

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores Conrad's treatment of the theme of dissolution. The Conradian character is seen as the victim of a nullifying presence whose sole aim is to deny him the possibility of life. The corrosive influence of this force, aptly called the "deadly shade" by the venerable teacher of languages in Under Western Eyes, is fully demonstrated throughout Conrad's work.

The frequency with which Conrad writes of a "Shade" or "Shades" demands that the reader give more than a passing interest to the subject. The word itself has been capitalized for the purposes of this study in order to underline its metaphorical significance. Taken as a whole, the Shade's identity cannot be made specific. It manifests itself in various objects and persons, but always with the same devastating effect. It does not discriminate in choosing its victims and this is illustrated in the variety of ways in which it works.

Dissolution, as it is used here, does not always refer to death. It involves the whole process by which a character is radically, and often dramatically, transformed. This process may be effected through death or through a spiritual metamorphosis which necessitates a drastic change in outlook. It is the character of the Shade to defy description, in terms of itself and its work. Conrad's own difficulty in representing the Shade as a unique presence, manifesting itself in multiple sources, is an indication of its omnipotence.