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CONRAD AND LYING

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Abstract: Conrad's attitude to lying appears to be unequivocally critical. Closer inspection reveals, however, that his approach is more complex. Writing about his life he intended to present it as coherent and ordered, with nothing left to chance and everything imbued with meaning. Thus white lies, compromises with the truth, half-truths, wishful thinking, and so on, are treated by Conrad as simply human.

In his books Conrad presents different varieties of lying, and although he does not claim that lying is always wrong he proves that people are always responsible for the consequences of their lie and must bear such consequences. Some lies are noble, harmless or redemptive, bringing good, while some are destructive and corrupting. The most dangerous is self-delusion. The consequences that man has to face in case of such a lie are unexpected and irreversible.

Keywords: Joseph Conrad, lying, white lies, half-truths, wishful thinking, self-delusion

At first glance Conrad's attitude to lying appears to be unequivocally critical. Closer inspection reveals, however, that his approach is more complex. This is best illustrated by two quotations, one from his correspondence; the other from his novella *Heart of Darkness*.

In one of his letters Conrad writes:

> As to my view of life, it is contained in my books which are the sincere expression of my thoughts and feelings. But I have formulated no doctrine either for my own use or for the information of the world. I respect courage, truth, fidelity, self-restraint and devotion to the ancient ideals of mankind; and am sorry that, like most men, I fail in the practice of these simple virtues.[1]

While writing this Conrad was probably reflecting on his own life, and situations in which he himself misrepresented the truth, for the sake of correspondent or interlocutor; or when he wanted his friends, acquaintances or readers to believe that he thought along the same lines and shared their values and views, or to express an opinion the addressee would expect. This would occur when, as a young man, he

[1] Joseph Conrad to Tadaichi Hidaka, 11 July 1911, in *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, vol. 4, eds. Frederic R. Karl and Laurence Davies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 457.

wrote to his uncle, Tadeusz Bobrowski, explaining his lack of money or other troubles he was in some ways mendacious, in order to spare his guardian's feelings, or to gain an advantage which, in other circumstances, he would not have enjoyed. This may also have been the case when, as a mature artist, he wrote to his publisher promising to finish the books he was writing quickly or explaining delays in supplying further texts.

The same happens when Conrad, as an adult writes about his adolescence, explaining his youthful choices in *A Personal Record*, which is both autobiographical and belletristic; in fact he neither lies nor tells the truth. I think Zdzisław Najder's comment on this book as "a splendid piece of personal mythology"[2] is the best way to characterise Conrad's statement that:

> The truth of the matter is that my faculty to write in English is as natural as any other aptitude with which I might have been born. I have a strange and overpowering feeling that it had always been an inherent part of myself. English was for me neither a matter of choice nor adoption. The merest idea of choice had never entered my head. And as to adoption – well, yes, there was adoption; but it was I who was adopted by the genius of the language, which directly I came out of the stammering stage made me its own… All I can claim after all those years of devoted practice, with the accumulated anguish of its doubts, imperfections and falterings in my heart, is the right to be believed when I say that if I had not written in English I would not have written at all.[3]

And then in *A Personal Record*:

> … I could have found a ship much nearer my native place, but I had thought to myself that if I was to be a seaman then I would be a British seaman and no other. It was a matter of deliberate choice.[4]

Conrad intended, with the benefit of hindsight, to present his life as coherent and ordered, with nothing left to chance and everything imbued with meaning. His choices were shown as unusually well considered and consistently implemented. And anything happening without his intention, such as his writing in English, was destiny, something not decided upon independently, but something simply granted to him.

Such lies: white lies, compromises with the truth, half-truths, wishful thinking, and so on, are treated by Conrad as simply human, so that he personally treated them quite leniently, as useful means to gain benefits or avoid annoyances: "I respect […] truth, […] and am sorry that, like most men, I fail in the practice of [this] simple virtue." Such lies do not hurt anyone, in fact, these are half-lies.

However, in *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow, frequently perceived as Conrad's *porte parole*, is far less understanding when it comes to liars and lying, remarking: "You know I hate, detest, and can't bear a lie, not because I am straighter than the rest of

[2] Zdzisław Najder, *Conrad in Perspective. Essays on Art and Fidelity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 104.

[3] Joseph Conrad, "Author's Note" to *A Personal Record* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 4-5.

[4] Conrad, *A Personal Record*, p. 106.

us, but simply because it appals me. There is a taint of death, a flavour of mortality in lies – which is exactly what I hate and detest in the world – what I want to forget."[5]

Though, after taking such a firm stand for the truth, Marlow himself lies to Kurtz's intended about her beloved's last words. He lies and is surprised that nothing has happened:

> "The last word he pronounced was – your name" […] It seemed to me that the house would collapse before I could escape, that the heavens would fall upon my head. But nothing happened. The heavens do not fall for such a trifle. Would they have fallen, I wonder, if I had rendered Kurtz that justice which was his due? Hadn't he said he wanted only justice? But I couldn't. I could not tell her. It would have been too dark—too dark altogether […].[6]

Why does this occur? How can such inconsistency in Marlow's behaviour be understood? Why is it that Marlow, while firmly condemning the lie, resorts to it himself at the end? To answer these questions, it is necessary to examine how Conrad – the writer and the man ooked at the question of lying and how his attitude had been shaped over time. To explain this, it is essential to travel back to his early childhood. Until the age of seventeen Conrad grew up in circumstances in which lying was not perceived as something reprehensible: in certain situations, it became necessary, even a matter of survival. A credible lie was a ticket to freedom, but in case of discovery the outcome could be devastating: imprisonment or even loss of life.

For the first seventeen years of his life, from birth, Conrad experienced the unconditional love of his parents and the support of his friends and family, and at the same time witnessed the repression of his family and compatriots by the Tsarist authorities, and suffered the fear and hardship of exile.

When Conrad was born in 1857, Poland existed only in the memory of Poles, as a spiritual phenomenon, a spectre. In the territories of the Russian Partition a very restrictive Russification policy was introduced, with severe repression and persecution, involving forfeiture of properties belonging to the Polish nobility, removal of the Polish language from schools and offices, erosion of Polish culture and all traces of patriotism. From the beginning of his life, Conrad (then little Konrad), observed his parents' commitment to Poland and their devotion to Polish culture and tradition, and attempts to keep their activities secret. He witnessed the tricks that his parents used to hide how they worked for liberation.

When Conrad's father was arrested in Warsaw, Konradek, not yet five years old, visited him with his mother in the Citadel. When Conrad's parents were put on trial for conspiracy, as confirmed by Ewelina's letters to her husband, they both denied everything and the boy, at the time with his family, was a silent witness to such life-saving lies, which neither helped nor managed to protect his family. Like any child, he sensed every mood and subconsciously absorbed all the emotions of the people around him:

[5] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, in *Heart of Darkness and Other Stories*, Introduction and Notes by Gene M. Moore (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1999), p. 54.

[6] Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, p. 105.

Korzeniowski, while interrogated, brazenly and obstinately refused to admit the truth, and his wife denied even her own handwriting when she was shown, as circumstantial evidence, her letters written to her husband, full of suggestive expressions; however, considering that the letters from his wife and other documents and manuscripts of rebellious content found at his place show that he was one of the most zealous anti-authority activists, and that his wife most likely participated in all his actions […].[7]

Conrad realised the ambiguous, relative nature of the concept of the truth from his earliest years. While he was aware that following the rule that telling the truth is a duty, he understood that it may bring disastrous consequences. Lying is in principle bad, but sometimes it can literally save someone's life. Thus, he did not perceive a lie as something utterly evil, regrettable, but as a means to achieve something, a tool to be used very carefully. A lie could be good or evil depending on the ends it serves. The same can be said about telling the truth. I am convinced that Conrad would agree with Benjamin Constant's opinion expressed in "On Political Reaction" (1797), in which he challenged Immanuel Kant's view on lying[8]. Constant wrote:

> It is a duty to tell the truth. The concept of duty is inseparable from the concept of right. A duty is that on the part of one being which corresponds to the rights of another. Where there are no rights, there are no duties. To tell the truth is therefore a duty, but only to one who has a right to the truth. But no one has a right to a truth that harms others.[9]

Conrad was aware of how dark and pernicious a force a lie can become when it is not uttered "against evil" but from low, selfish motives, or to defend "material interests."

I now survey some of Conrad's works, to describe all the shades of lies that can be found in them, and to explain why Marlow, who so much hates lying lies himself…

Conrad devotes most time to mendacity as a destructive element that can undo all plans and turn against the protagonist, who has committed a lie "against the good," for evil or mistaken motives, against other people or out of greed, revenge or jealousy.

In his greatest works we can find histories of a lying: in most cases, fatal lies. There are two kinds or categories of such lies: those in which characters lie to others (outward lying), and those in which they try to deceive themselves. The second kind is, according to Conrad, much worse, because it leads to psychological disintegration, loss of the sense of life, complete disaster. Its most dangerous form is self-delusion. The consequences to be faced in such cases are not only unexpected but irreversible. And, as Marlow says in *Lord Jim*, "…it is always the unexpected that happens."[10] Protagonists who attempt to deceive not others but initially themselves,

[7] Najder, *Conrad in Perspective*, p. 30.

[8] Constant expresses here his opinion on lying, although, he, as many others, "seriously misinterpreted" Kant's philosophical interpretation: see Helga Varden, "Kant and Lying to the Murderer at the Door… One More Time: Kant's Legal Philosophy and Lies to Murderers and Nazis," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 41, no. 4 (2010).

[9] Qtd. in Varden, "Kant and Lying to the Murderer at the Door," p. 104.

[10] Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim: A Tale* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1994), p. 76.

by rejecting the principles and values they should follow, or the truth they do not intend to accept, must confront unexpected outcomes, including their own reactions.

Lying to oneself runs through Conrad from start to finish and has two manifestations: there is self-deception, arising from within (delusion) and mistaken notions absorbed from without (illusion). The former is evident at once in *Almayer's Folly*, actually implied in the title. Almayer is lying to himself about his own status and the situation of his daughter, which is generated by his false ideas about her and colonial society, so could be called an illusion.

Every item of the Conrad oeuvre can be examined in this way. *Lord Jim* is one of the greatest studies in European literature of self-deception and the subsequent effort to deny its occurrence, leading eventually to an action which can be taken as redemptive or as an extension of the delusion.

In *The Secret Agent* Verloc's mendacity is outward, and double: he is deceiving Winnie and the other supposed anarchists and also deceiving his spymasters into thinking he is a worthwhile agent. His self-deception lies in his concept of himself as a worthy husband and stepfather, though he has no hesitation about endangering Stevie. Winne is the interesting figure in the novel, because her higher purpose, the welfare of her brother, rides over all other considerations to the point of her refusing to entertain them at all. She does not so much lie to herself as shield herself from the truth, raising a whole new concept of self-deception. As with *Almayer's Folly* the title indicates the theme of deception, lying, evading the truth.

In 'The Secret Sharer,' the captain engages in outward deception in concealing Leggatt, and seems to be doing so because he considers Leggatt's murder of the recalcitrant seaman was justified, even necessary so over-riding any legal or moral considerations. It is also a form of self-deception.

The clash of regulation and human solidarity is found in *Chance,* in the manner of Powell's gaining his becoming an officer on Captain Anthony's ship. Anthony himself, with another nice Conrad irony, hesitates to approach Flora out of a mistaken notion of chivalry which is tantamount to an illusion absorbed from outside himself but adopted to become a delusion.

Heyst's removal of Lena to a solipsistic existence, follows from his evident delusion and illusion about her and the consequence of forming their liaison. His failure to understand the upshot is a fatal self-deception.

This suggests that involvement with another human being at once introduces the possibility of betrayal. To love is to be at once poised on the verge of deception. The emotion its very self may be the source of betrayal. The marriages in Conrad are equivocal in these terms: the Goulds, the Verlocs and the Fynes.

Lying seems usually to carry with it the inevitability of betrayal in one form or another.

Charles Gould's compromising with the corruption necessary to continue with the mine is a betrayal of his marriage with Emilia, because it requires the withholding of the truth, the concealment which vitiates any relationship dependent on honesty and plain dealing.

Thus, in Conrad's works there are many liars, but I shall consider four, who are, I believe, the most significant in showing what lying meant to Conrad and explaining why Marlow, who abhors lying, betrays his own convictions and lies to Kurtz's intended. These figures are: Razumov, the protagonist of *Under Western Eyes*; Giovanni Battista Fidanza in *Nostromo;* Captain Whalley, in "The End of the Tether"; and Peyrol, the main character in *The Rover*.

Razumov, a natural son of Prince K and an archpriest's daughter, "officially and in fact without a family"[11] dreams of a respectable status and aspires to become "somebody" in the social hierarchy. Thus, a silver medal, an essay prize sponsored by the Ministry of Education appears to him a guarantee of his success, for "distinction would convert the label Razumov into an honoured name."[12] He will do anything to win this prize, not realising that with such calculation he is leading himself into a trap. When Haldin deceived by his reserve appears in his rooms revealing the reason he is there, Razumov's only thought is: "There goes my silver medal."[13] And from this moment on Razumov lies. He lies to Haldin and Haldin's sister and mother, the revolutionaries, but most of all he lies to himself, convincing himself that by betraying Haldin he acts as a true Russian patriot. But instead of feeling proud of his deed, Razumov is tormented by remorse. Haldin haunts him and he realises nothing will be the same and that there is no return to his life before Haldin's visit.

Gradually Razumov's personality disintegrates. He realises this twice. First, when Councillor Mikulin asks him where he wants to escape to, he see there is no return to his previous life "things […] were all changed, subtly and provokingly."[14] Second, when he talks to Natalie after Ziemianitch's suicide, the moment when he could remain an impostor, as there is no one now to tell the truth about his conduct except himself. Despite lying to Mrs Haldin, he is unable to lie to Natalie, at the moment she removes her veil. At this climax he understands that: "A man's real life is that accorded to him in the thoughts of other men by reason of respect or natural love."[15] Razumov says: "in giving Victor Haldin up, it was myself after all, whom I have 'betrayed most basely.'"[16] As Arnold Davidson comments: "Recognition comes with the removal of the veil. When he really sees Natalia, Razumov also begins to perceive how much he has misled himself, how little he understood his own desires, and how he is the one he "betrayed most basely."[17] In Razumov's case, the truth proved to be liberation: "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8: 32). Razumov

[11] Joseph Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, Introduction by Cedric Watts (London: David Campbell Publishers, 1991), p. 10.

[12] Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, p. 14.

[13] Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, p. 17.

[14] Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, p. 372.

[15] Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, p. 14.

[16] Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, p. 10.

[17] Arnold E. Davidson, "Deluded Vision in Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*," *International Fiction Review* 4, no. 1 (1977), p. 26.

writes to Natalie: "The truth shining in you drew the truth out of me."[18] Although he "was crippled, ill getting weaker every day"[19] he found peace and serenity in the end.

Razumov is a special case, in that his solipsistic existence renders him devoid of any human solidarity, so that his betrayal of Haldin is, ironically, the first human response he has shown to another human being's situation. It is, indeed, through the betrayal that he enters the world of human relationships, his remorse being the first emotion he has experienced derived from his conduct towards another.

Davidson is right in writing about the irony and deluded vision in Conrad's novel. It is also worth noting that Razumov is punished for his treachery by Nikita, who is also a betrayer among the revolutionaries, and that Razumov, who thinks that by confessing the truth he will be independent of anyone, can only exist thanks to the succour of others. This does not vitiate the fact that by confessing the truth Razumov regains his peace of mind.

Nostromo (Giovanni Battista Fidanza) also thinks only about his social status, and aspires to be seen as exceptional and irreplaceable. For such a valuation he is willing to sacrifice much, not only the truth. He follows "the pseudo-Cartesian formula 'They speak well of me; therefore they think well of me, therefore I am a great man."[20] He is perceived by Europeans as "our man," as his nicknames suggest (Nostromo – Italian phrase "nostro uomo"). "Fidanza" is trust or confidence in Italian. But he is not "theirs" but his own and thinks only of his reputation and self-image. Living by the admiration of others he becomes a slave to his vanity.

When he gets the mission to save the silver of the mine, nothing else matters to him. He fails to fulfil Teresa's dying request to bring a priest and leaves her in despair. When it turns out that the Europeans are able to come to terms with his death and the loss of the silver, he is disillusioned and realises he has been treated instrumentally: he has been "a dupe rather than an admired and respected man"[21] and plans his revenge. He decides to take possession of the silver, lies, saying that it was lost.

As with Razumov, the personality of Nostromo, who immerses himself in a lie, disintegrates, and the Capataz de Cargadores becomes the greatest victim of his own lie. In the end he deceives his friends: the old Garibaldino, Linda and Giselle. His life becomes a sham, "Mistaken for an undesirable suitor of Giselle's (which in fact he is), he is shot down like a thief (which indeed he is also)…"[22] He falls into the trap he has set for himself by trusting his entire life to his ego and "material interests." Nostromo finds no solace; he dies whilst feeling deluded; he has sacrificed all that was valuable for illusions, wealth, material interests, and at the last moment he longs for trust and understanding, but the truth will not make him free. As Conrad expresses it, "in the bewildered conviction of having been betrayed, of dying betrayed he

[18] Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, p. 451.

[19] Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, p. 473.

[20] Josiane Paccaud-Huget, "Betrayal and Corruptible Values in 'Nostromo,'" *L'Epoque Conradienne*, no. 20 (1994), p. 30.

[21] Michael Weston, *Morality and the Self* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975), p. 78.

[22] Jacques Berthoud, *Joseph Conrad: The Major Phase* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 126

hardly knows by what or by whom."[23] He dies defeated by his own lie and his death "is nothing less than a vindication of myth: he dies, like the legendary gringos, enslaved by the buried treasure, under the primeval curse."[24]

Captain Whaley is another example of a liar, at first glance, he seems to be acting in this way for noble reasons, but a closer analysis contradicts such an assessment.

> […] Henry Whalley, otherwise Dare-devil Harry—Whalley of the Condor, a famous clipper in her day. […] Fifty years at sea, and forty out in the East […] had made him honourably known to a generation of shipowners and merchants in all the ports from Bombay clear over to where the East merges into the West upon the coast of the two Americas. His fame remained writ, not very large but plain enough, on the Admiralty charts. […] Nothing could rob him of this kind of fame. […] He had never lost a ship or consented to a shady transaction; and he had lasted well, outlasting in the end the conditions that had gone to the making of his name.[25]

The Captain who experienced "the fellowship of the craft" and "the strong bond of the sea" sacrifices everything he believes in and what was the essence of his life for the love of his daughter. And this lie deprives him of everything, and as in the case of Razumov and Nostromo, it leads to the disintegration of his personality and destroys him. Since Whalley is acting against the mariner's code, he is violating the sacred principle of "the fellowship of the craft" endangering the life of the crew and the safety of the ship, which he, as commander, should have ensured. He behaves not like a flesh-and-blood human being, but like an automaton, performing certain actions in defiance of himself, as it were.

> As it is, his navigation not quite true, he not only scrapes the bar and runs the Sofala aground, but also does this to his life: "his eyes, instead of going straight to the point, with the assured keen glance of a sailor, wandered irresolutely in space, as though he, the discoverer of new routes, had lost his way upon this narrow sea."[26] (217).

Ironically, Whalley, by deceiving everyone, falls victim to deception himself, and it is he who deprives himself of self-respect and dignity. Conrad says in one of his letters:

> A character like Whalley's cannot cease to be frank with impunity. He is not frank with his old friend […] it is weakness – it is deterioration. Next he conveys a sort of false impression to Massy – on justifiable grounds. I indicate the progress of the shaking the character receives and make it possible thus to by and by present the man as concealing the oncoming of blindness – and so on; till […] he conceals the criminal wrecking of his ship by com[m]itting suicide.[27]

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[23] Joseph Conrad, "Author's Note" to *Nostromo*, in *Nostromo* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1994), p. 13.

[24] Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan, "*Nostromo* and the Failure of Myth," in *Joseph Conrad*, ed. Elaine Jordan (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), p. 141.

[25] Joseph Conrad, "The End of the Tether," in *Heart of Darkness and Other Stories*, pp. 110-111.

[26] David Mulry, "Untethered: Conrad's Narrative Modernity in 'The End of the Tether,'" *The Conradian* 33, no. 2 (2008), p. 21.

[27] Conrad to David Meldrum, Friday (August or September) 1902, *Collected Letters*, 2, p. 441.

As Jennifer Turner observes: "Conrad does not accept the father's unconscious motivation as an excuse, but rather determinedly places the blame on these neurotic, often psychotic, abusers of paternal authority."[28]

Peyrol is another father figure portrayed by Conrad, and at the same time

> the only book written in the closing years of his life which engaged many of the author's deepest sentiments: his nostalgia for the Mediterranean, his dislike of revolution, and his acquired English patriotism which is in constant contrast to the austere and yet spontaneous attachment to man's native soil shown by the novel's French hero.[29]

Peyrol, a French rover, who returns to the country of his childhood after years spent at sea where he has known only "the bonds of the lawless Brotherhood of the Coast."[30] He has witnessed the French Revolution, but approaches its ideals with scepticism and detachment: "When he robbed or killed it was not in the name of the sacred revolutionary principles or for the love of humanity."[31] He wants only to hide his treasure and lead a quiet life, without getting involved in any political games. He states that, "I detest treachery as much as any man, but […] you see I have nothing to do with your politics,"[32] and he almost succeeds. Living on the Escampobar farm among its inhabitants, he slowly grows into their lives, emotionally. becoming close to one person in particular, Arlette, who awakens his paternal feelings: "This one was a loveable creature. She produced on him the effect of a child, aroused a kind of intimate emotion which he had not known before to exist by itself in a man."[33]

Although he manages to withdraw from the world and live peacefully for eight years, the English blockade of Toulon shatters his peace. The presence of an English corvette at sea and the arrival of Lieutenant Real with a secret mission order awakens patriotism in Peyrol. These two feelings: paternal love for Arlette and love for France make the old rover decide to solve all the problems himself. Peyrol listens to the lieutenant's account of his mission, but does not promise to cooperate; he wants to act in his own way. He lies, or rather does not reveal the truth. He does not reveal his plans either Real or Arlette, who both accuse him of deception, Real of betrayal, Arlette of taking away her beloved). His actions become clear to everyone only after his death. "That old man had always meant to go himself […] It was as though the rover of the wide seas had left them to themselves on a sudden impulse of scorn, of magnanimity, of a passion weary of itself."[34]

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[28] Jennifer Turner, "The 'Passion of Paternity' – Fathers and Daughters in the Works of Joseph Conrad," *Conradiana* 39, no. 3 (2007), p. 245.

[29] Zdzisław Najder, *Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 468.

[30] Joseph Conrad, *The Rover* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1923), p. 71.

[31] Conrad, *The Rover*, p. 209.

[32] Conrad, *The Rover*, p. 27.

[33] Conrad, *The Rover*, p. 88.

[34] Conrad, *The Rover*, p. 260.

Peyrol's lie stems from the noblest of motives and by departing he literally takes all the problems troubling Arlette with him, and at the same time ensures the security of his homeland.

> As Arlette chooses Réal, Peyrol takes over the role of father and sacrifices himself to protect the younger man and destroy Scevola, usurping Réal's mission by taking the tartane out to sea with its false papers to be attacked by an English warship. As Peyrol kisses the unconscious Arlette's forehead before leaving, this last representative of the Conradian father takes the burden of blame away from the daughter and onto himself, finally proving the selfless nature of his paternal "passion."[35]

Peyrol's lie fulfils his life, as the epigraph at the beginning of the novel says: "Sleep after toyle, port after stormie seas, Ease after warre, death after life, does greatly please." Peyrol's deceit is a noble act, not a selfish one. In making this decision, he is thinking of the happiness and well-being of others, not of himself. It happened, in the case of the old man, that his lie became his sacrifice, his gift to those he loved. From this perspective, it is easier to understand Marlow's conduct in *Heart of Darkness*.

Marlow is a good seaman and this is probably the source of his abhorrence of lying. The fulfilment of professional obligations depends on straightforward sharing of perceptions and decisions. This is the case for seamen, because anything else is a betrayal of the code and of the duty of care, as it imperils the ship and the lives of comrades. But concern for the welfare of another may outweigh the necessity of honesty.

Marlow lies, telling Kurtz's Intended that the last word her beloved spoke before he died was her name. He could not tell her the truth, that Kurtz's last words were: "The horror! The horror!"[36] "But no one has a right to a truth that harms others," so Marlow lies.

Marlow lies to protect the Intended from an immense darkness, but at the same time he failed to protect himself from such darkness. Even though his lie is a benevolent lie, it is still a lie. His earlier declaration "I hate, detest, and can't bear a lie" from this perspective suggests that Marlow decides to bear the consequences of his lie, to live on with the consciousness of it. He shatters his peace, for he does not want to destroy the Intended's world, he realises as Kenneth A. Bruffee comments: "…not that the woman does not deserve to hear the truth, but rather that she does deserve not to hear the truth."[37]

Conrad presents different varieties of lying, and although he does not claim that lying is always wrong he proves that Kant was right in saying that people are always responsible for the consequences of their lie and must bear such consequences.[38] Some lies are noble, harmless or redemptive, bringing good, while some are destructive and corrupting.

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[35] Turner, "The 'Passion of Paternity,'" p. 245.

[36] Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, p. 97.

[37] Kenneth A. Bruffee, "The Lesser Nightmare: Marlow's Lie in *Heart of Darkness*," *Modern Language Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (1964), p. 325.

[38] Varden, "Kant and Lying to the Murderer at the Door," p. 404.

The most dangerous is self-delusion. The consequences that man has to face in case of such a lie are not only unexpected, but also irreversible. Protagonists who attempt to deceive not only others but also themselves by rejecting the principles and values they should follow, or the truth they do not intend to accept, must face consequences which they have not expected, which are very often the opposite of what they wanted to achieve with their lies. The benchmark is always humanity and respect for human dignity. Whenever somebody lies in the name of core values, the consequences which they face, are bearable and acceptable (even if they are difficult). Such lies bring hope.

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