine "normal" human relationships and emotions in a maritime situation must prove the "actuality" of his fictional world.

The drive towards the increasing use of realistic subject-matter in the sea story is paralleled by the masterly fashion in which Conrad, Stevenson, and Kipling allow their realistic concerns to dominate the structure of their tales. The early chapters of Lord Jim furnish a dramatic example: the Court of Inquiry's deliberations, upon which Marlow's thoughts are superimposed, become for a while the novel itself.

Indeed Lord Jim, and other stories such as "Falk" and "Youth", capitalise on that most typical of sailor-occupations - yarn-spinning in a bar, club, or riverside tavern. Stevenson, whose sea fiction can now be accepted as nautically realistic, allows his characters' voyages to dominate the shape of his last two sea-novels, narratives in which meaning is conveyed through metaphors and symbols which grow out of the movements of ships and additional nautical detail.

The development of the three writers' sailor-characterisation also demonstrates the appeal of realism: first, they introduce fully-realised characters into sea fiction; and, secondly, their sailors are not distinguished as such by their dress or their language but because they are depicted in close relationship with a working environment which is both convincing and accessible to the majority of readers. This is not to imply that stereotypical elements disappear from their characterisation, indeed in characters like Allistoun (The Nigger), Wardrop ("The Devil and the Deep Sea"), and Nares (The Wrecker) a balance is struck between the psychologically realistic and the author's desire to emphasise sailor qualities: resourcefulness, vigilance, bravery, skill, and "nerve". This last group of characters is also significant in the terms of the history of sailor-characterisation. The new man-of-action stereotype supplants the old "jolly tar", "Plain Dealer", and buccaneer stereotypes which survive today only in the pantomime and children's literature.

The argument, therefore, that the sea fiction of Conrad, Kipling and Stevenson written between 1881 and 1917 is serious and enduring, is amply justified. Furthermore, the themes of the narratives are various enough to underline the strength-in-depth of the three men's achievement. In many ways the stories displaying marked romance characteristics have a greater width of relevance to civilisation and society seen as a whole. Stevenson, as we have seen, condemns the evils of materialism in The Wrecker, and Kipling warns the West of the dangers of complacency in

"A Matter of Fact". In addition this type of narrative deals with the dramatic aspects of human psychology: obsession ("A Smile of Fortune"); paranoia ("The Merry Men"); and mental breakdown ("The Disturber of Traffic"). On the other hand the more realistic stories of Conrad and Kipling are very much concerned with the psychology of work. All three authors have an interest in the nature of bravery, and Conrad and Stevenson are aware of the inconsistencies in the concept of manliness. Each writer evinces a deep concern with the moral aspects of human conduct; in this respect Conrad and Kipling are frequently preoccupied with dramatising the conflicts between group (or institutional) loyalties, and individual desires and weaknesses.

These common interests should serve to emphasise the close relationship between the maritime fiction of these three writers. The similarities in their work doubtless owe much to the fact that as marine authors they faced common problems and applied their imaginations to like material; nevertheless the themes they chose to pursue, the ideas they expressed, and the form their work assumed are sufficiently close to warrant further investigation in areas other than the sea story. It is surprising therefore that their names are not often linked in scholarly studies, and more surprising that, considering the high reputation of his two contemporaries, Stevenson should be so neglected.



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