



Chapter I

Conrad and Imperialism

Colonial fiction stood out as a trend in British literature during the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries when people began to pay more heed to racial, cultural, and national conflicts than to the class conflicts which flourished in the Victorian Age. The imperial experience enchanted numerous British writers such as Rudyard Kipling, Joseph Conrad, E. M. Forster, George Orwell, Joyce Cary, and Graham Greene. All these figures brought the colonial world into the core of British literature. Rudyard Kipling and Joseph Conrad, both of whom were exposed to the "trauma of conquest" during imperialist expansion, wrote zealously about the power of imperialism during its zenith; however, they treated the theme differently. Kipling often introduced his readers to the realm of British soldiers with a sense of imperialist "jingoism"--the enjoyment of national expansion. Conrad, on the other hand, introduced the readers to the world of merchant seamen. In his works, the readers perceive a hatred for self-congratulatory jingoism.

For convenience, the development of imperialism can be divided into three phases according to specific

periods of time and the reasons for establishing the empires. The first phase is the Ancient Empire which covers the period from Ancient Egypt to the late fifteenth century; the second phase is Modern Imperialism which can be further divided into two subphases: Old Imperialism (from the Age of Discovery to the late eighteenth century) and New Imperialism (from the late eighteenth century to the end of World War II.) The third phase is Neo-Colonialism, starting after World War II and continuing to the present. Because Conrad lived during the age of new imperialism, this thesis will focus only on imperialism in the nineteenth century for which the motives fall into three categories: economic, political, and religio-cultural.

The economic motivation was actually the most important force that propelled several powerful countries to search for colonies. The search for colonies accelerated after industrialization occurred, which increased the imbalance between the supply of and demand for machine-made products. Moreover, the advance of industrialization stimulated the demand for raw materials. Hence, spices, sugar and slaves decreased in importance from then on. Colonies would serve as markets for surplus industrial goods as well as for sources of cheap labor, essential raw materials and investment opportunities for surplus capital. All these factors expedited the imperialist competition among mighty nations.

The second motive for the growth of imperialism was the greed for political power. The greed for power, as René Maunier once said, was the wish "to dominate others for the sake of dominating."¹ Most powerful nations expressed their desire for glory and power in a notion that the more colonies one nation possessed, the mightier that nation became. Furthermore, a strong sense of nationalism spreading through European countries helped to form the belief that the greatness of a nation depended on the number of its colonies. Consequently, the thirst for power of the politicians, together with the sense of nationalism, helped encourage nations to scramble for new territories and compete to plant their nations' flags on foreign soil.

Imperialism was also inspired by religion as well as by a sense of cultural and racial supremacy. It was this motive to which Conrad paid most attention. The motive lay in the belief that "the imperial agent or

¹René Maunier, "The Imperial Race," in British Imperialism: Gold, God, Glory, ed. Robin W. Winks (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), p.68.

nation has an inherent right, based on moral superiority and material might, to impose its pre-eminent values and techniques on the inferior indigenous nation or society."² This motive derived from the idea of the purity of peoples and races, which itself stemmed from the assumption that the whites were the pure peoples--the supreme race in the world--who had been selected by God to bring the civilizing mission to the whole human race. Thus, the whites, as Benita Parry states in her book, Conrad and Imperialism, considered themselves "the savior of the benighted people" or "the Messiah" who had received the command of heaven to come down to help the uncivilized people.³ Such a notion was promoted as "the White Man's Burden" by Rudyard Kipling, whose poem spoke of the white man who had the burden of ruling over the non-whites. While Kipling celebrated this white man's burden, Conrad deflated it in his works.

Conrad's works also reveal that the disparity in technology widened the gap between the highly advanced countries and the backward countries, making the latter feel inferior to Europeans while affirming the arrogance

²George Nadel and Perry Curtis, Imperialism and Colonialism (London: The Macmillan Co., 1964), p. 15.

³Benita Parry, Conrad and Imperialism: Ideological Boundaries and Visionary Frontiers (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1983), p. 9.

of the former who regarded themselves as masters and demeaned other races. In Conrad's colonial fiction, most of his white characters--Almayer, Kurzs, Jim, Willems--violated the code of the white man's burden to "save" the natives by abandoning all their duties and falling prey to greed. All were obsessed with self-aggrandisement, which later brought them to their doom and which led to the brand of cynical imperialism that Conrad often denounced.

Since, like many other writers who wrote about imperialism, Conrad was born and grew up at the time when the imperial force was gathering strength, accounts of imperialism and of Conrad's life are inseparable. He saw imperialism exerting its pressures on the people around him as well as on himself, both in his home country and in other parts of the world. Therefore, imperialism inevitably shaped Conrad's life and works to a large extent.

Born under imperial domain in the Ukraine, Conrad was brought up under oppressive conditions. He witnessed the Poles' futile fight for independence from Russia. Among the Polish patriots, Apollo Korzeniowski, Conrad's father, was one of the leading Polish nationalists, who worked for national independence, land reform and the abolition of serfdom. He lost a great deal of property in such involvement. After the collapse of his family, he, together with his wife and his only son, moved to Warsaw. There, Apollo and his friends got involved in an esoteric

national committee⁴ whose aim was to regain independence from Russia. The committee supported many uprisings, and, in early 1863, it was suppressed and its members, including Apollo and his wife, were arrested. Apollo was sentenced to live in exile with his wife and son in a wretched remote part of Russia--Vologda.

During exile the family had to live miserably. The boy, Conrad, only four years old, nearly died of pneumonia on the way to Vologda. Eva Bobrowska, the mother, contracted tuberculosis and never recuperated. Her death in 1865, after much hardship and suffering, brought a deep sense of bereavement to father and son. Apollo degenerated into "mysticism touched with despair."⁵ The death of Eva disintegrated Apollo's health and spirit. He tried to spend the rest of his life ensuring Conrad's safe future. As his health became weaker, he and his son were allowed to go back to Poland on the assumption that the old man was not dangerous to the empire any longer. Apollo decided to live the last part of his life at Crascrow and there Conrad was sent to school. In "Poland

⁴This national committee was later named the Central National Committee.

⁵Joseph Conrad, Letter to Edward Garnett, 20 January 1900, quoted in Jocelyn Baines, Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography (New York: McGraw Hill Book Co. Inc., 1960), p. 24.

Revisited" Conrad brooded over his feeling about another misery which was coming to his family. This was the time of his father's last illness:

I don't know what would have become of me if I had not been a reading boy I read! What did I not read! Later in the evening, but not always, I would be permitted to tiptoe into the sick-room to say goodnight to the figure prone on the bed, which could not acknowledge my presence, but by a slow movement of the eyes, put my lips dutifully to the nerveless hand lying on the coverlet, and tiptoe out again. Then I would go to bed, in a room at the end of the corridor and often, not always, cry myself into a good sleep.⁶

Conrad's bitter recollections reveal how dismal his childhood was. At too young an age, he was forced to confront the calamities of his country as well as the suffering of his family. This bitterness and anguish later molded Conrad into a melancholy adult. After Apollo died, Conrad's maternal uncle, Tadeusz Bobrowski, took him in and looked after him until Conrad went to sea. This uncle influenced the young Conrad mostly in Conrad's later years.

⁶Conrad, "Poland Revisited," in Notes on Life and Letters (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd, 1967), p. 168.

In fact, as a result of this influence, there existed in Conrad two personalities. One was his absorption of his father's personality in the early years; the other was that which he took from his uncle, Tadeusz. As to the former, Conrad inherited an idealistic and imaginative temperament, but from the latter he received a pragmatic and sensible temperament. Under the guardianship of Tadeusz, Conrad was made to question his father's idealism. Tadeusz convinced his nephew that Apollo's devotion to Poland was attributable to a dream of heroic glory without much concern for family, and Tadeusz emphasized that Apollo's devotion was egotistical rather than selfless. It appeared to him that Apollo had been responsible for his family's misfortune because he had not only sacrificed himself but also his family on behalf of that glorious dream. Tadeusz's sceptical account of Apollo and his heroic deeds brought about internal conflicts in Conrad. The conflicts often caused battles, between reality and imagination, in Conrad's mind. This self-conflict, along with his father's failure in the conspiracy against Russian occupation augmented Conrad's despair. The desperation of Poland, as well as of Conrad himself, was an impetus which drove him to leave his homeland.

That Conrad left Poland did not mean that he entirely turned his back on the imperialism with which he had been confronted since his birth. Instead, the two

decades of his maritime life drew him into the principal arena of imperialism. He went to the West Indies in 1875 and 1876, the Far East from 1883 to 1888, and Africa in 1890. During these two decades, he sailed back and forth between the trade centers and the tiny outposts of the empires. His voyages acquainted him with a great number of imperialist adventurers and their myths, and his colonial background gave him great insight into these men's characters. Conrad believed that these imperialist adventurers were extremely romantic and egocentric. Most were illusion-ridden and blind to their own fallibility. Their blindness as well as their excessive pride often brought them and their colonies to their doom. Conrad was greatly captivated with such imperialist figures as Willems and Jim Lingard, William Olmeijer, Arthur Hodister, George Klein and Sir James Brooke. All of these men later became the models of eminent characters in his colonial fiction. His meetings with these imperialist adventurers helped Conrad in delineating their psychology as well as their moral imperfections in his works.

Although a few years after the fall of the empires most people considered Conrad a great anti-imperialist novelist and proclaimed him a prophet of the decline of imperialism, Conrad was, in fact, ambivalent about imperialism. Sometimes he praised it but at other times he attacked it. Therefore, the meaning and significance

of imperialism seem to have been ambiguous in Conrad's mind.

Conrad's fictional and non-fictional prose do reveal, however, his trust in the honesty and the reliability of British imperialism, a trust that he retains even after he is disillusioned with the romance of imperialism on the Congo river. Conrad once wrote an essay, entitled "An Observer in Malaya," to praise Hugh Clifford, a British administrator in Malaya who later became Conrad's friend, for his good and consistent intentions in his administration of the colony. Conrad's appraisal of Clifford best shows his approbation of British imperialism:

If the opinion of a looker-on [sic] from afar is worth anything, Mr. Hugh Clifford's anxiety about his country's record is needless. To the Malays whom he governs, instructs, and guides he is the embodiment of the intentions, of the conscience and might of his race. And of all the nations conquering distant territories in the name of the most excellent intentions, England alone sends out men who, with such a transparent sincerity of feeling, can speak, as Mr. Clifford does, of the place of toil and exile as "the land which is very dear to me, where the best years of my life have been spent"⁷

⁷Conrad, "An Observer in Malaya," in Notes on Life and Letters, p. 58.

He praises British imperialism because he believes that "some real work is done in there."⁸ This ideal imperialism is also portrayed in his extollment of the British Merchant Service in the essay, entitled "Well Done" (1918):

It is my conviction, or perhaps, I ought to say my deep feeling born from personal experience I don't venture to affirm that the main characteristic of the British men spread all over the world is not the spirit of the adventures so much as the spirit of service. I think that this could be demonstrated from the history of great voyages and the general activity of the race. That the British man has always liked his service to be adventurous rather than otherwise cannot be denied, . . . nobody can say that the adventurous activities of the British race are stamped with the futility of a chase after mere emotion.⁹

Here, Conrad shows his admiration of British administration. He perceives it as a romantically pragmatic one in which the British subjects are liable to devote themselves wholeheartedly to the duties and service imposed on them.

⁸Conrad, Heart of Darkness (New York: New American Library, 1983), p. 73.

⁹Conrad, "Well Done," in Notes on Life and Letters, p. 189.

Of all imperialism, in Conrad's eyes, British imperialism is the most benevolent. It represents the highest achievement of administration among the Europeans. Conrad regards the British service as useful, effective, stable, dispassionate, and devoted to duty more than to honor or glory. It can be argued that Conrad goes too far when he thinks that Britain extended her empire without heed to the honor and glory gained thereby. Historically, the British have been known for their national pride and for their pleasure in having Britain known as the Empire where the sun never set. Britain encouraged her subjects to hunt for more colonies and to keep her glory forever. In addition to their pride, British imperialists who came to India and Burma, for instance, also brought hypocrisy with them.

Thus, although British imperialism is not without its blemishes as shown in E. M. Forster's A Passage to India and George Orwell's Burmese Days, Conrad's praise for British imperialism may have partly emanated from his subconscious attempt to search for a positive aspect to imperialism. Certainly, the Victorian quest for idealism, together with Conrad's romantic heritage, greatly influenced Conrad's way of thinking. He saw and judged the British empire with the eyes of the Victorians. Conrad's approbation for British imperialism is also shown in his praise for an eminent British subject, namely Sir James Brooke, whose career and myth enthralled him.

Conrad's admiration of Sir James Brooke, a British imperialist in the Far East, also sheds light on his concept of an ideal imperialism. Conrad owes much in his literary works to Brooke, upon whose legend the "Conradian Myth" is based. He first read the story of Brooke when he was around eight or nine years old. Later, as a grown-up, he wrote a letter to a descendant of Brooke. In that letter, he fully expressed his personal admiration for the great Rajah Brooke:

The first Rajah Brooke has been one of my boyish admirations, a feeling I have kept, to this day, strengthened by the better understanding of the greatness of his character and the unstained rectitude of his purpose.¹⁰

Conrad exalted Brooke as an ideal imperialist hero. Brooke was an individualist European who became a benevolent "colonist," and his career success appealed to Conrad so much that he refined it and depicted it in his works of art as the "Conradian Myth"--a myth which involves an individualist hero or anti-hero living in isolation from his own kind in a remote, primitive country.

¹⁰Conrad, Letter to Margaret Brooke, 15 June 1920, quoted in Avrom Fleishman, Conrad's Politics (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1967), p. 102.

Whether Conrad was aware of Brooke's shortcomings or not is not explicitly revealed in his works; however, the fact that he was aware of the menaces of individualist imperialism is revealed through his portrayals of such imperialist characters as Kurtz, Jim, and Lingard. All of these characters came into the third world with good intention to help develop the native communities, but they later failed to live up their ideals, becoming obsessed with their personal affairs. While Kurtz was concerned too much with collecting ivory, Jim was preoccupied with self-glorification. Lingard, on the other hand, broke the promise that he would help Hassim, his native companion, to regain his kingdom when he was wrapped up in his passionate love for a white woman he came across at the Shore of Refuge.

All of these characters' failure to live up their ideals brought about calamities to the native community as well as to these white characters themselves. Kurtz had moral anarchy in his mind; Jim was blind to reality; Lingard had self-conflicts in his decision to choose between his roots, the white men, and his obligation, the promise he had given to his Malayan friend. These effects on the white men turned to be the genesis of the community destruction. Kurtz's moral anarchy encouraged tribal wars while Jim's blindness gave Brown an occasion to kill the crowned prince of Bugis and his party, and Lingard's self-conflict kept him from decisively preventing the

massacre of the natives in the explosion of the Emma, the white man's ship which loaded a great amount of gunpowder. Therefore, although some of Conrad's characters tried to achieve the "colonist" status like that of the "Brooke ideal," most failed to achieve the ideal as a result of their loss of objectivity, causing them to revert to egotistic sentimentality and pride. Egoism, consequently, brought them to their downfalls. In short, most of Conrad's characters are the perversion of the Brooke myth of ideal imperialism.

Conrad's concept of ideal imperialism is also manifest in Heart of Darkness. In the passage where Marlow distinguishes "colonists" from "conquerors," Conrad neatly asserts his own attitude toward imperialism. In a way, it can be regarded as Conrad's evaluation of imperialism:

But these chaps were not much account, really. they were no colonists; their admiration was merely a squeeze, and nothing more, I suspect. They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force-- nothing to boast of when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of the others. They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is

the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea, an unselfish belief in the idea--something you can set up and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to¹¹

It seemed to Conrad that neither work-ethics nor long residence did a colonist make. Fidelity to the land, to the native people as well as to oneself were the essential traits of a colonist. In Conrad's fiction, most Europeans coming to the colonial world are not able to achieve the status of colonist. Most of them tend to be conquerors because they exploit the land and the people rather than benefit them. They surrender themselves to their own greed. They exert their power over the weak and rule their colonies with violent policies. Moreover, they do not follow the fixed standards of conduct of those who share the 'White Man's Burden.' In order to redeem their guilt, the guilt of the conquerors, they have to be loyal to themselves and to the burdens they carry as well; otherwise, they will meet their nemesis in the colonial domain as Kurtz does in Heart of Darkness.

Conrad, therefore, admires benevolent imperialism, but he attacks aggressive imperialism; that is, he believes in an imperialism based on a national will to improve a territory without destroying others. Conrad did

¹¹Conrad, Heart of Darkness, pp. 69-70.

not support global expansion that was based on military force or economic competition. He believed that aggressive imperialism of that type more often destroyed rather than developed the territories. To Conrad, the goal, the mission behind imperialism was good and admirable, but the means used by many imperialists to that end were wicked and repugnant. Conrad felt that many Europeans degraded this noble mission of imperialism by only pretending to go to backward countries in order to educate or civilize the natives when their real motive was the search for material wealth and indomitable power.

In colonial fiction, Conrad portrays imperialism as national expansion, motivated by despotic or capitalist motives which are aggressive and exploitative. In fact Conrad, as shown in his works, is disposed to regard the white men as the representatives of organization and civilization whereas the natives in the third world represent chaos. This point is clearly depicted in Conrad's fiction which concerns the British empire. As in Typhoon, disorder happens on the ship Nan-Shan and it is Captain MacWhirr, who restores the order. During the storm, money is thrown out of the Chinese coolies' chests by the typhoon, causing a confused fight for money among the coolies. Captain MacWhirr solves the problem by dividing the money among them equally. Finally, MacWhirr can guide them through the storm safely.

Although it is the white man's duty to bring peace, order and progress to his inferiors, Conrad also realises the dangers of the intervention of white men, including the British, into native affairs. Instead of changing bad conditions into good ones, most of the imperialists of Conrad's day worsened them. This irony is ubiquitous in Conrad's works. It appears to Conrad that the native communities have their own primitive way of life; that is, there exist plundering and robbery, tribal wars and enslavement among rapacious rulers of the communities. The intervention of the whites sometimes aggravates the holocaust of the natives as in the case of Lingard in The Rescue, but sometimes it brings about self-destruction as in Kurtz's. Unlike Kurtz and Lingard, Jim partly succeeds in bringing order out of anarchy when he first came to Patusan. He suppressed the head-hunters, abolishes slavery and the monopolized policy of Rajah Allang, a cruel and rapacious rajah of the Malays. Moreover, he plans to create coffee plantations and build a fort to protect his community. Unfortunately, he is so obsessed with his imagination that he becomes blind to reality and unable to cope with the problem of Brown's invasion. His blindness finally lead to the destruction of himself as well as his community. To portray the Europeans in such a way indicates Conrad's doubt about the motivations of imperialists. Conrad remains uncertain as to whether the Europeans are loyal to their assumed white men's burden or are merely pouring

into the backward continents on errands of economic and psychological exploitation. Participating in the imperialist ventures, they are prone to decivilize, demoralize and devitalize when they compete to satisfy their own greed for wealth, power and glory by conquering and exploiting their colonies all over the world. The wealthier they become, the more their illusions grow until they are blinded to reality and their doom is sealed.

Conrad seems to perceive that some change does occur to the imperialist agents when they stray beyond their own cultures and Conrad does not hesitate to pick up on that change in his work as an imperialist after effect. He further explores how much change will affect both the Europeans and the natives in the colonies as a result of imperialism. That Conrad mostly demonstrates the negative effects of it in his work indicates that advantages rarely exist in imperialism, especially those advantages that arise with self-esteem. Thus, the questions of motivation and impact constitute the imperial debate which is resonant in Conrad's colonial fiction.

Conrad's definite insight into imperialism and its forceful impact comes from his immediate experience. Throughout his life, he has learned about its power. The crude experience of his life shaped his pessimistic view of the world. Even though he saw some of the positive aspects of the British empire, he always portrayed the destructive image of imperialism in his fiction. All

imperialism in his works is condemned to exploitation and destruction. Thus, during the time of colonial independence, most people in Europe tended to regard Conrad as a profound critic of imperialism. In fact, Conrad did not speak for or against either group, the Europeans or the natives. He only analyzed the power of imperialism as it affected both groups.

Because Conrad lived during the time when the new wave of imperialism was spreading and because he as well as his family underwent great suffering caused by imperial powers, imperialism unsurprisingly became a striking theme in most of his fiction. Indeed, the theme seems to be "the secret sharer" of Conrad's works. In his Colonial fiction, Conrad explored imperialism of various empires in various areas of the world. He portrayed the image of Dutch and British imperialism in the Far East in such works as Almayer's Folly, An Outcast of the Islands, The Rescue, and Lord Jim, and of Belgian imperialism in Africa in Heart of Darkness and his notable short story, "An Outpost of Progress".

The following study will concentrate on imperialism as portrayed in Conrad's works. The selected works of Conrad used for this study are Heart of Darkness, Lord Jim, the Rescue, and "An Outpost of Progress." What will be discussed in this thesis is how Conrad investigates the theme of imperialism which is one of the major preoccupations of modern British literature.