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The *Ancien Régime* and Fetishistic Politics in *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”*

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A great man works with the ideas of his age, and regenerates them. [. . .] But his own mind has its ordinary side, the regeneration of ideas is not complete, and the notions of the day not only limit the range of his achievement [. . .] but float about unasimulated within his living stream of thought. And thus he will seem to have preached the very superstitions which he combated.

—Bernard Bosanquet, qtd. as epigraph to Fleishman

As Avrom Fleishman realized, Bernard Bosanquet’s statement applies well to Conrad’s complex engagement with both his own background and the central concerns of his day. As Bosanquet points out, such complexity is often unfairly overwhelmed—texture is flattened out and tensions are massaged (or beaten) away—so that the “great man” is all too often thought of as having “preached the very superstitions which he” critiqued (Bosanquet qtd. as epigraph to Fleishman).¹ Such has been, sadly, Conrad’s fate. As Zdzislaw Najder has pointed out, “in the thirties the label ‘conservative’ was affixed to Conrad—and it stuck” (77). Indeed, the notion that Conrad preached the superstitions of his age has guided rather than been challenged by all but the most recent inquiries into his attitudes toward everything from imperialism to feminism, revolution to sexuality, and guilt to globalization.² He has been cast variously as (at best) a conservative in thrall to the ethic of his family’s noble background;³ a pseudo-aristocratic reactionary;⁴ or (at worst) a jingoistic, racist social Darwinist.⁵ Such readings routinely ignore or mini-

mize the complexities of Conrad's experience and how those (at times outright contradictory) complexities are negotiated in his work. The contradictions of his experience of imperial domination, his life under Russian custody, his *szlachta* upbringing, his abandonment of the homeland for which both his parents died, and his time in the merchant service as an agent of Western imperialism have routinely been flattened out to create a portrait of Conrad as a starched-collar conservative nostalgic for the social structures and values of the *ancien régime*. As a result, Conrad has been fetishized as the prototypical conservative modernist; abundant evidence and even arguments by prominent scholars to the contrary are consistently disavowed, and his name has become a byword for the essentially conservative modernism that supposedly issues in the fascism of Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound, among others.⁶

Adding my voice to those currently chipping away at this caricature (of modernism, fully as much as of Conrad), I want to trace in detail certain decisive aspects of Conrad's engagement with *ancien régime* values. In doing so, I want to show that though Conrad felt a deep affinity for the *ancien régime's* tendency to fetishize certain specific individuals as embodiments rather than representatives of order, peace, and righteousness, he was also suspicious of such operations. This suspicion first appears in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* where we find a complex and vitiated admiration of the simple orderliness granted by *ancien régime* practices of fetishization. Additionally, I hope that coming to understand this engagement will extend beyond simply challenging prevailing notions of Conrad's politics: *ancien régime* ideals of natural superiority and fetishization are still very much with us in the twenty-first century, and seeing how Conrad negotiated the interlocked attractions and repulsions of such thinking can help illuminate the various fetishizations—and our investments in them—that characterize our own moment.

Because this process of fetishization is so central to Conrad's concerns and to my discussion here, I want to take a moment to clarify what the term means and how it functions. A fetish is a substitute formation, an unremarkable object that stands in for a much-valued lost object. Fetishization is a process of disavowal; the fetishist both recognizes that the lost object is lost and yet disavows that knowledge, refusing to admit it to his or her consciousness. It thus presents a paradox: on the one hand, the fetishist knows that the object is lost and that the substitute object has no special qualities; on the other hand, he or

she unconsciously believes and behaves as though the fetish object really is the reappearance of the lost object. In psychoanalytic terms, this is how some children come to terms (or avoid coming to terms) with their discovery that the mother lacks the phallus; in anthropological terms, it is how the worshipper comes to venerate as sacred an icon he himself has just carved; and in Marxist terms it is how the consumer overcomes the knowledge that he or she has had to sacrifice authentic humanity as the price of admission to capitalist culture.

As these examples indicate, fetishization takes on manifold forms in different contexts. To understand its articulation in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* we must situate it within the context of what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri claim to be one of the most significant cultural changes of the last two hundred years: the transition from the *ancien régime* system of sovereigns and subjects to global capitalism's manifold and contradictory versions of democracy. Arno J. Mayer situates the crucial hinge of this transition at the turn of the twentieth century, with World War I marking "the decline and fall of the old order [...] rather than [...] the explosive rise of industrial capitalism bent on imposing its primacy":

In 1914 Europe was still too much of an old order for its reigning ideas and values to be other than conservative, undemocratic, and hierarchical. Post mercantile capitalism and its class formations were too weak for enlightened progress, liberalism, and equality to become hegemonic. To the extent that the axioms of the nineteenth-century enlightenment made their way, they were forced to adapt to the pre-existing worldview of the imperious old regime, which excelled at distorting and defusing them. (4, 275)

Mayer's view lends particularity to Hardt and Negri's sweeping historical account, and establishes the powerful influence of *ancien régime* social structures and value systems well into the twentieth century. Especially useful for its insistence on the importance of the *ancien régime* among early twentieth-century geopolitical determinants, Mayer's perspective sheds extraordinary light on the terms of Conrad's artistic engagement with his cultural moment in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus."*

Perhaps of equal importance, the cultural context which Mayer describes and in which Conrad arrived at his artistic and intellectual maturity bears striking affinities with our own moment: anxieties abound regarding Balkanization, domestic and international terrorism,

global imperialism, anarchism, rapid technological change, the weakening and collapse of global empires, a perceived loss of innocence and accompanying nostalgia, and the spread of democracy. Likewise, just as *ancien régime* hierarchies began to crumble at the end of the nineteenth century, so the stable binaries of the last century's cold war have faded (despite efforts to preserve them as highly adaptable categories—us/them, good/evil), and a radically uncertain future faces us just as it did Conrad and his contemporaries one hundred years ago. Now, as then, we are faced with a confusing geopolitical milieu in which it can be hard if not impossible to reconcile one's emotional responses with one's rational sensibilities, one's humanity with one's rage. In this light it seems to me that we can learn a great deal, and perhaps even discern a successful pattern of engagement, by tracing how Conrad grappled with many of the same issues at the moment of his decisive transition from seaman to novelist ("To" 168).

That grappling is never simple, and Conrad's ambivalence in the face of it led Albert Guerard to write that, with Conrad, "we are dealing with a temperament chronically addicted to approach and withdrawal" (234). Such a pattern certainly appears to typify *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*: in this novel, Conrad seems to present us with a viable threat to the traditional order of the *ancien régime*, before withdrawing that threat to reaffirm the traditional order in the novel's famously elegiac conclusion. Such a model is not quite adequate to what we actually find in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* however; perceptive as Guerard's observation is, it too easily reduces Conrad's attitude in this novel to one of mere oscillation. Rather, I would suggest that the movement of Conrad's engagement with the threatened displacement of life under sail and the *ancien régime* ideals which sustain it is dialectical in nature, if not quite in execution. Instead of a simple approach and withdrawal, we have in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* the presentation of a viable threat to the traditional order of the *ancien régime*, and a recontainment of that threat; but this recontainment is complicated, and does not simply return us to the starting point.

The first stage in this dialectic is Conrad's presentation of a threat to the traditional order of life under sail—an order characterized by Conrad himself as harmonizing with *ancien régime* ideals and practices⁷—and it comes chiefly in the person of Donkin. From his first appearance on, Donkin clearly lacks the narrator's approval: "They all knew him! He was the man that cannot steer, that cannot splice, that dodges the work on dark nights. [. . .] The man who is the last out and

the first in when all hands are called. The man who can't do most things and won't do the rest" (*Nigger* 10–11). Despite all this, it doesn't take Donkin long to capture the sentiments of most of the rest of the crew: "He knew how to conquer the naïve instincts of that crowd. In a moment they gave him their compassion, jocularly, contemptuously, or surlily" (*Nigger* 12). By the time the storm is over and the officers are demanding that the crew continue working the ship, Donkin has more than just the crew's compassion. Building on the crew's sense of grievance over being placed in danger by Captain Allistoun's refusal to cut away the masts, Donkin at once massages their professional egos and fomenting unrest: "We decried our officers—who had done nothing—and listened to the fascinating Donkin. His care for our rights, his disinterested concern for our dignity, were not discouraged by the invariable contumely of our words, by the disdain of our looks. Our contempt for him was unbounded—and we could not but listen with interest to that consummate artist"; "We abominated the creature and could not deny the luminous truth of his contentions. It was all so obvious" (*Nigger* 100, 101). However much the crew disdains Donkin's person, it seems, they cannot deny the seductive power of his Plimsoll rhetoric; his ability to draw them into his manner of thinking outweighs their personal distaste and poses a distinct threat to the orderly hierarchy upon which the ship's effective operation depends.

This threat, already somewhat undercut by the narrator's disdainful characterization of Donkin and the crew's personal distaste for him, is quickly recontained, however, as Conrad's "chronically addicted" temperament leads him to counterapproach with withdrawal (Guerard 234). In this case, the withdrawal occurs in two decisive moments: the captain's assertion of his authority during the storm, and his management of the crew's near-mutiny. Both moments rely upon what Marx might have called one of the more mystical aspects of *ancien régime* social relations: the fetishization of particular individuals (in these cases, the captain) as inherently superior to the mass of humanity over which they preside.

In contrast to Donkin, Captain Allistoun—whose name means, among other things, "from the old manor"—is fetishized as a superior sort throughout the book by both the narrator and the crew (categories which notoriously overlap): he is serious, intrepid, steady, brave, meticulous, and—most importantly—"he loved his ship" (*Nigger* 30). This fetishization first appears dramatically, however, when the ship goes over on her side during the storm and the entire crew cries out for the

masts to be cut away: "They all yelled unceasingly:—'The masts! Cut! Cut!'" (*Nigger* 58). This uproar sends the carpenter toward his tool shed to retrieve the axe he keeps by "for just such an emergency" (*Nigger* 59). It is an anarchic moment, one in which hierarchy is essentially absent and the will of the crew is manifest directly in response to the situation. The threat posed by Donkin appears to be on the cusp of realization, but neither Conrad nor Allistoun will brook any such collapse of the established regime of control. Instead, the crew's commonly held and generally expressed wish is quickly countermanded by a single word from Allistoun:

Captain Allistoun struggled, managed to stand up with his face near the deck, upon which men swung on the ends of ropes, like nest robbers upon a cliff. One of his feet was on somebody's chest; his face was purple; his lips moved. He yelled also; he yelled, bending down:—"No! No!" Mr. Baker, one leg over the binnacle-stand, roared out:—"Did you say no? Not cut?" He shook his head madly. "No! No!" Between his legs the crawling carpenter heard, collapsed at once, and lay full length in the angle of the skylight. Voices took up the shout—"No! No!" Then all became still. [. . .] They all believed [cutting the masts] was their only chance; but a little hard-faced man shook his grey head and shouted "No!" without giving them as much as a glance. (*Nigger* 59)

The specifically *ancien-regime* character of the recontainment enacted here manifests in two telling details. First, the captain's sovereign power over body and soul of his men appears in his imperious denial of their common will for safety. Second, it is reinforced by the fact that he negates that common will while standing on one of his crew's chest. Not merely standing while the crew lies prone, Allistoun asserts an unconscious, natural superiority by assuming the iconic pose of a victor in single combat. Moreover, the sheer force of Allistoun's command demands notice, as it affects the body of men in two ways: first, it instantly overrides their determination to cut the masts; second, it produces a physical effect on the carpenter, who collapses in a heap upon hearing the command. Only Donkin continues to cry out for the masts to be cut, but he is soon quieted as "one of his rescuers struck him a back-handed blow over the mouth" (*Nigger* 60). The crew's (and the narrator's) habit of fetishizing the captain produces a ripple effect here, as the ordinary seamen at once physically enforce the captain's edict and symbolically enforce his right to rule. No matter how bad the situa-

tion seems, the captain remains the fetishized embodiment of authority and reserves the right to dispose of both ship and crew without either explaining his actions or taking the crew's desires into consideration.

The second decisive moment in which the approach to a fractured regime onboard the ship is recontained comes during the crew's near-mutiny. Following quickly on Allistoun's refusal to allow Wait to return to work, the near-mutiny is set in motion by Donkin's snakelike injunction: "Donkin hissed:—'Go for them . . . it's dark!'" (*Nigger* 123). Seeing an opportunity to overthrow the regime by which he has been governed since joining the ship, Donkin capitalizes on the crew's discontent and provokes the crowd into making "a short run aft in a body" before they hold up (*Nigger* 123). Breaking free from that body, Donkin attempts to break through the captain's fetishized aura of authority by throwing an iron belaying-pin at him. This is the most desperate moment of threat to the ship's hierarchy in the novel, and Conrad quickly recontains it, as not the captain but the rest of the crew put a stop to any further assaults:

There were shouts. "Don't!"—"Drop it!"—"We ain't that kind!" The black cluster of human forms reeled against the bulwark, back again towards the house. Ringbolts rang under stumbling feet.—"Drop it!"—"Let me!"—"No!"—"Curse you . . . hah!" Then sounds as of some one's face being slapped; a piece of iron fell on the deck; a short scuffle, and some one's shadowy body scuttled rapidly across the main hatch before the shadow of a kick. (*Nigger* 123–4)

Allistoun is clearly fetishized here as the embodiment of social cohesion and functioning. He is the token, perhaps even the totem, of such cohesion even though there is nothing specific about him that guarantees it—his status is necessary even if it is not demonstrably true. In the organicist terms Conrad so prefers,⁸ Allistoun is conceived as the head of the social body, as that which gives it direction and control. In contrast to Donkin, whose ideas the crew readily separates from his person, Allistoun's body itself is fetishized. To the majority of the crew, an assault upon the captain's body would be an assault on the abstract principle of order upon which all the crew's safety depends. In both cases, the process of fetishization denies Allistoun's human fallibility and identifies him personally with the structural position he occupies. He does not merely hold a position of authority; he is authority embodied. The discipline upon which the ship's functioning depends is

thus partially guaranteed by the belief that the captain is irreplaceable, that he *is* the position he holds; any knowledge to the contrary is disavowed and the crew make him into a fetish whose integrity is magically linked to their own survival. The crew's sudden reluctance to carry out its half-formed mutinous intentions thus reveals not only their deep ambivalence toward Donkin, but also the extent to which they are invested in the very social order that so rigorously, relentlessly, and perhaps even unjustly governs all aspects of their lives.⁹ Toying with the notion of the ship as state in this pivotal episode, Conrad raises some strikingly (im)pertinent questions (for an archconservative, at least) about what exactly is involved in the consent to be ruled.

Immediately after Donkin is subdued, Allistoun reasserts his authority and restores both safety and order to the ship. During the ruckus, the helmsman has left his post and crept forward to see what the commotion is about. Consequently, the ship has been left to drift and placed in danger as she comes "up gently to the wind without anyone being aware of it. [. . .] The ship trembled from trucks to keel; the sails kept on rattling like a discharge of musketry; the chain sheets and loose shackles jingled aloft in a thin peal; the gin blocks groaned. It was as if an invisible hand had given the ship an angry shake to recall the men that peopled her decks to the sense of reality, vigilance, and duty" (*Nigger* 124). The "musketry" and "shackles" here clearly evoke the forces of order, which stand opposed to the disorder of mutiny. Moreover, Conrad invokes the "invisible hand" of a supernatural agent standing clearly on the side of law and order, giving the ship "an angry shake" as if to call the proceedings to order. This agency is associated with "reality, vigilance, and duty," and augments Allistoun's fetishized status as he gives it voice: "'Helm up!' cried the master sharply" (*Nigger* 124). This cry puts the on-deck watch to work, leaving the below-deck watch to retire to the forecabin, where they spend the rest of the evening discussing the events.

For the remainder of the voyage, even when the ship is stuck in the doldrums, no real threat to the regime of discipline appears and Conrad seems to have returned us to the stability and order of traditional *ancien régime* social relations. Donkin is reduced to his former pathetic status among the crew, no one any longer pays much attention to his agitation, and no further violence is attempted against the officers of the ship. Conrad has approached and withdrawn from the danger of a viable threat to the regime of control by which the idealized *ancien régime*-esque order on the *Narcissus* is maintained, apparently reaffirming once

and for all his fidelity to “an older pattern, requiring absolute allegiance in order to maintain its precarious unity” (Fleishman 75). In both the storm and the attempted mutiny, Captain Allistoun’s authority onboard the ship is affirmed, and the fetishization of putatively superior persons that typifies both *ancien régime*-infused social structures and life onboard ship is emphatically restored. When Wait dies,¹⁰ the weather clears (the supernatural agency seems ready to forgive), and when the ship makes land Donkin is quickly swept from the scene. What follows is, of course, the narrator’s famous (or notorious) paean to the crew in what can only be read as a genuinely utopian moment. In the narrator’s declaration that the crew “were a good crowd. As good a crowd as ever fisted with wild cries the beating canvas of a heavy foresail; or tossing aloft, invisible in the night, gave back yell for yell to a westerly gale,” we can hardly but discern an almost willful repression of the truth in favor of an extended fetishization (*Nigger* 173). The truth of the crew’s venality is disavowed, and fetishistic praise is insisted upon. This moment is utopian in its articulation of a profound wish, its vision of life the way the narrator (and Conrad) would like it to be; and it places the final seal on Conrad’s explicit declaration of allegiance to the values and institutions of the *ancien régime*. Only their fetishization of the captain allows the crew to come through their challenges, and as a reward they are at last allowed by the narrator to bask in the glow of his fetishization.

Or so it would seem. In fact, there is another dimension to Conrad’s treatment of the potentially viable threat to the established order whose value he seems so desperate to reaffirm. In a dialectical twist on the movement of approach and withdrawal, Conrad sows the seeds of doubt and shows that the utopian conclusion is fatally compromised. Each time we read Conrad, we run the risk of discovering something new that may upset our received understanding; in this case we find that just when Conrad appears to be doing his best to consolidate his case against reforming the established way of doing things, he is already articulating a countercurrent of critique.

Perhaps the most shocking indication of this countercurrent appears when we read Allistoun’s refusal to cut the masts realistically rather than dramatically or fetishistically. As captain of the ship, Allistoun would have had “obligations which were not easily reconciled. The safety of the ship, the welfare of the crew, the profit of the owner, and the progress of the captain’s career did not always mesh neatly” (Foulke 111). One of the chief books on how to reconcile these demands while

running a ship responsibly—and one of Conrad's favorite books—was *Seamanship*, written by one Captain Alston (upon whom Allistoun may be based) (Foulke 114).¹¹ This book clearly recommends “cutting away the masts” “when a ship was knocked over on her beam ends and in danger of foundering” (*Nigger* 114). Such a move was standard practice to guarantee the safety of both the crew and the ship. Given this, Allistoun's refusal “to cut away the masts is an act of infidelity to the *Narcissus* and her men”; it is an unconscionable failure of both duty and protocol (*Nigger* 114).

Allistoun does not behave this way out of incompetence; he does it out of egoism and self-interest. As Foulke goes on to point out, Allistoun's motive for placing the ship and all onboard her in such peril is to preserve “his chances for a ‘brilliantly quick passage’” (115). Indeed, Foulke actually places the blame for the *Narcissus*'s capsizing directly on Allistoun's shoulders: “By driving the ship too hard [Allistoun] causes the capsize and by refusing to cut away the masts he risks total loss” (115). Foulke goes on to conclude that, far from being an ideal captain, “Allistoun resembles Ahab more than Vere, a man moved by a single-minded desire rather than one who feels the moral strain of choosing between incompatible values. His preoccupation with his own fame, as reflected in a fast passage for the *Narcissus*, links him with the more virulent strain of egoism that infects the crew” (Foulke 116).

These insights represent the return of what this particular fetishization disavows: Allistoun's fallibility and thus his capacity to be every bit as—if not more narcissistic and petty than—the “children of the sea” he commands (Guerard 219). In this new light, Allistoun as much as Donkin stands revealed as a primary figure of narcissism rather than duty onboard the ship. The fetishistic picture of Allistoun as a model captain is hopelessly damaged, as is any simple conception of him as the noble and virtuous leader of a stable community dedicated to duty, honor, and fidelity. The utopian conclusion based upon that spurious conception is thus likewise threatened, and Conrad's “farewell tribute to life under sail” turns out to be a somewhat more complex engagement with the values represented by that way of life than it might initially appear to be (Morgan 207).

This countercurrent is powerful and constitutes a neglected but vital dimension of the novel; nonetheless, *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* cannot ultimately be read as fundamentally critical of the *ancien régime* social structures that characterized the age of sail. Though it is not quite, contra Guerard, “the tribute to the ‘children of the sea’ that Conrad

wanted it to be,” the vision presented by the novel remains profoundly nostalgic (Guerard 219). Disavowal is essential to fetishization, and it reappears forcefully in the concluding panegyric. And, however strained it might be, this nostalgic impulse manages to color the entire narrative. Whatever we know of Allistoun’s flaws, the narrator’s open admiration for him tends to sway our final assessment, just as his reverence for Singleton influences us even after we see that his noble thirty hours of “steer[ing] with care” are pointless: with the ship up on her beams, the rudder would be out of the water and no steerage would be possible (Foulke 110). There is no denying that both nostalgia and critical insight are present in the narrative, but the dimension of critical insight remains submerged; the novel’s covertly critical countercurrent, though undeniably present, is secondary, and the novel still manages to achieve its primary goal of valorizing the age of sail.

That said, the submerged critical dimension we discover in *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* does not go away but becomes increasingly significant in the imperialist narratives with which Conrad follows it up. The ironies of *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim*, and *Nostromo*—the disparities between how Kurtz, Jim, and Nostromo are fetishized and how they really are, for example—point to his increasing consciousness of the complexity of the sociopolitical milieu with which he was engaged. Maturing as a writer, Conrad consistently enlarged his perspective to include the underlying continuity between *ancien régime* ideals and the brutality of imperialism. Going beyond the creeping knowledge of flaws and problems we saw in *The Nigger of the “Narcissus,”* Conrad discovers in these succeeding works that there is a deeply unsettling dark side to the values and ideals on which he had been raised and to which he would have liked to continue to adhere. Though he never completely gave up his nostalgia for an heroic age in which fetishized individuals could live up to their press (see, for example, his praise of men like Captain James Cook, Sir John Franklin, Mungo Park, and Stanley Livingstone in “Geography and Some Explorers”), these works show that Conrad clearly grew increasingly unable simply to repress or ignore the flaws and potential horrors of the *ancien régime* mentality, even as he remained suspicious of its alternatives.

As I hope the foregoing analysis makes clear, we need urgently to continue to re-think any simple nomination of Conrad as straightforwardly conservative or reactionary. It is time to remove the conservative label that was attached to Conrad in the thirties. There is no denying that many of his attitudes are typical of those Mayer identifies

with the *ancien régime*, especially his desire to disavow the at-times ignoble characteristics of those fetishized as the better sort. But that is not to say that Conrad could at all easily fall back upon nostalgia as he worked through his ambivalence towards modernity. Though Conrad was deeply influenced by the value systems of both his *szlachta* boyhood and the British merchant service, and though he tended throughout his writing career to valorize the social structures and values of the *ancien régime*, he remained far too astute a cultural critic to lapse into any simple idealism, and could not avoid the critical insights we find articulated, if submerged, in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus."* And though his disdain for the brazen and mercenary ascendancy of "material interests" may borrow from *ancien régime* scorn for capitalism and democracy (see especially "Autocracy and War"), his relentlessly critical consciousness prevents him from settling into a retrogressive world view as he continues to develop his political attitudes through works like *Nostromo*, *The Secret Agent*, *Under Western Eyes*, and even *The Rover*.

Rather, Conrad's engagement with *ancien régime* values produces a more complex skepticism, a negative dialectical perspective that becomes the essence of his mature political consciousness. *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* is the decisive point of germination for Conrad's engagement with fetishization as both an aspect of *ancien régime*-style thought and a complex component of twentieth-century democracy. Democracy remains a keyword today, as does the practice of fetishizing particular individuals, groups of individuals, and the very concept of the individual itself. By reading how Conrad engaged with this problematic, we can discover some means of understanding our own tendencies to fetishize what we do, to sustain the kinds of governance we do, and to consent to being ruled as we do.

NOTES

1. Bosanquet's binary of preaching versus combating is itself too simple to describe Conrad's engagement with the "ideas of his age" (Fleishman).

2. Though this point of view continues to prevail, we should bear in mind the important recent challenges to it. See, for example, Brian Richardson.

3. See, for example, Ford Madox Ford's claim that Conrad was "an aristocratic apologist" (qtd. in Fleishman vii-viii); see also Cobley.

4. See, for example, Johnston, Yates, Clark, Humphries, Eagleton (cited in Laskowsky 90), Messenger, and Jones.

5. See, for example, Achebe, Redmond, Mongia, and Brantlinger.

6. Some readers will no doubt note the similarity between what I am discussing here and Giorgio Agamben's recent theorization of sovereignty. I regret

that I came upon his work too late for this paper to have its benefit, but it clearly relates and merits further exploration in relation to Conrad's work.

7. Conrad insisted to John Galsworthy that life onboard a sailing ship "is not constructed on the model of Liberal theory but according to an older pattern, requiring absolute allegiance in order to maintain its precarious unity" (Fleishman 75).

8. See Fleishman for a detailed exposition of Conrad's organicist politics.

9. This investment is particularly telling as it shows Conrad imagining the *ancien régime* social structure on shipboard as essentially hegemonic rather than disciplinary. Conrad's will to nostalgia is evident here as he too fetishizes the captain, disavowing his flawed leadership (about which, more shortly) and celebrating him as the guarantor of safety and order.

10. Wait, of course, is also fetishized by the crew, though in a manner somewhat different from how they fetishize the captain; this competing fetishization is one of the means by which Wait disrupts life onboard the *Narcissus* and one of the reasons why the captain ultimately must assert his absolute sovereignty over Wait's body and soul to retain control of his ship (i.e., when he refuses to allow Wait to rejoin the crew and restricts him to his room in the forward deck-house).

11. Foulke notes that, if this is the case, "the fictional captain's conduct would seem to be even more starkly egregious" (114).

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