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Few readers of Joseph Conrad would disagree that he was far more interested in the relationships among men than in the relationships between men and women, and he explored the homosocial continuum as fully as he could considering that he was under extraordinary restraints. The Cleveland Street Affair and especially the Wilde trials--outlined briefly below-- had an enormous influence on the development of the concept of homosexuality in British culture. Through the second half of the nineteenth century, the homosexual began to emerge as an identifiable type that was defined, and defined itself, in opposition to what we would now call the heterosexual community. Conrad was writing during this transitional period, when the battle lines were being formed. On one side were the Wildean aesthetes who despised the bourgeoisie, and on the other was the bourgeois majority who despised and feared Wilde's followers. Conrad courted ostracism if he supported the former, but he courted mediocrity and philistinism if he remained with the latter. So, as usual, he took refuge in indirection, in subtlety, and in irony. Conrad's approach to imperialism presents a familiar and useful analogy. In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow pointedly excludes contemporary Britain from his indictment of European imperialism, thus placating his British audience. And Marlow pushes a sympathetic identification with the Africans as far as he can before he is interrupted by his conservative audience that includes a lawyer, an accountant, and a director of companies. Conrad walks a similar tight-rope in his exploration of the homosocial continuum--pushing out the boundaries a little and then pulling back to accommodate a conventional audience that would have been hostile to a more overt exploration. In other words, Conrad could only press his artistic investigations of the potential relationships between men so far because those investigations were threatened by the ghost of Oscar Wilde.

For most people today, homosexuality is a fixed, profoundly defining feature of a person's identity. Just over one hundred years ago, when Conrad began publishing his work, this was not yet true. Contemporary work on homoeroticism in the nineteenth century may be said to have originated with Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, where he argues in an often-quoted passage that "Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite was a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species" (266). Conrad began writing before that so-called "species" had been fully described, defined, or catalogued in legal, medical, or popular discourses. So before we turn to Conrad's works, we should look briefly at the historical context, at what we might call the homosocial milieu of the nineteenth century.

The first reference to a more-or-less homosexual group in England I have found is to the so-called "Mollies" of the eighteenth century, who met in "molly houses": inns or taverns. Their existence is documented primarily in contemporary pamphlets written

against them, where they are said to have dressed up and acted as women, and to have engaged in what were then called sodomitical acts (Craft, 24-26). But laws against sodomy in Western culture go back at least as far as Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*, written in the thirteenth century, in which he proscribed as "unnatural" any sexual act that did not potentially lead to procreation. This definition of sodomy made its way into the English legal code (Craft, 13). It was a crime punishable by death. In the first third of the nineteenth century, fifty men were hanged for sodomy in England. After 1830, the death penalty was no longer applied, and in 1861 the penal code was amended--conviction led to sentences from ten years to life (Weeks, 100). Again, sodomy included any so-called unnatural act--any act that did not lead to procreation. There was no special category for what we would nowadays call homosexual behavior.

In 1885, male homosexuality, now a sub-category of sodomy, was first legally defined in the Labouchere Amendment as "acts of gross indecency between men" and treated as a misdemeanor punishable by up to two years of hard labor. After the Vagrancy Act of 1898, male prostitutes were given six month prison sentences for solicitation (Weeks, 102-3). The laws were enforced more broadly as the penalties became less harsh, and as homosexuality became more clearly defined, it aroused more fear and hostility. At the same time, more individuals found themselves culturally defined as sexual inverts, and this led to increased group identification and resistance to the enforcement of "public morality."

Medical recognition of homosexuality followed the same pattern of increasing definition through the end of the nineteenth century, culminating in the work of several sexologists--French, German, and English--by the turn of the century. Indeed, physicians were sometimes called upon by jurists to help them define forms of deviance that they were attempting to recognize and punish. Gradually through this period, medical explanations defined a homosexual orientation as the outward manifestation of a congenital illness.

Popular interest in and fear of homosexuals grew through the nineteenth century as "sexual inversion" became better defined within the legal and medical professions. It was feared as a form of degeneracy and decay that signaled the end of the British Empire--it would undermine British manliness, the family, and public morality, the three indispensable foundations of British Imperial strength. And homosexuals were feared as corrupters of youth. Because they were (and still are) defined by their sexual preference, popular belief, supported by the legal and medical professions, labeled homosexuals as purely sexual and perverse, incapable of controlling their degenerate desires (Weeks, 106-7). Both casual homosexual behavior and intense, romantic crushes between boys were not at all uncommon in English public schools in the first half of the nineteenth century, but by the end of the century, headmasters, according to Noel Annan, began to regard "homosexual relations as the worst of all crimes," and to punish it by "instant expulsion" (190).

Legal, medical, and popular interest in the emerging "species" of the homosexual came into sharp focus during two scandals in the last ten years of the nineteenth century: the Cleveland Street Affair of 1889-1890, and, of course, the three trials involving Oscar

Wilde in 1895. In 1889, during a routine interrogation of a suspected thief, the police discovered a homosexual brothel on Cleveland Street in London. Two factors elevated this investigation to a national and even international scandal. The boys involved worked for the post office and had been recruited as prostitutes while they were in government service. Those arrested implicated high ranking members of the nobility, including Lord Arthur Somerset, who was forced to flee the country, the Earl of Euston, and even Prince Albert Victor, the son of the Prince of Wales and heir-presumptive to the English throne. As soon as he learned that his son was implicated, the Prince of Wales intervened and saw to it that only the prostitutes would go to jail. The proprietor of the brothel, Charles Hammond, was allowed to escape to the United States, and none of his clients was arrested. But the public was informed of the aristocratic and even royal gentlemen implicated by the scandal, and several newspapers noted how class and influence affected the investigation.

Oscar Wilde's even more notorious trials had similar consequences. The commoners, Wilde and Alfred Taylor (who had served as a go-between for Wilde and others), were arrested, tried, and convicted, while Wilde's lover, Lord Alfred Douglas, was protected from prosecution. After Wilde's arrest, hundreds of men who felt implicated by Wilde's conviction left London for the continent, and all but two newspapers, *The Daily Chronicle* and *Reynold's News*, celebrated Wilde's conviction as the triumph of virtue over the most wicked vice (Ellmann, 457, 479).

It was in this poisoned atmosphere of aristocratic scandal, Wildean experimentation, and bourgeois revulsion that Conrad began publishing his work. It would be extraordinary indeed if an artist as sensitive as Conrad to his cultural milieu would leave these issues unaddressed in his fiction.

The only absolutely unequivocal homosexual in Conrad's fiction is the evil Mr. Jones, the antagonist in *Victory* (1915). Jones' antipathy to women is pathological; they literally make him sick. Jones is a gentlemanly blackguard who travels with a sailor-turned-secretary, Martin Ricardo, and a bear-like South American servant named Pedro. Ricardo, his so-called secretary, describes a scene in Mr. Jones' past clearly meant to indicate Jones' sexual perversion. During one of their thieving expeditions, Jones settles in a small Mexican village. There he hires a "bare-legged" boy to sing "tristes" to him all day long (151). In the end, Jones kills Ricardo because Ricardo was planning to leave him for a woman, and then Jones drowns himself in despair. Jeffrey Meyers' book on homosexuality and British fiction first alerted me to the sexual orientation of Mr. Jones (though Bernard Meyer had noted the possibility earlier in his psychoanalytical biography of Conrad). Jeffrey Meyers claims that the protagonist, Heyst, is also homosexual, but this seems unlikely. It is true that Heyst's excessive gentlemanliness and philosophical detachment make it difficult for him to get close to people, even to the woman, Lena, whom he rescues and takes to live with him. But Conrad makes Heyst's heterosexuality explicit in the one scene of physical passion between him and Lena. Heyst and Lena walk to a spot on their island overlooking the sea. They embrace; Lena orders Heyst away, and Conrad ends the chapter portentously enough with the words: "-- a command which Heyst did not obey" (203). At the beginning of the next chapter, we

find Heyst retrieving Lena's cork helmet while she arranges her hair. Readers familiar with Conrad's scenes of romance will recognize that this is as close to a representation of physical, sexual passion as Conrad would usually go. Heyst, therefore, does not share a homosexual orientation with Jones, who is clearly meant to be Heyst's evil double, just as Gentleman Brown serves as Lord Jim's Doppelgänger. Heyst's gentlemanly reserve with women becomes antipathy in Jones, and Heyst's solicitude for a male friend becomes homosexual perversion in the villain.

In fact, as Robert Hodges points out, homosexuality is presented quite conventionally in *Victory*:

In portraying Mr. Jones, the villain of the tale, Conrad employs a number of turn-of-the-century notions about homosexual males. He conceives of Jones as a Satanic dandy-aesthete. Beneath a veneer of gentlemanly intelligence and good manners, Jones is totally ruthless and always in search of new sensations. (387-88)

Hodges adds that the villain goes under the name of Jones because he had to leave England for some unspecified crime, and that crime was probably sodomy. Thus, in the one book that addresses homosexuality directly, Conrad takes a conventional stand, one that we might call homophobic today: the one undoubted homosexual in his fiction is treated stereotypically and quite unsympathetically--Jones is one of Conrad's most vicious characters. To find a more sympathetic treatment, we need to turn to the works where the homoeroticism is more covert, and the first place to look is the aptly named "The Secret Sharer" (published in 1912).

Bruce Harkness wrote the first detailed analysis of "The Secret Sharer" that stresses the homoerotic potentialities in the story, though since the article is a parody of archetypal criticism, the reader is not meant to take its conclusions too seriously. Fourteen years later, in 1979, Robert Hodges followed up on Harkness's analysis and concluded that the homoeroticism is indeed quite serious. He argues that "the story suggests a clandestine love affair, initially shattering but ultimately bracing for the captain: in short, an allegory of coming out" (385).

Hodges goes too far when he identifies "The Secret Sharer" as a coming-out story--the Captain never directly acknowledges any homosexual feelings, even to himself, and to call it a veiled coming-out story seems oxymoronic. Still, the relationship between the Captain and the fugitive has all the trappings of a covert love affair.

The Captain finds a naked young man clinging to his rope ladder, an escaped fugitive who has killed a subordinate on another ship anchored nearby. He remarks his good voice, good looks, and "well-knit" physique, and agrees to hide him in his cabin, thereby risking his first command and his career. The captain is so obsessed with his double, the illicit sharer of his life, and hiding the fugitive is so distracting, that it affects the captain's ability to command, driving him, the captain says, "almost to the point of insanity"

(*Twixt Land and Sea*, 114). The story, as both Harkness and Hodges point out, is full of intimate gestures between the two men, of high anxiety but also high mutual regard, and all this takes place in the captain's bedroom. In the end, despite the enormous strain occasioned by hiding him, the captain doesn't want to part with Leggatt, the fugitive, and he risks the life of his ship to give his double the shortest possible swim to shore. At their parting, the captain says "Our eyes met, several seconds elapsed, till, our glances still mingled, I extended my hand and turned the lamp out." Finally, their hands, the captain says, "met gropingly, lingered united in a steady, motionless grasp" (138).

The situation in *Lord Jim* (1900) is nearly identical. A sea captain who, as in "The Secret Sharer," narrates the story, takes a very close interest in a handsome young first mate who has disgraced himself so badly as a ship's officer that he will never hold that position again. Marlow risks neither his ship nor his career for Jim, but his concern for Jim's well-being seems as obsessive, if not quite as damaging, as the narrator's in "The Secret Sharer." Like the other captain, Marlow is even distracted by Jim's presence aboard his ship. After Jim leaves one of the many lowly jobs he is forced to take after his trial, Marlow picks him up:

I took him away from Bangkok in my ship, and we had a longish passage. . . . In every sense of the expression [a passenger who is a seaman] is 'on deck'; but my Jim, for the most part, skulked down below as though he had been a stowaway. He infected me so that I avoided speaking on professional matters. . . . I felt extremely unwilling to give orders to my officers in his presence. (200-01)

Marlow has two obvious reasons for this discomfort in front of his crew. Jim is a notorious figure, and it would be embarrassing for a ship's captain to be seen as his protector. More charitably, Marlow is obviously embarrassed and discomfited by Jim's own feelings of unworthiness and shame, feelings that prevent him from appreciating the day-to-day life of a working ship and leave him skulking below. But Marlow's response is so intense--and so potentially dangerous to his command--that there is possibly a third reason. Marlow's attachment to Jim is so profound that it affects his professional judgment. It is almost as though he wanted to hide something about that relationship from his crew. Moreover, like the captain in "The Secret Sharer," Marlow helps Jim to escape the consequences of his crime, in this case, by having his friend Stein set him up as a trader in Patusan. (What we now call the Third World serves as a place of refuge for both fugitives.)

Many of the details in *Lord Jim* also confirm a homoerotic component in the relationship between Marlow and Jim. As Hodges points out, Marlow appears to pick Jim up after the Inquiry and takes him to dinner (384). After the trial, Marlow leads Jim back to his hotel room, and Marlow says this of him: "He followed me as manageable as a little child, with an obedient air, with no sort of manifestation, rather as though he had been waiting for me there to come along and carry him off" (170-71). In most of the romances we

read, men come along and "carry off" beautiful young damsels in distress, not handsome young men.

Marlow supports Jim thereafter by recommending him to various owners of shops, plantations, and trading companies in the East. The first of these tradesmen, a "more than middle-aged bachelor, with a reputation for eccentricity" (187) named Denver, who owns a rice mill, very nearly adopts Jim. Though Jim is technically no more than an employee, Denver gives him a room in his house, and Marlow describes their relationship in this way:

It seemed to me on reading [Denver's] letter that my friend had found more than tolerance for Jim--that there were the beginnings of active liking For one thing, Jim kept his freshness in the climate. Had he been a girl--my friend wrote--one could have said he was blooming--blooming modestly--like a violet, not like some of these blatant tropical flowers. (187)

Only in homoerotic literature do older men use words like "freshness," "blooming," and violets when appreciatively describing a young man. And Denver's response to Jim's departure has the injured tone of a jilted lover:

There are no spoons missing, as far as I know. . . . I haven't been interested enough to inquire. He is gone, leaving on the breakfast-table a formal little note of apology, which is either silly or heartless. Probably both--and it's all one to me. Allow me to say, lest you should have some more mysterious young men in reserve, that I have shut up shop, definitely and for ever. This is the last eccentricity I shall be guilty of. Do not imagine for a moment that I care a hang. (188-89)

Whatever we conclude about Marlow's sexual orientation, Mr. Denver clearly seems to represent an early example of the homosexual in literature, as at least two other readers, Hodges and Robert Lange, have noted.

Jim is essentially a passive character; he remains an object in the novel, not a subject, for we are never given more than a glimpse of the inner workings of his mind. He is someone for whom others have feelings, someone who inspires strong emotions. So Mr. Denver loves him and feels bitterly betrayed when Jim leaves, a pattern that is repeated when Jim deserts Jewel in the end. Jim does not have a homosexual orientation, although Robert Lange makes this claim in a recent article; Jim merely provokes a homoerotic response. But he isn't especially heterosexual, either, for he leaves Jewel as readily as he left the mill owner, and Jewel feels as bitterly betrayed as Denver. I believe that Marlow also loves Jim, just as Jewel and Denver do, and feels equally betrayed by his egotistical suicide.

Marlow last sees Jim after Jim has become a great man in Patusan, surrounded by faithful native subordinates and servants, and more-or-less married to Jewel. All the inhabitants of Patusan are a little disconcerted by Marlow's visit because they fear he will take Jim back with him to the white world, and Marlow must reassure them that he has no intention of carrying Jim off. Jewel is especially suspicious of Marlow. "While Jim and I were talking," Marlow tells the reader, "she would come and go with rapid glances at us, leaving on her passage an impression of grace and charm and a distinct suggestion of watchfulness" (282). Marlow tries to convince Jewel that Jim will not leave her, that Marlow has not come to steal him from her: "'Why did you come to us from out there?'" she asks Marlow. "'He speaks of you too often. You make me afraid. Do you--do you want him?' A sort of stealthy fierceness had crept into our hurried mutters. 'I shall never come again,' I said bitterly. 'And I don't want him. No one wants him'" (317).

Marlow's bitterness betrays him; he does indeed seem to want Jim, and he has to struggle with himself to relinquish him to Jewel. Marlow's sense of loss comes through clearly in his last sight of Jim, when he says that his figure "seemed to catch all the light left in a darkened world And, suddenly, I lost him" (336). We understand and appreciate the tragedy in Lord Jim only when we understand and appreciate Marlow's obsessive solicitude for Jim and the great magnitude of the loss that Marlow suffers, first when he is forced to give Jim up to Jewel in Patusan and promise never to visit him again, and, finally, when Jim commits a kind of suicide at the end. Mourning Jim's death in his letter to the privileged reader near the end of the book, Marlow reveals one last time how much Jim meant to him: "It's difficult to believe he will never come again. I shall never hear his voice again, nor shall I see his smooth tan-and-pink face with a white line on the forehead, and the youthful eyes darkened by excitement to a profound, unfathomable blue" (343). Surely this catalogue of Jim's beauty, this last tribute to his voice, his complexion, his youthful blue eyes, "darkened by excitement," is the last lament of a despairing lover.

In *Doubletalk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration*, Wayne Koestenbaum asserts that all collaboration between male writers is a sublimated form of homosexual contact. "Collaborators express homoeroticism and they strive to conceal it [B]luntly stated," he continues, "men who collaborate engage in a metaphorical sexual intercourse, and . . . the text they balance between them is alternately the child of their sexual union, and a shared woman" (3). Biographers would be best able to comment on Koestenbaum's theory as it applies to Conrad's collaboration with Ford Maddox Ford, but the first part of *Romance* (1903), certainly resonates with homoerotic desire. The hero is a poor young nobleman who, at first, seeks adventure in the West Indies and then gets far more than he bargained for. John Kemp marries the girl, Seraphina, in the end, but he has to wade through blood and survive a treason trial to get her. Kemp is a deliberately conventional hero--naive, powerful, and too straightforward to understand the intrigue that quickly ensnares him. His sexuality seems equally conventional; one look at Seraphina and he loves her extravagantly. The rest of the novel is impelled forward by their need to escape, their separation, and Kemp's desperate efforts to recover her.

Kemp's love life becomes conventionally heterosexual, however, only after he meets Seraphina. Before he falls in love with a woman, a man very nearly succeeds in seducing him. Carlos Riego, a Spanish nobleman, meets Kemp early in the book and falls in love, he says, with Kemp's sister, Veronica. But the sister is merely a cover for his love for Kemp himself. When they arrive together in Jamaica, Carlos tries to get Kemp to sail with him to Rio Medio, in Cuba:

"Ah, amigo mio, but you must [go] now," said Carlos gently--"you must -" And, looking me straight in the face with a still, penetrating glance of his big, romantic eyes, "It is a good life," he whispered seductively, "and I like you, John Kemp. You are young--young yet. But I love you very much for your own sake, and for the sake of one I shall never see again."

He fascinated me. He was all eyes in the dusk, standing in a languid pose just clear of the shaft of light that fell through the scuttle in a square patch.

I lowered my voice, too. "What life?" I asked.

"Life in my uncle's palace," he said, so sweetly and persuasively that the suggestiveness of it caused a thrill in me.

(47)

We might well ask with Kemp what kind of life Carlos is offering him. Kemp refuses, despite the thrill of Carlos' seduction, and Carlos gives up. But he reiterates his love for Kemp quite explicitly when they separate:

"Juan," he said, "let us not quarrel. You are very young; you cannot understand these things; you cannot weigh them; you have a foolish idea in your head. I wished you to come with us because I love you, Juan. Do you think I wish you evil? You are true and brave, and our families are united." He sighed suddenly.

"I do not want to quarrel!" I said. "I don't."

I did not want to quarrel; I wanted more to cry. I was very lonely, and he was going away. Romance was going out of my life.

He added musically, "You even do not understand. There is someone else who speaks for you to me, always--someone else. But one day you will. I shall come back for you--one day." He looked at me and smiled. It stirred unknown depths of emotion in me. I would have gone with him, then, had he asked me. "One day," he repeated, with an extraordinary cadence of tone.

His hand was grasping mine; it thrilled me like a woman's; he stood shaking it very gently.

"One day," he said, "I shall repay what I owe you. I wished you with me, because I go into some danger. I wanted you. Good-by "

He leaned over and kissed me lightly on the cheek, then climbed away. I felt that the light of Romance was going out of my life. (50-1)

Conrad and Ford could hardly have made the homoeroticism more overt. And when we add to this passage the fact that Carlos was meant to marry Seraphina, we can see two perfect examples in *Romance* of what Eve Sedgwick calls the homoerotic triangle. A homoerotic triangle exists when two men come together sexually (though, of course, metaphorically) through the mediation of a woman. (A familiar example described in Sedgwick's book involves David Copperfield and his friend Steerforth. Steerforth loves his friend, David, and gives him a feminine name, Daisy, but he can only connect with him through the sexual metaphor of seducing David's childhood friend, Emily.) In *Romance*, this triangle exists doubly among Carlos, Kemp, Kemp's sister Veronica, and Seraphina. Carlos pretends love for Veronica to get to his true love, John Kemp, and Kemp loves Seraphina as a substitute for Carlos. (Carlos dies, conveniently enough, just before Seraphina and Kemp are engaged. In *David Copperfield*, Steerforth must die before David can marry Dora.)

Koestenbaum notes not only Carlos' attempt to seduce Kemp (169), but also a number of what we might call floating homoerotic passages in the book, "floating" because they appear to have no clear purpose. Indeed, there are scenes in the novel where it is difficult for the reader to know whether men are being threatened with murder or with homosexual rape. Koestenbaum's claim that the obvious homoeroticism in *Romance* somehow reflects the relationship between Ford and Conrad is interesting, but it would need to be supported with more biographical evidence than he supplies before I would be inclined to accept it. Instead, I see *Romance* as Ford and Conrad's parody of an adventure tale. It is, after all, a thoroughly extravagant romance, full of hair-raising escapes and captures, battles on land and sea, pirates, other equally exotic people with foreign accents, and tropical scenery. It seems to me, therefore, that the homoeroticism may reflect Ford and Conrad's recognition that this is a feature of many adventure novels; the obvious, and even extravagant homoeroticism is, in other words, one of the objects of their satire.

Like *Lord Jim's* Marlow, the language-teacher narrator of *Under Western Eyes* (1911) is an aging bachelor with an almost obsessive interest in a young person. Natalia is, of course, a woman, but what seems to attract the narrator is her masculinity, what he calls her "exquisite virility" (118). He admires her voice, which is "deep, almost harsh" (102) and "masculine" (141). He admires her "strong . . . hands (99) and her "strong," assertive walk: "Her walk was not that hybrid and uncertain gliding affected by some women, but a frank, strong, healthy movement forward" (182). Her glance, he notes enthusiastically, "was as direct and trustful as that of a young man" (102).

One of the melancholy features of *Under Western Eyes* is the narrator's insistence that, much as he admires Natalia, there can be no possibility of a romance between them. He is, he insists, a totally inappropriate suitor: too Western, too unimaginative and insignificant, and, especially, too old. He presents himself from the first as an unimaginative person, assuring the reader of his truthfulness; he could never have made up the story he is about to tell. He is merely a pedagogue, a dried-up repository of languages. He responds to his attraction to Natalia by insisting on his own immateriality. When he feels she is threatened by Peter Ivanovitch, the feminist conspirator who has more-or-less devoured his female protégé, the narrator complains that he cannot protect her. "Removed," he writes, "by the difference of age and nationality as if into the sphere of another existence, I produced, even upon myself, the effect of a dumb helpless ghost, of an anxious immaterial thing that could only hover about without the power to protect or guide by as much as a whisper" (126). If he sees Natalia as robust, "virile," and assertive, he presents himself as her opposite: an impotent, bodiless phantom. Once again, he insists on the great difference in their ages, yet how old is he? "I am not," he writes, "ancient enough as yet to be strikingly decrepit":

I have no long beard like the good hermit of a romantic ballad; my footsteps are not tottering, my aspect not that of a slow, venerable sage. Those picturesque advantages are not mine. I am old, alas, in a brisk, commonplace way. (143)

This is the self-portrait of a man who may fear the onset of old age, but who has not yet reached it. He remains vigorous ("brisk" is his self-deprecating term), and the overall tone of this portrait invites the reader's distrust. The narrator is so diffident, so self-effacing, and his references to long beards and "tottering" footsteps so absurdly histrionic that we cannot believe he is as old as he claims. His response to Natalia's mother, Mrs. Haldin, is another subtle indication of this. She was once, he writes, a beautiful woman (101), but now she is old--"the old mother" of Natalia (112, 372). Mrs. Haldin must be approximately fifty if she has children who are in their early-to-middle twenties. A man in his sixties might refer to a woman in her fifties as "old," but if our painfully self-conscious narrator were in his sixties, he would undoubtedly add that old as she was, he himself was older. Finally, the language teacher links himself in action and conversation with the young people, Natalia and Razomov, and not with Mrs. Haldin, which suggests that he is not quite of her generation. All of this leads me to believe that he is younger than Mrs. Haldin, surely young enough to imagine some kind of winter/spring relationship with Natalia.

What I am leading up to is the suggestion that the narrator's insistence on the impossibility of a romance with Natalia, despite his attraction to her, can be explained if we see him as an early example of the closet homosexual. This might help us decipher one of the stranger passages in the book. When he first meets Natalia, as I've already noted, he compares her manner to that of a young man, and he remarks "how attractive physically her personality could be to a man capable of appreciating in a woman

something else than the mere grace of femininity She was--to look at her was enough--very capable of being roused by an idea or simply by a person. At least, so I judged with I believe an unbiased mind; for clearly my person could not be the person--and as to my ideas! . . ." (102). That the narrator himself finds her attractive is obvious, and it is equally obvious that it is her masculinity that he admires. When he exclaims that he, alas, could not be the man to arouse her because of his "person" and "ideas," he is inviting us, I suppose, to interpret him to mean that that person is too old and those ideas too dry and pedestrian for an idealistic Russian girl. Yet we might also conclude that he is not as old as he claims and that those "ideas" might include an appreciation of male beauty incompatible with the possibility of heterosexual romance. This appreciation is suggested by the terms he uses to praise Natalia and by his repeated admiration for Razumov's good looks. Early in the novel the narrator notes that

Razumov was a tall, well-proportioned young man, quite unusually dark for a Russian from the Central Provinces. His good looks would have been unquestionable if it had not been for a peculiar lack of fineness in the features. It was as if a face modelled vigorously in wax (with some approach even to a classical correctness of type) had been held close to a fire till all sharpness of line had been lost in the softening of the material. But even thus he was sufficiently good-looking. (5)

This particular concern with the quality of Razumov's good looks, with its offering of a mild criticism that is then more-or-less dismissed, and its comparison of the living Razumov to a work of art, marks the speaker as a connoisseur of male beauty. At the end of the novel the narrator drops the criticism and remarks once again how "very good-looking" (317) Razumov is.

In short, I do not believe it too fanciful to suggest that the narrator acts like a man who, in middle age, has found a young woman he could sexually admire after spending his life admiring young men. This would not only justify the passive and melancholy nature of his admiration for Natalia, it would also explain the retiring, self-effacing, and personally non-revelatory quality of his narrative, a narrative that has the feel of having been written by a man who has something to hide.

Chance, published in 1913, an extended study of gender and gender conflict, provides a further exploration of the homosocial continuum. The famously misogynistic Marlow of *Chance* attacks women's fantastic (from his perspective) idealism (93) and their ruthlessness: "All the virtues are not enough for them; they want also all the crimes for their own. And why? Because in such completeness there is power--the kind of thrill they love most . . ." (63). He spars with the feminist Mrs. Fyne in several scenes, and describes the heroine, Flora de Barral, in terms that make her appear almost vampirish: "A white gleam between [her] red lips was so short that I remained uncertain whether it was a smile or a ferocious baring of little even teeth" (201-2). There are only two moments in the novel, however, when Marlow might be seen to reveal a sexual interest in men that would balance his highly critical response to women. Admiring Mrs. Fyne's

appearance, if not her aggressively feminist point of view, Marlow says, "I dare say there are many youthful subalterns, and not the worst-looking too, who resemble Mrs. Fyne in the type of face, in the sunburnt complexion, down to that something alert in bearing" (137). In short, Mrs. Fyne is attractive because she resembles a young officer. Later, after musing widely about women in generally derogatory terms, Marlow makes this surprising claim:

I hope there's enough of a kid and an imbecile in me to answer the requirements of some really good woman eventually--some day . . . Some day. Why do you gasp? You don't suppose I should be afraid of getting married? That supposition would be offensive . . . (150-51)

After all he has said against women, why shouldn't his patient auditor gasp when Marlow suggests he might meet a good woman some day and settle down? Why would the listener's stunned response be so offensive to Marlow? The answer could be that Marlow does not want to appear incapable of entering into a heterosexual relationship; he does not want his auditor to believe, and he is offended that his auditor might believe, that he is homosexual. This might lead the alert reader to believe that he is homosexual.

I will not insist on this interpretation of Marlow, however. It seems just as reasonable to read him as a Tiresian figure. He mocks other men for being "solidly, densely, amusingly,--hopelessly" masculine, and he brags of his ability to understand women because of his own "femininity," a femininity that Marlow describes in this way: "that drop of superior essence of which I am myself aware" (146).

Marlow aside, however, there are two homosocially charged arenas in the novel: the coterie of young women who surround Mrs. Fyne, and Captain Anthony's ship before he marries Flora. The latter space seems to me to be especially charged with suppressed homoerotic longing. A man named Franklin had been Anthony's first mate for many years, and he is the member of the crew who takes the most offense when Flora marries his Captain. He always slept aboard ship while it was in harbor, he complains, but now he sleeps ashore. He can no longer eat with the Captain, and all the good fellowship he enjoyed before Flora arrived on the scene is ended. Indeed, many of his old shipmates decide to leave once Flora joins the ship (279). His bitterness is startling to the new second mate, Powell, who joins the crew after Flora's first voyage (302).

Franklin wishes that the Captain had never married and that the Captain's circumstances were more like Franklin's own; he claims he himself could never marry because he needed to support his ailing mother. While explaining this to young Powell, he even hints rather decorously of his amorous exploits. "A woman," he says,

"must be looked after, and, if it comes to that, I say, give me a mother. I dare say if she had not lasted it out so well I might have gone and got married. I don't know, though.

We sailors haven't got much time to look about us to any purpose. Anyhow, as the old lady was there I haven't, I may say, looked at a girl in all my life. Not that I wasn't partial to female society in my time," he added with a pathetic intonation, while the whites of his goggle eyes gleamed amorously under the clear night sky. "Very partial, I may say."
(300-1)

This restrained locker-room bravado might easily be read as a clumsy attempt to hide the obvious--Franklin uses his mother as an excuse for his single state. He is incapable of marrying because he loves Anthony's ship, her crew, and especially Anthony himself. His absurdly bitter response to Flora is very like the response of a jealous lover to a rival .

The accumulated evidence that Joseph Conrad was an early investigator of the homosocial continuum--from the most conventionally acceptable good fellowship between men to the most taboo homosexual orientation and behavior--seems to me to be overwhelming. At one end is, say, the relationship between Charles Gould and the Chief Engineer in *Nostramo*, or between the first mate, Jukes, and his correspondent in "Typhoon." At the other is Mr. Denver, the mill owner who loves Lord Jim; the sympathetically treated Count in "Il Conde", a probable victim of blackmail for his homosexual activities ; and the so-called Mr. Jones, the vicious, misogynistic homosexual villain in *Victory*. In between we find men whose sexual orientation seems more uncertain: Leggatt and the Captain in "The Secret Sharer"; the melancholy narrator of *Under Western Eyes*; Captain Anthony's first mate, Mr. Franklin; Carlos and the young John Kemp in *Romance*; and even Conrad's fictional surrogate, Marlow, in *Chance* and, especially, *Lord Jim*. There should be nothing very shocking or radical in this assertion, and the recognition that Conrad secretly articulated homosexual relationships and depicted the circumstances--villainous, amusing, or pathetic--of what we would now call homosexuals enriches his work. Of course, it may help to explain the unsatisfactory treatment of the heterosexual relationships in his stories, but it also provides an additional richness to at least two of his greatest novels: *Lord Jim* and *Under Western Eyes*.

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