CHAPTER V

MASCU LINITY IN MELVILLE AND CONRAD: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Melville and Conrad were neither contemporary to each other nor did they share the same cultural background. While the former was born in America in the 1850s, the latter was Polish by birth and subsequently emerged as one of the outstanding British novelists of early twentieth century.

The biographies of Melville and Conrad bear eloquent testimony to the fact that they faced the challenges creditably, as determinedly as they lived out the early part of their lives. From an early age, they were deprived of security and snugness and had to fend for themselves. Struggle seems to have provided insights to both of them. Both incidentally passed through situations of near death. Melville, after his desertion of ship, in the South Seas and living among cannibals, escaping from where there was virtually no escape; and Conrad sick of his ebbing fortunes in France shot himself. Yet both survived and resurrected into artistes to produce an impressive body of literary works in nineteenth and twentieth century.

Both Melville and Conrad had opted for maritime vocation that had perhaps provided a unique insight into the men and manners, the workings of institution on board - a world away from the conventional
human society in which the elemental passions, morbidity and distorted desires find fertile ground to grow.

On thematic and narrative level too, there is an uncanny similarity between the two authors. Harry Levin finds similarities between *Moby Dick* and *Heart of Darkness*. In Conrad’s tale he finds an improved version of the ‘catastrophic quest’ of Melville’s novel of epic dimension (Levin 202).

Similarly Tindall observes that Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* is a symbolic work like Melville’s *Moby Dick* and *Billy Budd*. He even compares the role played by Marlow with that of Ishmael and the narrator of Melville’s last novel.

Leon F. Seltzer while comparing both the authors observes:

Melville and Conrad represent two fairly distinct cultural eras... and besides the half century that separates Conrad’s most important fiction from Melville’s, there is the crucial fact that both writers lie outside the intellectual mainstream of their times. (Seltzer: XVI)

Nevertheless, the similar themes and techniques and essentially the same worldview presents a substantial affinity between the two writers. For instance, the Sea forms the background for both the authors and is used as a powerful symbolic device to influence their themes. The metaphor of voyage in an open, placid sea in major writings of both the authors presents an apt comparison. The Sea is
presented as an embodiment of challenges to man and at the same time a source of serene wisdom accumulated through the ages. The Sea also serves as a domain away from the land where the masculine culture finds an unrestricted freedom. The captains of ships representing the masculine authority and power exert their imperialist caprices in exploiting the weak sailors. Further, the Ship is used as a safe closet for homosocial relationships that, though a deviant form of sexuality in the Victorian standard, poses challenge to the heterosexual and patriarchal authority of the nineteenth century.

Although Ship is the main theatre of action in a many of the novels of both the authors and ship is feminized by both and seems to be a substitute for woman figures, there is a difference in treatment of the Ship by the two authors. For instance, the young captain in The Shadow-Line says:

Half an hour later, putting my foot on her deck for the first time, I received the feeling of deep physical satisfaction. Nothing could equal to fullness of that moment, the ideal completeness of that emotional experience which had come to me. (50)

Such intense love for the ship does not exist in Melville's works. Melville's ship is a means to exploit the resources and for productive activity. It is because while the merchant ship supplied the frame for activity. It is because while the merchant ship supplied the frame for Conrad's world, the whale ship was the right ambience for Melville's. Society in a merchant ship is predominantly a commercial one: the
ship has a definite destination; it leaves a port, with a sense of direction, to reach another port. But Melville's whaleships voyage chartlessly; they are not expected to return till they completely fill themselves with whale oil. Whaling made possible a community, a civilization; yet all the activity of the community was to promote a "transcendental "activity, a whale-hunt thousands of miles away; all the sections of society subserved the exploratory function of man. Basically, for Melville, the human society or group was that of hunter's one; and in visualizing the world thus, Melville is more primitive than Conrad. The dominant nature of human society is very explicit in Melville's ships. Though Conrad's world appears to be explorer one, in reality it is not so. The ivory in Heart of Darkness is not hunted, but snatched from the natives who possess it. It is this difference between a merchant ship and a whale ship that suggests to us why it is easier to see imperialistic strain in Conrad more than in Melville. Voyage has no geographical impact in Conrad's world, and for all his spiritual rejection of imperialism, Conrad politically could not detach himself from a race that was known for subjecting weaker to slavery and exploitations. But the geographical element in Melville makes imperialism an exploratory affair, thereby including the whole human community. Melville's imperialism can be well understood from the passage of Moby Dick.
And thus have these naked Nantucketers, these sea hermits, issuing from their ant-hills in the sea, overrun and conquered the watery worlds like so many Alexander's, parcelling out among them the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans, as the three pirate powers did Poland. Let America add Mexico to Texas, and pile Cuba upon Canada; let The English overswam all India, and hang out their blazing banner from the sun; two-thirds of this terraqueous globe are the Nantucketers. For the sea is his; he owns it, as emperors own Empires; other seamen having but a right of way through it. Merchant ships are but extension bridges; armed ones but floating forts; even pirates and privateers, though following the sea as highwaymen the road, they but plunder other ships, other fragments of the land like themselves, without seeking to draw their living from the bottomless deep itself. The Nantucketer, he alone resides and riots on the sea.... He lives on the sea, as prairie cocks in the prairie; he hides among the waves, he climbs them as chamois hunters climb the Alps. (158)

When the Nantucketer is likened to Alexander, it is not to suggest a subjugator but an exploratory, who can allow all humanity to share his exploratory or hunting experience. The whaleship Pequod, for example, carries representatives from all parts of the world. America itself, for Melville was a vast explorative unit.

Conrad always conceived of a human society where the authority is shared with the community though American type Democracy was not his preference. The merchant ship in Conrad's tales makes for such society. In fact, at an early stage, Britain was his ideal which he depicts as a vast ship of order.
The dark land lay alone in the midst of waters, like a mighty ship bestarred with vigilant lights - a ship carrying the burden of millions of lives - a ship freighted with dross and with jewels, with gold and with steel. She towered up immense and strong, guarding priceless traditions ... A great ship! For ages, had the ocean battered in vain her enduring sides; she was there when the world was vaster and darker, when the sea was great and mysterious, and ready to surrender the prize of fame to audacious men. A ship mother of fleets and nations! The great flagship of the race; stronger than the storms! And anchored in the open sea. (The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' 135)

For Conrad, order in a society did not mean stability due to a section of society exercising authority over the whole; it meant solidarity of community to counter the threat of meaninglessness, as well as the scope for every individual in society to exercise ethical authority. There is of course a hierarchy in a ship - as captain, chief mate, second mate etc. but there is also scope for the person like cook in The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' to provide coffee in the severe wind and when the whole ship is a mess. When the surprised crew asks him he says: “As long as she swims, I will cook!” The narrator comments on the cook:

He remained heroic. His saying - the slaying of his life - became proverbial in the mouths of men as are the sayings of conquerors of sages. Later, whenever one of us was puzzled by a task and advised to relinquish it, he would express his determination to persevere and to succeed by his words: ‘as soon as she swims I will cook!’ (31)
The structure in Melville’s society is, however, an exploratory one in which a charismatic leader wields traditional authority. According to Max Weber’s delineation of authority:

Genuine charismatic domination therefore knows no abstract legal codes and statutes and no formal way of adjudication. Its objective law emanates concretely from the highly personal experience of heavenly grace and from god-like strength of the hero. Hence its attitude is revolutionary and transvalues everything; it makes a sovereign break with all traditional or rational norms. (250)

According to Weber, the charismatic hero has faith in his extraordinary qualities. But their devotion is “born of distress and enthusiasm.” Such a hero appears at a time of social change, when the older order is to be challenged. The prophet and hunters are leaders of this sort. The self-knowledge, identity, or self-assertion of a member of such a community is derived from a principle which is beyond the boundaries of his community. Melville turns hunting into a metaphysical game in his fiction, *Moby Dick* and its main character, Ahab is a seeker of the absolute truth. His growth to heroic heights is because of his personal vision. He forces his will on the others. There are pairs of characters in Melville, which could be considered as doubles; like Ahab-Ishmael, Benito Cereno–Amasa Delano, Bartleby-the lawyer, etc. These doubles in Melville are metaphysical doubles whereas Conrad’s doubles are more psychological.
The dichotomy between power and knowledge that the hero like Ahab and Pierre can suggest was fully exploited by Melville to bring out his political dilemma. Although convinced of the value of democracy, Melville was sceptical of its victory. There seems to be a tension between democracy and authoritarianism in Melville, but he also found an inherent paradox in the nature of authority. Hence his characters like Ahab, Benito Cereno reveal that paradox.

Melville chose the whaleship to project the basic structure of human society as he saw it. The whaleship, in fact, suits as a setting for the dramatization of the conflict between authoritarianism and democracy. The conflict is inherent in the very frame of the ship. On the one hand, because a ship has representatives from all sections of life and of different nationalities, it makes for a democratic set up; it is a total society, a community. But once the ship enters the sea, the captain’s word reigns supreme; he is beyond any control of land, and in this way, authoritarianism can come to prevail on the ship. In a whaleship, this conflict can be sharper while in a merchant ship, the liberties and rights of the crew are not seriously endangered by authority, as the will of the captain here is necessarily the collective will of the crew. Further, in a man-of-war, the one chosen for the drama of *Billy Budd*, authority is absolute and discipline is imposed stringently curtailing rights of the crew. Thus the nature of the ship has also a meaning for both the authors.
Man in a societal group is the central thematic concern of Melville and Conrad. Melville in *Moby Dick* presents crew of a whaler, ranging from cannibals to ferocious Ahab. Similarly Conrad's characters in *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*; *Lord Jim*; *Heart of Darkness* are heterogeneous and present a microcosm where a clear picture emerges of their inherent contradictions.

Both Conrad and Melville fashioned their characters in similar manner. A study by Seltzer on the two characters such as Jackson in *Redburn* and Wait in *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* is interesting in that Jackson is the forerunner of Ahab, Taji and the Confidence-man while Wait is the type from which Conrad moulded Kurtz, Nostromo, Jim and Razumov. If Melville found passions and anguish of a traditional masculine character, Conrad saw in Wait the tensions of the 'ethical' hero.

Both Wait and Jackson are characterized by violent cough. Both of them too succumb to their sickness before the voyages are completed. They are sick certainly; but they use their sickness to tyrannise and confuse the crew, they successfully bewilder the sailors. The attitude of the crew to Jackson is strikingly similar to the crew's attitude to Wait in *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*. They intensely dislike Jackson, yet tenderly nurse him in every possible way. But Jackson "would sit scowling on them, and found fault with what they did". Like Wait, he abuses the very ones who cringingly look after him.
Coincidentally, the character who is most attached to Jackson, and most abused and snubbed by him is a strong, healthy sailor from Ireland, named Belfast; and Belfast also happens to be the name in *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’*, of the sailor most attentive to Wait and consequently the most abused by him. The similarity in the names apart, what is emphasized here is the similarity of characters and relations between them. Both Conrad and Melville were fascinated by the nature of domination which characters like Wait and Jackson exercised over representative weak sailors like Belfast.

Conrad’s characters derive their heroic authority from their relationship with truth. Marlow’s abhorrence of falsehood can be understood in the light of his statement:

You know I hate, detest, cannot bear a lie,...simply because it appals me. There is a taint of death,- a flavour of mortality in lies- which is exactly what I hate and detest in the world... ( *Heart of Darkness* 38-39)

Jim also bravely insists on public trial for the same reason. Similarly, Razumov makes heroic attempts to return to Existence through ethical means. By betraying Haldin, he had lost the power to “stand out” as a man:

I had neither the simplicity not the courage nor the self-possession to be a scoundrel, or an exceptionally able man. ( *Under Western Eyes* 365)
He “embraced the might of falsehood” and hence he tries to redeem himself by loving Natalia; he sees her as truth. This is the ontological truth that Razumov realizes:

In giving Victor Haldin up, it was myself, after all, whom I have betrayed most basely. (ibid 364)

Nostromo, similarly, degenerates himself because he gives himself to falsehood:

To do things by stealth humiliated him. And he suffered most from the concentration of his thought upon treasure.(523)

The characters of Melville, on the other hand, are forced to their roles of Prometheus. They try to encounter the threat to their existences through intense passion-love or hate.

What is most strikingly similar between these two authors is their perception of the hegemonic masculinity operating through their contemporary societies on the land and the sea to perpetuate hierarchical authority, patriarchy, ruthless dominance and exploitation of weaker segments of men and women. Under the guise of manly virtues glorified during their time, they locate an oppressive masculinist culture. It seems, the nineteenth century and early twentieth century social and cultural ethos demanded power, competency, efficiency and achievement in men to maintain productive behaviour expected of successful men. Hence hetero-
sexuality was a normative sexual preference. Masturbatory sexuality and any other deviance in the form of homosocial behaviour were proscribed. Women were looked upon as passive, submissive and subjective. The power structure operating in the scheme used to make an unusual demand of aggressive masculinity. The growing imperialism both in Britain and America in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, too, demanded this aggressive masculinity to augment their trades and commerce, expansionism and colonization. The hypocrisy inherent in the racial superiority of the British and American culture to justify colonization also promoted these masculine values.

In fact, the early nineteenth century provided a fertile environment for an expansive American manhood. So true is also the case of British manhood. Geographic expansion, establishment of new colonies, the pacification of their native population and the resultant dramatic growth in economy gave further impetus to their masculine creed. The whaling industry in America also stood for that productive activity. However, as the time passed towards modernity and social and political order changed with growing democratic ideals, there was a perception that their supposedly natural male roles and prerogatives were not somehow rooted in the human condition and that, they were instead determined by a complex set of relationships subject to change and decay.
Against this socio-cultural backdrop, Melville and Conrad attempted to decode the contemporary male mystique through their fictional constructions in various characters and interrogated the traditional notion associated with masculinity. Both of them make consistent assault on the Victorian and post-Victorian masculinity and also replaced the idealised heterosexual and productive behaviour from their fictions by male-male relationships. Both of them were convinced that dominant mode of masculinity constructs a hierarchy in sexual politics and the homosexuals are subordinated as inferior in the same way as women are. Homophobia operates in such system to reinforce the repressive heterosexual dominance to perpetuate a masculine power. The nineteenth century American authors like Whitman and Melville believed that heterosexuality perpetuated male dominance and property relationships. Hence they encouraged emotional attachments between men to eliminate inequality. Melville seems to have posited love between men as a response to isolation experienced in the ships, as a tool to question the patriarchal values and as a potential vehicle for the creation of more egalitarian societies. He possessed an insight that recognized the links between sexuality and structures of power. He was also aware of the fact that human affection is undermined in the name of authority and love is suppressed by power. Hence he used the male couple as democratic union of equals and potentially subversive force against a society of
male heterosexual domination which could serve as the basis for a new social organization. Fraternity is seen by him as an alternative to egotism. His fictions such as Redburn, Moby Dick and Billy Budd very explicitly depict homosexuality as sexual preferences. However, in Billy Budd he shows how the patriarchal authority in a homophobic strategy executes Billy, the innocent sailor, unjustly implicating him with the charge of mutiny. Although, Melville could not envision an alternative to the grim picture of the society without a viable model of male friendship, he has taken up the problematic of masculinity in which he presents how power depends on the suppression of eros by the masculine authority. Similarly, Harry Bolton in Redburn is victimized by the crew for his feminine charm and homosexual preference.

Further, the homosocial ambience is also explicit in Moby Dick where Ishmael and Queequeg forge a fraternal bond with obvious purpose of upholding love against the oppressive regime of Ahab, the monomaniac Captain of the Ship they board. Similar is the situation in Typee, theearliest of his fiction.

In their “hearts’ honeymoon,” Queequeg and Ishmael unwr apy many of the cultural fears that prevent communication across the boundaries of race and culture. Although presented in a tone of comic exaggeration, the wedding of Ishmael and Queequeg as a symbolic miscegenation that strikes the heart of American and western history.
possesses real potential to undercut a system of authority. One of the most daring insights of Melville in *Moby Dick* is the recognition of homophobia as a force linked to racism and required by patriarchal society just as much as the suppression of women. Melville deliberately places the scene of racial and sexual harmony prior to the death-drive that was to take place on Pequod. Melville strongly believed that democratic potential is threatened not so much by a assertion of traditional political authority as by the persistence of structures of hierarchy and abuse in a democratic culture or by the capacity of democratic culture to spawn monsters like Ahab, demagogues who play upon the weakness of the mob. The “elevated” language of Ahab that operates with a motivation demanding participation and forced assent of the listeners those who are weak, is emblematic of masculine authority.

The chapter “A Squeeze of the Hand” in *Moby Dick* clearly aimed at social harmony in mutual masturbation. The passage derives its transgressive power in part from the moral purity campaign of the mid-nineteenth century that sought to suppress all eroticism, including masturbation, seen in economic term as “spending” or wasting of sperm. Melville obviously imagines of a scene of reclaimed fraternity that might diffuse the tension of the death drive on board. Throughout Melville’s work, masturbation plays an essential role in male sexuality. The use of masturbation is intended partly to his
search for a non-aggressive phallicism and partly to a response to
cultural pressure against masturbation as a dangerous and non-
productive sexuality. Caught up in the erotic sensations, he finds
forgetting the "horrible oath" of vengeance obtained by Ahab. If Ahab
symbolised all masculine authority accumulated in him, the male
friendship is imagined as offering an opportunity for resistance to it.
Melville consistently viewed that the patriarchal authority destroys the
phallicism of the matriarchy as dangerous sign of free sexual play and
tamed male sexuality. An abstract authority of putative fathers, he
believes, takes the place of the orgiastic celebration of the phallus and
its playfulness. The circumcision or castration enacted in the book
stands for that cultural disempowerment.

Analysing the aspect of homosexuality in Pierre, James Creech
is of opinion that the novel's concern for the father's sexuality and the
apparently repentant incest represent a transfer of "guilt for
homosexual desire" to other crimes. Pierre's one sexual transgression
can stand in for another, and what is most often at stake is a
transgression against patriarchy. The desire for purity, for the
expiation of the sins of the father, can only lead to his other sins. The
language used by Melville to describe the adolescent friendship of the
two cousins, Pierre and Glen and allusion to Shakespeare's sonnet 144
also indicates the presence of different kind of love. The Good Angel
and the Bad angel are to be understood not only as innocence and
experience but even more as homosexual and heterosexual. Again, as Newton Arvin points out Pierre's desire to "preserve the incestuous bond with his father by uniting himself to this mysterious girl who... strongly resembles that parent" also implies homosexual desire.

Melville's final sustained treatment of power and desire comes in *Billy Budd*. As a contemporary of Freud by the time he wrote the novella, Melville sees his villain Claggart as repressed homosexual whose desire for Billy is converted into a false accusation against him. The difference in status and power work against any transgressive potential and place the men in a feminized position of powerless passivity. Melville intended to posit the homosexuality as a threat to masculinist authority in a complex way in *Billy Budd*. His principal concern is to suggest the ways in which a potential for love, "but for fate and ban", is misdirected in homophobic order into jealousy and hatred. Claggart acts out the homophobia of self-hatred. In Foucauldian term, the discipline imposed by Captain Vere is also an act of asserting the masculine over the feminine. This is how, the theme of the masculinist power and desire is dramatised in many of Melville's novels to reveal the complexity operating behind it.

The comparison with Conrad becomes apt when the strategy of representation of homosexuality is explored in his fictions vis-a-vis Melville's works. In favouring male-male relationships over traditional heterosexuality, Conrad also attempted a representation of men that
accepts deviant forms of masculinity. Conrad in his modernist approach challenged the gender ideology of the nineteenth century. His literary assault on Victorian masculinity is clearly reflected in the works like *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim* and *The Secret Sharer*.

In *Heart of Darkness*, apart from the constraint of role strain of Kurtz in maintaining imperialist manly culture, another relevant aspect that is in the focus of gender critics recently has been indeed of great import to the understanding of masculinity operating in the text. It concerns a story told by one man to a group of men with whom he feels a close bond, a bond necessary for them to understand his story, although he nevertheless feels part of it cannot be communicated. His story concerns his growing fascination, disgust and identification for another man, centred on his realization that this man has been involved in taboo practices about which the story-teller (Marlow) will not be specific. This realization creates, at least in the mind of the story-teller, an enduring intimacy with the other man, despite his death, and intimacy involving the sharing of a graceful yet exciting knowledge from which the dead man’s fiancée must be protected.

The rhetorical and symbolic structures of Conrad’s novella constantly evoke discourses of sexual knowledge and ignorance, which, as Sedgwick shows, focused with particular intensity at that period on a crisis of heterosexual/homosexual definition. The male homosocial relations which are prominent at all levels of *Heart of
Darkness are structured by this crisis, just as they are structured by the denial of power and utterance to woman and by the economics of empire. In terms of the politics of literary interpretation, to neglect a reading of the text in terms of homosexual desire would be to repeat the process of exclusion and denial which have been so prominent in the discourse of male sexuality, just as to read the text’s overt marginalization of woman as merely social realism is to replicate a sexist discourse, and to defend the text’s representation of Africa on the grounds that Africa is used here only as a symbol of the European psyche is to replicate a racist discourse.

The central instance in the story of the structuring of homosocial relations by the problematic of homosexual/heterosexual definition is the doubling between Kurtz and Marlow, which has been extensively discussed by critics. Doubles are a recurrent feature of Conrad’s fiction, crucial to the symbolic meaning of this and other stories, most notably The Secret Sharer and Under Western Eyes. In the triangular situation which exists in Marlow’s mind after Kurtz’s death and specially during the scene with the Intended, there is a notable confusion between identification and desire. His fantasy that he possesses Kurtz, body and soul, is also a fantasy of being Kurtz, echoing as it does Kurtz’s own obsessional possessiveness:
All that had been Kurtz’s had passed out my hands: his soul, his body, his station, his plans, his ivory, his career. There remained only his memory and his Intended. *(Heart of Darkness 180)*

You should have heard him say, ‘My ivory’...My Intended, My ivory, my station, my river, my –‘everything belonged to him. It made me hold my breath in expectation of hearing the wilderness burst into a prodigious peal of laughter... Everything belonged to him– but that was a trifle. The thing was to know what he belonged to. *(ibid 153)*

There is an obvious ambiguity about Marlow’s wish to surrender ‘his memory’. The critics raise doubts about whose memory that is referred to here. Whether it is Marlow’s memory of Kurtz, or Kurtz’s own memory? Marlow’s oblique reference to his memory lost in the oblivion implies his possessiveness about Kurtz:

All that had been Kurtz’s had passed out of my hands: his soul, his body, his station, his plans, his ivory, his career. There remained only his memory and his Intended– and I wanted to give that up, too, to the past, in a way– to surrender personally all that remained of him with me to that oblivion which is the last word of our common fate. *(155)*

What is most striking here is perhaps the extent of Marlow’s identification with Kurtz, combined with a fantasy of possessing him, body and soul.

Telling stories about someone is not the usual way of consigning them to oblivion: the Intended is surrendered, less to the ‘oblivion’ than to Marlow’s fantasies about her and to his male
listeners. This brings the readers back to the nature of male bonds in *Heart of Darkness*. Nina Pelikan Straus argues that:

In *Heart of Darkness* women are used to deny, distort, and censor men's passionate love for one another. Projecting his own love on to the form of the Intended, Marlow is able to conceal from himself the dark complexity of his own love—a love that strikes him with horror— for Kurtz. (134)

If we follow Straus in seeing Marlow's fascination with Kurtz in terms of desire between men which excludes women from a secret knowledge, this is not necessarily to say that the story is primarily about repressed homosexual desire. Rather the argument is that the relationship between Marlow and Kurtz takes place within a whole matrix of inter-male relationships involving competitiveness, desire, bonding, the sharing and appropriation of power and knowledge, and that this matrix of relations has characteristically functioned in modern western society through the setting up of powerful barriers between sexual and other forms of inter-male relationships. Women, by functioning as objects of exchange (literal or psychic) and of shared desire, have been used to maintain such a barrier, male desire being channelled through women. This involves the exclusion of women from the subject positions of power, knowledge and desire. They are established as that which is desired, that which is the object of knowledge, that which is exchanged or controlled.
However, an interpretation of *Heart of Darkness* in terms of male homosexual desire can undoubtedly be made, building on Straus’s article. The secret knowledge which Marlow and Kurtz come to share, the metaphors of transgression, a boundary with which Marlow glosses the relationship of this knowledge to death, the ‘unspeakable rites’ which Kurtz has practised, all have distinctively sexual overtones within the discourse of sexuality/knowledge that Sedgwick identifies in late nineteenth-century Europe.

The harlequin tells Marlow that he and Kurtz ‘talked everything...of love too’. Kurtz is said to have ‘lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts’ (131); there was something wanting in him’ (131); ‘he was hollow at the core’ (131); he is an ‘atrocious phantom’ (133)... possessed by ‘diabolic love and ...unearthly hate’ and of course, in his own words, ‘the horror!’(149). It is in sexual terms, as well as in terms of imperialist exploitation, that the darkness which Marlow imagines he finds in Africa is reflected back into the hearts of colonial culture inhabited by Marlow and his respectable male listeners.

Sedgwick’s perception that the emergence in the nineteenth century of a definition of the ‘homosexual’ in terms of sameness offered a way of concealing and expressing same sex desire through images of self-love, opens the possibility of alternative interpretations of many of the pairs of male doubles that are found in Conrad’s works.
In the case of Heart of Darkness, Marlow’s placing of the Intended as one of Kurtz’s possessions, comparable to the ivory in which he traded, is revealed as part of an economy of repressed same sex desire, complicit with both the structures of patriarchy and with the economics of empire. This link is elucidated by Irigaray:

The use of and traffic in women subtend and uphold the reign of masculine hom(m)o-sexuality, even while they maintain that hom(m)o-sexuality in speculations, mirror games, identifications, and more or less rivalrous appropriations, which defer its real practice... The exchange of women as goods accompanies and stimulates exchanges of other ‘wealth’ among groups of men. (172)

Heart of Darkness, then, suggests a possible symbolic structure or paradigm in which the key terms are: women, men, knowledge or truth, confession or revelation, lying or concealment. This structure recurs in many of Conrad’s works, although with variation.

The gendered circulation of knowledge is also notably found in Under Western Eyes. The basic paradigm is one in which knowledge, both literal knowledge of particular facts and events and existential knowledge, is sought, shared, competed for and otherwise circulated among groups of men, male narrators, male narratees and implied male readers. This circulation involves and is facilitated by the exclusion of women from such knowledge, combined with a tendency to identify them symbolically with it. The women represent the truth,
particularly ungraspable metaphysical truth, but they do not possess it. Another way of putting this would be to say that the exclusion of women from the space within which men's knowledge circulates encourages the identification of the truth 'beyond, ultimate or unattainable truth, with the feminine.

The possibility of women gaining possession of knowledge usually exists as a focus of fear and desire. In many texts of Conrad, the truth is somehow revealed to an important female character, or such a revelation is threatened. These moments are moments of crisis, often identified with violence and death. Marlow's lie to the Intended in *Heart of Darkness*, Razumonov's confession to Natalia Haldin in *Under Western Eyes* and Nostromo's confession to Mrs Gould in the deathbed are glaring instances. Each of these events is followed or preceded by death or violence. In each of these texts, this moment threatens to disrupt a pattern of knowledge circulating exclusively among men. When such disruption takes place, it threatens the death of a masculine heterosexual self.

In *Under Western Eyes*, as in *Heart of Darkness*, there is an idealised figure of a beautiful young woman, from whom the truth of a male crime must be kept secret. However, here the concealment becomes unbearable to the man who knows of that crime. Hence there is double confession, to Natalia Haldin and to the Russian revolutionaries. It is the latter confession which, in literal and realistic
terms, leads to the deafening and crippling of Razumov. Nevertheless, symbolically this punishment, leading to his anticipated early death, seems to confirm the taboo established in *Heart of Darkness* on the passing of male secrets to a woman. The parallel with *Heart of Darkness* is evident when Natalia hopes to learn from Razumov some of her brother's last words, just as the Intended asks Marlow for Kurtz's last words. The crime of Razumov was the betrayal of Natalia's brother to torture and execution at the hands of the Russian state. But critics have a suspicion if there was some transgression in sexual conduct with Haldin that he was preparing to confess. Some believe that Razumov's desire in relation to Victor Haldin seems primarily one of identification: the desire to be him, or to be in his place. Hence the Conradian theme of the double operates between Razumov and Haldin to a great extent. Thus like *Heart of darkness, Under Western Eyes*, is a fiction about men's knowledge and understanding of themselves and other men, and the ways in which such knowledge circulates, articulating relationships between men. Again women serve as objects of male competitiveness and as such mediate relationships between men. Though less about masculinist ideology, it is more able to explore and question it.

Another aspect of gendered reading of works of both Melville and Conrad that brings them together is the interrelationship of gender and imperialism. Some critics and historians, such as Ronlad
Hyam have seen imperial expansion as an outlet for excess male sexual energy or as a sublimation of sexuality. Stoler herself sees imperial sexuality in Foucauldian terms, as part of a mechanism for the regulation of social identity. Sander Gilman argues that sexuality, as most salient marker of otherness, is likely to figure in any racist ideology. He demonstrates that in the iconography of the nineteenth century, "the white man's burden"...becomes his sexuality and its control, and it is in this that is transferred into the need to control the sexuality of the Other, the Other as sexualized female.

In *Lord Jim*, the principal male bond evoked is explicitly a professional code in an idealized form, identified by Marlow when he claims Jim as 'one of us'. This bond implicates gender and race in that the code is associated exclusively with European males. This bond is sanctified by moments of male intimacy which transcend professionalism and reach uneasily for the metaphysical:

There was a moment of real and profound intimacy, unexpected and short-lived like a glimpse of some everlasting, of some saving truth. (241)

At the time of Marlow's parting from Jim in Patusan, the emotional intensity displayed between the two also indicate this intimacy very clearly.
and Conrad, a pattern emerges in which both the novelists are found to have inflected the gender code of their time to combat the evils of the society. Both of them constructed their fictional works around the idea of a fundamental aggressive drive in western culture that had led to great acts of daring but had also led to the destruction of human values and the suppression of the entire feminine side of the culture.

In the culture of growing capitalism and imperial expansion, the subordination of women by men, of coloured nations by white and nature by culture were the trends which struck the imagination of these sensitive authors. Hence one of the strategies common to both of them was to posit male-male relationship as an alternative to the ideology of aggressive male domination of the nineteenth and twentieth century society. Although it was not the subject per se of these authors, they have adopted it as a strategy to challenge the hegemonic masculinity operating in the structure of power of their time through this cultural counterforce. Both of them have also located a close nexus between masculinity and the imperial values, class hierarchy, racial superiority; and subverted those ideals through the portrayal of their characters. The major fictions of Melville and Conrad apparently present phallocentric masculinity where the presence of phallus stands for the masculine identity; but interestingly, both these authors through their use of irony problematize the notion of masculinity only to reveal that such masculine identity is not
coherent and stable. The characters drawn both from Melville and Conrad such as Ahab, Taji, Claggart, Pierre Jim, Charles Gould, Nostromo and Razumov have eventually revealed their incoherence as manly figures and they have proved to be the hollow men. Imagining to be the leaders and moulders of events, they discover themselves to be the tools of impersonal and often destructive forces.

This comparative study corroborates the hypothesis that masculinity, in fact, is merely a psychic structure, a fantasy, a code of behaviour or a set of social practices and constraints rather than a reality. Masculinity as an ideal has inherent contradictions and Melville and Conrad have artistically exposed this paradox in their works.