Youth as a short story first appeared in Blackwood's Magazine in September 1898; Heart of Darkness was serialised in the same magazine in the issues for February, March, and April 1899. In book form these two tales along with The End of the Tether were published in Youth: A Narrative and Two Other Stories by Blackwood in 1902. Youth and Heart of Darkness are of the quality of Lord Jim—that is to say, 'they touch the high-water-mark of English fiction and continue the tradition of adventure-romance. Both stories follow Conrad's particular convention; they are the outpourings of Marlow's experiences'. In Youth Conrad presents 'an excitement' that is 'something of a strain', for it is 'so sustained and prolonged, in which we are braced to encounter so much that menaces and appals'.¹ Youth, in this conception of Conrad, is not the time of freedom and delight, but 'the test, the trial of life' (p.102).

Youth, in fact, recounts the abortive voyage of the Judea from London to Bankok, and the narrator is the middle-aged Marlow who looks back indulgently on the ardent optimism of his younger self some twenty-two years ago. This is nostalgically remembered. But the ill-fated voyage of the Judea is based on facts, on Conrad's actual experiences which are then fictionalized in Youth. The actual voyage was undertaken by the Palestine, between 1881 and 1883, from England to Sumatra where Conrad acted as an officer. All the
incidents recorded in *Youth* actually occurred. But for literary purposes Conrad made various changes. Caedric Watts observes:

> When the ‘Palestine’ sank, the rowing-boats took less than fourteen hours to reach land; in the table, they take ‘many days’.... Again, the description of the landfall stresses the aromatically exotic glamour of the orient: ‘impalpable and enslaving, like a charm, like a whispered promise of mysterious delight’; whereas in reality, as Conrad told Richard Curle, the landfall had been made at Muntok—’a damned hole without any beach and without any glamour’.2

A particularly significant modification about the crew takes place in *Youth*. On the *Palestine* the hard-working crew consisted of a black seaman from St Kitts, a Belgian, an Irishman, two men and a boy from Devon, three men from Cornwall, and a Norwegian; the officers were an Englishman, an Irishman, and, of course, a Pole.3 In *Youth* the *Judea* has only British crew: “That crew of Liverpool hard cases had in them the right stuff. It’s my experience they always have” (p.115). This deliberate modification was possibly effected to offer a generous tribute to Conrad’s adoptive country England.4 This change was a thematic necessity for the narrative where Conrad’s main concern was to focus on the conflict between ideal and reality.

In his Author’s Note written in 1917 Conrad calls *Youth* “a feat of memory... a record of experience”. He also adds that “the experience, in its facts, in its inwardness and in its outward colouring, begins and ends in myself”.5 The Author’s Note was written by Conrad some thirty-six years after the voyage and nineteen years after he had transcribed his actual voyage on the *Palestine* into an imaginative re-creation.

The story of *Youth* deals with the voyage of the *Judea* from London to Bankok with a cargo of coal. But before she could reach her destination she catches fire owing to the spontaneous combustion of coal midway in the Indian Ocean where she sinks in an aura of triumph. The decay and destruction of the *Judea* has been the culmination of a journey which passes through serious ordeals like the onslaughts by natural forces, the sudden collision with another steamer, and
the development of a leak in the Judea. The entire journey of the Judea has been unsteady and lumbering, has been fraught with immense dangers and disasters; for the ship is “all rust, dust, and grime-soot aloft, dirt on deck...a ruined cottage” (p.95). The series of vicissitudes also means tremendous stress and strain for the crew on board, including the captain.

Conrad has presented these ideas of Youth in a fictive framework with a narrative mode and structure where Marlow is first introduced as a personal narrator; the delineation of characters and their multiple points of view; the creation of atmosphere and the defiance of chronology. Obviously, the devices referred to are all methods of indirect narration. As an early story Youth is also significant for its symbolic meaning and for its subtle use of symbols and complex imagery intended to ironically project the nostalgic illusions and excitement of Marlow’s youth. Conrad has also adopted other stylistic and rhetorical devices—one being the deft and conscious handling of language—so that Conrad’s aesthetic concept of fiction becomes very complex and requires our unflagging awareness and unremitting attention for its exploration. The remarkable feature of Conrad’s art of fiction is his ingenious organisation of formal elements in the narrative in a coherent and integrated manner which on decodification reveals its thematic pattern. This is also true of Youth.

In Youth Conrad has adopted a narrative technique, linear and chronological in motion. The narrative moves in a straightforward manner as it records the chronicle of the abortive journey of the Judea with a cargo of coal from London to Bankok, though frequently halted and delayed by the unforgiving circumstances at different stages of its journey. The narrative mode of Youth is complex and mysterious because it introduces several narrators; that is, the narrative presents multiple points of view that would definitely illuminate the various aspects of reality from different angles of vision. The primary narrator initiates the story, which then is taken up by Marlow, and the contribution of
Marlow’s friends—here the silent listeners—is no less significant. These perspectives may be arranged thus:

Young Marlow’s original experience and his limited reactions to that experience; mature Marlow’s perspective on young Marlow’s experience, which gradually ends up in becoming less and less detached and ironic; the response of the group of four listeners to Marlow’s tale—a company director, an accountant, a lawyer, and the frame-narrator;

Conrad’s point of view which emphasizes man’s futile attempts to forestall mutability, although he fairly presents how both the old Marlow and the young Marlow treat their experience.6

This narrative mode becomes thematically necessary for Conrad who, in Youth, wants to focus on the conflict between illusion and reality—the young Marlow’s experience of the Eastern seas and the exotic East reviewed ironically by the mature Marlow some twenty-two years later.

The structure of Youth is so conceived as to present ironically the illusions of Marlow’s youth, its delights and mysteries nostalgically remembered by the older Marlow. The older Marlow attempts to discover a symbolic meaning in the past voyage of the Judea in which he joined as second mate and his fancy is immediately caught as he reads the motto “Do or Die” written below her name, although she is old, rusty, and burdensome:

To me she was not an old rattle-trap carting about the world a lot of coal for a freight—to me she was the endeavour, the test, the trial of life. I think of her with pleasure, with affection, with regret.... (p.102)

Marlow states that the adventure of the Judea to the East signifies a certain kind of ‘test’ and ‘trial of life’ for Captain Beard who, at sixty, is commanding a ship for the first time, and ironically, his last.Significantly, Marlow has said nothing about his first command of ‘a 14-foot thing’. Structurally, Youth depicts two tests—one for Captain Beard who has failed in the test, and another for the young romantic Marlow who, however, succeeds in the test with the greatest ‘conviction of strength’. It is, therefore, apparent that his subject “is
more the voyage’s personal meaning to him [Marlow] than that which the voyage itself illustrates”.7

Conrad has chosen the moral ‘test’ as the central situation in his early stories. It is a part of his narrative technique to explore the psychology of his characters. Conrad sees experience as a test and the place of his characters in his moral hierarchy is determined by their responses to the test. As the traditional moralist Conrad’s intention has been “to explore that most important moment in an individual’s life, the moment”8 which reveals whether or not he is faithful to the community.

In *Youth* both Marlow and Captain Beard face the ‘test’ with a ‘Do or Die’ motive. Their way of tackling the situations that such a test involves reveals some distinctive traits of character. Marlow in particular plays a vital role in the test of Captain Beard—a role which entails a similar challenge for himself, and he confronts it with his “silly, charming, beautiful youth” (p.124). Marlow’s wild heroics displayed on board the ship are part of his youthful exuberance and enthusiasm, and speak of his courageous spirit; they end up in producing some comic effects too.

The creation of Marlow in Conrad’s fiction is more a necessity than a simple convention: “A narrator who might observe events and later interpret what he saw must have seemed to Conrad a satisfactory solution to the problem”.9 The problem before Conrad has been to find out a means of distancing himself from his materials. Marlow as the narrator in *Youth* provides the gap of twenty years and also introduces two contrasting points of view necessary for the presentation of dualism in the story.10

Presented for the first time as a narrator in *Youth*, Marlow reappears as a narrator in *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim*, and *Chance*. As a civilized, philosophically-minded, and much-travelled Englishman who relates his past experiences, Marlow proves to be an ideal ‘surrogate author’. Conrad has said,
"Of all my people he's the one that has never been a vexation to my spirit. A most discreet, understanding man": Conrad could now enjoy an exceptional freedom in commentary, since cynical or sceptical ideas could be ascribed to the narrating character rather than to the author. So Marlow serves, in part, as a mask through which Conrad can speak more fluently and diversely. Appearing repeatedly in Conrad's fiction, Marlow turns out to be the fullest, most sophisticated, and most convincing character in the whole of Conrad's literary work.

One view as to the origin of Marlow is that he is "a surrogate figure coping with versions of Conrad's own psychic turmoil and moral confusion," "a vessel for some of Conrad's doubts and anxieties". This view has been substantiated by Conrad's letters of the period 1897-99.

...what makes mankind tragic is not that they are victims of nature, it is that they are conscious of it. To be part of the animal kingdom under the conditions of the earth is very well—but as soon as you know of your slavery the pain, the anger, the strife—the tragedy begins.... There is no morality, no knowledge and no hope; there is only the consciousness of ourselves which drives us about a world that whether seen in a convex or a concave mirror is always but a vain and fleeting appearance.

Here Conrad has stated man's accursed position in this amoral world. His tragedy lies in his inability to effect any change of status, while the world always wears a deceptive look. The same despair is echoed in another letter:

Life knows us not and we do not know life—we don't know even our own thoughts.... Faith is a myth and beliefs shift like mistis on the shore; thoughts vanish: words, once pronounced, die; and the memory of yesterday is as shadowy as the hope of tomorrow—only the string of my platitudes seems to have no end.

Doubtless Conrad hints at the utter indifference of life to the human community. His letters show a mind that is ruffled and shaken by moral and intellectual confusion.

In Youth the elder Marlow recounts with enthusiasm and fervour the exploits of his youth. His presentation is made in lucid, straightforward prose:
Marlow highlights the uniqueness and romance of his experience. The word ‘first’ is repeated in the passage to suggest his rapturous state. His acceptance of the assignment of a ‘responsible’ second mate is invested with romance. For along with the honour and responsibility that such an appointment carries with it, the young Marlow is destined to explore the glory and splendour of ‘the mysterious East’—to transmute his fantasy into reality.

The mature Marlow is keenly conscious of the general state of flux in an evanescent world, of doubts, turmoil, and uncertainties, of a pre-established design in the world, and man’s unalterable position in this universe. In *Youth* Marlow expostulates:

> You fight, work, sweat, nearly kill yourself, sometimes do kill yourself trying to accomplish something—and you can’t. Not from any fault of yours. You simply can do nothing,...(p.94).

Conrad here gravely implies man’s inability to deal with the natural forces that confront him, for which he is not solely to be blamed: “Not from any fault of yours”. Conrad’s general reflections supply clues to the future action of the story—‘or get a wretched 600-ton cargo of coal to its port of destination’.

As the mature Marlow remembers, he is the most important person in every crisis that the *Judea* has to face. It is he who first notices the approaching steamer that smashes the *Judea* partially; he who is the first officer to discover the smoke emitting from the cargo. It is again Marlow who has seen the revived fire, following the sudden blast of a part of the deck in which he is thrown in the air “describing a short parabola” (p.113). Even when the crucial time comes for the crew to abandon the burning ship and to occupy immediately the three life-boats, it is Marlow again who is very prompt to act. Marlow is the first to grab at the floating saucepan leading to the discovery that
the house on deck is swept away by the deluge of the sea and that Abraham has
to be saved (p.103-4). In his curious attempt to dig down to the fire below in
the ship Marlow seeks to display his impetuous heroism; but it soon proves
quixotic and bathetic in effect when he has to be ‘fished out’ of it by “a chain-
hook tied to a broom-handle” (p.111). The image no doubt is intended to deflate
Marlow’s egotism.

As the burning Judea goes down in “a glorious triumph” (p.125) Marlow
exultantly sets out on his first command of a small boat—“the 14-foot thing”
(p.124). Marlow “wanted to have my first command all to myself” (p.124).
And he is determined to make his boat drift purposely away from his
companions, so that he can fully taste the meaning of adventure alone, and to
meet the exotic East of his dream alone.

The old Marlow recalls how he [Marlow] with “his triumphant conviction of
strength” has arrived at “the East of the ancient navigators”, and exults “like a
conqueror” (pp.127, 131, 128). To young Marlow the East appears “impalpable
and enslaving, like a whispered promise of mysterious delight” (p.127). He
realises that youth is “a voyage to age, to disillusionment, to experience”.16 The
presence of death and mutability is everywhere: “The mysterious East faced
me, perfumed like a flower, silent like death, dark like a grave” (p.128). But
Marlow’s paean about youth is in fact a gesture to escape from the ravages of
time and the disillusionment of experience. Hence his spontaneous recoil from
the implications of this discovery:

But for me all the East is contained in that vision of my youth. It is all in that moment.
(p.132)

Conrad’s handling of the narrators in Youth and their multiple viewpoints is
effective. We have seen that Marlow is both participant in, and teller of his own
tale—but he is not the overall narrator of the text. That person remains
anonymous, but we are told from time to time that Marlow is talking to an
audience, of which one member is the writer of the full story. The response of the audience is expressed in the final paragraph of the story:

*And we all nodded at him: the man of finance, the man of accounts, the man of law, we all nodded at him over the polished table that like a still sheet of brown water reflected our faces, lined, wrinkled; our faces marked by toil, by deceptions, by success, by love; our weary eyes looking still, looking always, looking anxiously for something out of life, that while it is expected is already gone—has passed unseen, in a sigh, in a flash—together with the youth, with the strength, with the romance of illusions. (p.132)*

The most striking aspect of the passage is the contrast between the reality of the listeners—their ‘gnarled’ weariness—and the fact that even in that condition they are still looking for some ideal state of life, for some experience in life that would give it meaning. The words ‘lines’, ‘wrinkled’, ‘marked’, and ‘weary’ convey the aging-experience of the silent characters; while the repetition significantly suggests the continued search for an ideal even in these conditions—‘looking still, looking always, looking anxiously’. The reality for the listeners is that youth has passed, ‘is already gone’, but they still seek its strength and romance. While the passage formally concludes the story of *Youth*, it also uniquely illustrates how ideals, although often leading to illusions, to a false perception of the world and of experience—this is the lesson Marlow learns from his experience—nevertheless remain attractive.17

As a character-narrator Marlow’s position in *Youth* is vital and unassailable, and he provides the basis of its narrative structure which is then sustained by other major characters like Captain Beard and Mahon the mate. Conceived in the principle of contrast and parallelism, Captain Beard and Mahon, though veteran and experienced enough, offer an interesting study in contrast, while young Marlow is like a boy between two grandfathers. Conrad has also introduced a group of minor characters like Mrs. Beard, Abraham the steward, and the “crew of Liverpool hard cases” (p.115), the anonymous voice from the *Celestial* in the East, who are pertinent to the plot of *Youth* and consistently work out its pattern of themes. Added to them are Marlow’s four other silent
listeners—a company director, an accountant, a lawyer, and the frame narrator—bound together by “the strong bond of the sea, and also the fellowship of the craft” (p.93). Conrad needs these experienced men around Marlow to highlight the true feelings of youth. These gentlemen appear at the beginning of the story; they appear too at its end as a refrain as if to announce a formal closure. The people of Falmouth, deriding and ridiculing the halted Judea, are relevant in so far as they help to aggravate further the mental and moral condition of Marlow. In fact, the prolonged halt at Falmouth makes all of them—Captain Beard, Mahon, and Marlow—feel more scared, more isolated “as though we had been forgotten by the world” (p.106). By juxtaposing these characters in Youth Conrad has not only underlined its emerging thematic pattern, but has also ironically presented fundamental attributes of each character. And they are fully absorbed in the ironic narrative structure of Youth.

In Youth Captain Beard—‘the simple hero’—is the unreflecting, courageous, loyal seaman who meets his crises with unthinking devotion. Even at sixty “he had blue eyes in that old face of his, which were amazingly like a boy’s” (p.94). He possesses a “candid expression... [and] a rare internal gift of simplicity and rectitude of soul” (p.94). The episode of the smashing of the Judea by an approaching steamer, illustrates the captain’s nervous state of mind, particularly as his wife was aboard the ship. With no response to Marlow’s call Captain Beard simply “caught up his wife, ran on deck, and across, and down into our boat, which was fast to the ladder” (p.99). This jump into the boat proves his moral rectitude, shows his honest obligation to ‘the woman of his life’. He is, however, quick to realise that this courageous act interferes with his loyal service to the ship he commands. “A sailor has no business with a wife—I say”, he growls (p.99). This ‘jump’ is significantly repeated later in the narrative structure when the captain and the crew, following the disintegration of the Judea, are forced to board the three rescue boats made ready for the purpose.
He again proves his rectitude by not submitting to despair or gloom, even when he sees that the ship can hardly be reclaimed, that failure is quite imminent. Even when the Judea is in flames, he shows his determination to stick to his command. His crew are ready to leave, but Captain Beard is found “sitting on the gratings still and mute for hours” (p.119). He is still hopeful: ‘We may do something with her yet’ (p.116). His solitariness is strongly pronounced. Yet Captain Beard’s duty, fidelity and loyalty to the ship is unique. But Conrad takes care to emphasize certain unattractive physical details, particularly his shortness, bowed shoulders and “one leg more bandy than the other” (p.94). Obviously this is an understatement and Conrad’s intention was to enhance Captain Beard’s spiritedness, by diminishing him physically. Conrad employs both the means of understatement and bathos for explicating his themes. Despite his loyalty, skill, and heroic endeavour, Captain Beard proved ‘vulnerable’ and could not succeed in the ‘test’. For the Judea sank midway in the Indian Ocean.

A sharp contrast to Captain Beard, Mahon is a minor character in Youth and is initially filtered through Marlow’s consciousness—‘an old chap’, ‘a Roman nose, a snow-white long beard’, ‘well connected’, but constantly dogged by ill-luck, and unable to get on in life even in his old age. He has to be satisfied with the position as second-in-command in the ship (p.95). His ‘Roman nose’ with long white beard suggests dignity and authority as a long-serving seaman. His bad luck has, however, kept him from becoming the captain. But the details about Mahon’s character show that his potential dignity at the beginning is at odds with the impression he creates towards the end of the narrative: “Farther out old Mahon’s face was upturned to the sky, with the long white beard spread out on his breast, as if he had been shot where he sat at the tiller” (p.131). Mahon, like Captain Beard, has been metaphorically killed by the journey and the misadventures, and the detail of the conspicuous beard seems to emphasize that he is finished as a seaman.
Like her husband Captain Beard, Mrs. Beard combines in herself a curious blend of old age and youth. She is "an old woman, with a face all wrinkled and ruddy like a winter apple, and the figure of a young girl" (p.97). The indelible marks of her old age are subdued and softened by the freshness and youthfulness of her personality. Her tenderness towards Marlow prompts her to mend Marlow's shirts. Her loving care for Captain Beard is conveyed in her request to Marlow to remind the captain of his muffler—particularly at night. Mrs. Beard is dead now, just as youth vanishes in due course. Yet as a minor character Mrs. Beard reinforces the theme of the tension between youth and old age.

The setting in *Youth* is obviously the vast and enormous sea caught in its volatile moods of awful ferocity and of profound calmness. The old rattle-trap *Judea* moves and wallows on this sea like 'a candle-box' on her way from London to Bankok when she is caught in the famous 'October gale' that infuriates the sea. Conrad's presentation of the seascape is very vivid: "It was wind, lightning, sleet, snow, and a terrific sea", when the ship's bulwarks are smashed, and the decks flooded. Under the strong impact of the wind the ship has shifted her ballast into the lee bow and all hands including the captain have to go below with shovels to right her—actually performing a gravedigger's work to toss shovelfuls of wet sand to windward (p.96).

Three months later in January the *Judea* experiences the second onslaught of the gale in her course through the Atlantic. The immensity of the great foaming waves against the sky 'dirty like a smoked ceiling' horrifies the community of sailors on the ship, and that too without any break in the weather:

*The sea was white like a sheet of foam, like a caldron of boiling milk; there was not a break in the clouds, no—not the size of a man's hand—no, not for so much as ten seconds. There was for us no sky, there were for us no stars, no sun, no universe—nothing but angry clouds and an infuriated sea (p.101).*
The dreadful menace of the sea terrifies the sailors who think that they are divorced from their known universe. Their desperation and bewilderment are forcefully conveyed through the repetition of ‘no’/ ‘not’ for as many as ten times. The terror is intensified when the Judea suddenly springs a bad leak—“not enough to drown us at once, but enough to kill us with the unrelenting work at the pumps” (p.101). Captain Beard and the Judea have to face the challenges of the sea—each in his own particular way. Captain Beard cannot succeed in taking the first command to Bankok, while the Judea cannot survive the misfortunes and disasters on her way and sinks in the sea in full conflagration.

Conrad’s central preoccupation in Youth is to focus on the opposition between an ideal and the reality in which someone attempts to achieve it [the ideal]. Marlow has so far—that is, until the ship sinks—been somewhat protected from the worst features of reality, because Beard has borne the main responsibility. Ironically, Marlow too fits in with the scheme of things when he has to take the responsibility of the 14-foot little boat. Inspired with his ideals and illusions that “I could last forever” (p.126), Marlow embarks on the sea and realises that the journey is fraught with hardship and dangers, particularly when his craft is an open boat:

I remember nights and days of calm, when we pulled, we pulled, and the boat seemed to stand still, as if bewitched within the circle of the sea horizon, I remember the heat, the deluge of rain-squalls that kept us bailing for dear life (but filled our water-cask), and I remember sixteen hours on end with a mouth dry as a cinder and a steering-oar over the stern to keep my first command head on to a breaking sea (p.126).

Marlow’s optimism notwithstanding, he feels that his condition is precarious, he realises the difficulties of making progress when their boat seems to be ‘bewitched within the circle of the sea horizon’. Regardless of the real suffering that the sea and nature cause to the sailors whose lives are his responsibility, Marlow engages himself in the overriding idea of reaching a harbour in the East. His youth gives him the strength and determination to
accomplish what is almost impossible, but we are reminded that the reality of youth—and all youth—is that it will ultimately be lost.

The sea is, however, delineated by Conrad not merely in its ferocity, agitation, and turbulence, but also in its periods of calmness, of serenity which also has its own beauty equally arresting.

The sky was a miracle of purity, a miracle of azure. The sea was polished, was blue, was pellucid, was sparkling like a precious stone, extending on all sides, all round to the horizon—as if the whole terrestrial globe had been one jewel, one colossal sapphire, a single gem fashioned into a planet(p.110).

In ‘the lustre of the great calm waters’ the Judea, do or die, glides imperceptibly ‘through an interminable procession of days’ (p.108), while on board the sailors are fighting for life at the pumps, trying desperately to extinguish the fire by frantically pouring lots of Indian Ocean into the main hatch. Conrad again views the sea and the East as the revelation not of life, but of the coldness and fixity of death. Overwhelmed by his youthful illusions, Marlow fails to realize that within his romantic yearning for glamour lies a longing for irresponsibility, repose, and death. By an amazing feat of imagination Marlow comes to identify the hardness and lifeless lustre of the sea with that of the earth. The sea appears like ‘a precious stone’, and the earth ‘one colossal sapphire’. So in his eagerness to search for adventure Marlow discovers a terrifying beauty of the Eastern sea and of the East.

The ironic structure of Youth is to be found in the arrangement of episodes and grouping of sequences. Irony to be valid must be integral to the story. The episode of the smashing of the Judea by an approaching steamer at the Tyne is conceived in ironic terms. Not only is the Judea extensively damaged and her journey further delayed by three weeks, the incident illuminates the character of Captain Beard. To save his wife Captain Beard jumps into the boat that is fastened to the ladder, and ironically, later in the story all the sailors have to take another jump from the furiously burning Judea to save themselves.
In *Youth* irony is piled upon irony. As Mrs. Beard is mending Marlow's torn clothes, Captain Beard has been vainly trying to overhaul the ancient ship. The deduction is "That life, perhaps like old clothes and the ship, must be worn out irreparably." Conrad's ironic attitude enables him to juxtapose contradictory ideas. The scene of the rats deserting the ship is ironic. Mahon and Marlow sneer at this, while they remain behind as if to affirm the youthful motto of the ship "Do or die". Later in the story, this sneer is turned into a petrified look of horror and amazement at the sudden explosion of part of the deck by the spontaneous combustion of coal. Ironically, this occurs at a time when the crew are resting with the complacent thought that "they were the boys to put out combustions" (p. 112) and that they have won "a great naval battle" (p. 112). Marlow expects to see the sky and the sea also 'convulsed with horror'; but ironically, "the peace of the sky and the serenity of the sea were distinctly surprising" (p. 114).

The vivid scene of the sailors of the *Judea* at the pump provides another great source of irony and humour. While depicting their predicament, Conrad carefully magnifies their virtues of duty, loyalty, and fidelity.

> We poured salt water as into a barrel without a bottom. It was our fate to pump in that ship, to pump out of her, to pump into her; and after keeping water out of her to save ourselves from being drowned, we frantically poured water into her to save ourselves from being burnt (p. 110).

The irony here lies in the juxtaposition of two contrary activities which the crew members must perform in order to defuse the positive threats to their lives. The act of constant pumping is central to both occasions. The humour of the respective situations is in their futile attempt to extinguish the fire by flooding with bucketsful of salt water the hatch below—'a barrel without bottom', as it were.

These formal elements of the narrative *Youth*—its character, plot, structure, and style—engage several important themes. *Youth* is a nostalgic story about
Marlow's youth related by the older Marlow, and an important theme is, therefore, the conflict between illusion and reality, between youthful excitement and exultation on the one hand, and the experienced, sedate, and reflective man's sober and dispassionate analyses of the past incidents, on the other, with an ironic overture. Another major theme is the isolation of Captain Beard and the young Marlow himself. Added to these are the themes of the seamen's perfect and consistent loyalty to the craft and profession, of fidelity and solidarity, of youth and age contrasted, and above all, Conrad's reflection on the role of Nemesis on human life when they cannot bring a cargo ship to the port of destination, safely and steadily.

The theme of isolation is worked out through the characters of Captain Beard and the young Marlow. Like all the vulnerable heroes in Conrad, whether simple or complex, Captain Beard is an egotist, and his isolation is 'self-imposed'. The egotists' "deepest impulses and longings are directed not toward a dutiful place in the ranks but toward self-aggrandizement". Conrad asserts that "egoism is the motive force of most men's action". Captain Beard has a terrible time in manoeuvring the old Judea through the furies and gales and the ruffled sea, that have brought to the ship a series of accidents and disasters. But he was never upset; his unreflective mind makes possible his patience and tranquillity, necessary courage and determination with which he kept his fixity of aim. Even when the cargo is on fire, the captain's directives to the sailors show his lack of imagination:

*The coast of West Australia is near, but I mean to proceed to our destination... her head for Bankok, and fight the fire. No more putting back anywhere, if we all get roasted* (p. 109).

Despite the threatening dangers, Captain Beard would not alter the ship's direction. Prompted by the same egotism, he calmly refuses the offer of a safe passage by Captain Nash of the Somerville. Ironically, Captain Beard, nervously anxious, has to seek the passage to safety from an English ship the
Celestial when the Judea is destroyed and drowned in the sea. His stolidity and introvert nature deter him from cultivating any relationship with the crew except when professional obligations compel them to work together to save the craft from the impending dangers. Captain Beard’s moral seclusion is illustrated by his stolid reaction to the sudden explosion of part of the deck at which Marlow has been awfully wounded. He is also unaware of the general state of panic among the crew. While the scene of explosion appears to the captain to be ‘awfully mysterious’, he at once notices “the wheel deserted and his barque off her course” (p.115). Prompted by professionalism, he goes forward to take the wheel himself and holds on to it until the helmsman relieves him. Thus Captain Beard “was immense in the singleness of his idea and in his placid ignorance of our agitation” (p.115). His devotion to the craft is pronounced from his refusal to climb down into the rescue boat with the declaration: “We must see the last of the ship” (p.119). Before his final abandonment of the ship his perfect spiritual communion with ‘his first command’ (p.124) once again reveals his essentially solitary and isolated nature. Barring the brief admonition to Marlow to be extremely careful in his first command, Captain Beard remains taciturn during the last leg of the trip.

Just as Captain Beard’s old age and gravity, the responsibility of the command, and professional commitments are powerful forces that make him solitary and isolated in the Judea, so also Marlow’s state of isolation originates from a ‘different set of factors that usually predominate over a youth shortly to be initiated into his first command; the factors are his youthful dream and illusion, fervid imagination, exuberance and potentiality, and the irresistible attraction for the exotic, luxuriant East. Basically romantic and egotist, Marlow too, like Captain Beard, is bent on personal aggrandizement. His ideals as a youth, further stimulated by the ship’s motto “Do or die”, set him apart from others and make him lonely and secluded.
To Marlow, youth is synonymous with romantic charm, with magic beauty and adventure, with strength, vigour, and energy. Youth exults in the spirit of independence; it makes one different from the old and experienced who have their visions of the glory of youth. At the very outset of *Youth* Marlow is emotionally detached from his two superiors Captain Beard and Mahon, and ever since he is solely confined to his own world of action, excitement, and adventure. Some glimpses of this enchanted world of youth can be caught from the books he chooses to read: Carlyle's *Sartar Resartus* and Burnaby's *Ride to Khiva*, and a complete set of Byron's works. Marlow's remarks about the first two books are significant:

... but I remember I preferred the soldier to the philosopher at the time; a preference which life only confirmed. One was a man, and the other was neither more—or less (p.97).

Not that the young Marlow is wholly abhorrent to the philosopher, but the philosopher remains a puzzling mystery to him. Marlow, however, decides to model his life on the soldier with a 'Do or die' creed before him, and thus isolates himself from the rest of the crew.

Marlow's isolation is also seen in his acceptance of the responsibility of the first command of the 14-foot boat. The exotic East is waiting for Marlow who is always looking forward to the prospect of an 'independent cruising'. As the command falls on him Marlow is overwhelmingly jubilant and is thrilled with the idea that he "wasn't going to sail in a squadron if there were a chance for independent cruising (p.124). Despite the cautions of the captain and Mahon, Marlow is stimulated by the magic charm and beauty of youth: "I wanted to have my first command all to myself,... I would make land by myself... youth! All youth! The silly, charming, beautiful youth". (p.124)

In having the command 'all to myself' and in isolation from the *squadron* Marlow no doubt vindicates his youthful silliness. Facing the tremendous hardships—the deluge, the heat, and thirst—a do-or-die situation—he is not
upset. He persists in the struggle with the feeling that "I could last for ever, outlast the sea"; the feeling of the "triumphant conviction of strength, the heat of life in the handful of dust" (pp.126-7) helps Marlow immensely to reach the mysterious portal of the East. In the loneliness of command he not only communes with himself, but becomes spiritually enlightened by discovering the mysterious East that "faced me, perfumed like a flower, silent like death, dark like a grave"(p.128)

The theme of youth with all its glamour, intoxication, and romantic illusions gains added significance when Conrad ironically contrasts youth with old age throughout the story. Captain Beard and Mrs. Beard combine old age and youth in their physical features. Mahon the mate is again presented as an old man. Conrad also draws attention to the Judea which is also an old ship, "all rust, dust, grime", but the motto below her name belies her age—"Do or die" which stirs Marlow's imagination. The choice of the four aged men with their weary faces—a company director, an accountant, a lawyer, and the author—has been deliberate and significant. They provide the necessary frame for the recollection of the illusion of Marlow's youth. Further, "the contrast between these weary faces and the intensity of Marlow's account enhance the dramatic quality of his vision".22

Young Marlow regards himself as an indestructible being. Nothing can touch him—neither the wrath of the ocean nor the inadequacy of men. So romantically absorbed in his dream, Marlow's final conclusion is that youthful strength and glamour of adventure are but illusions, that life must inevitably end in disenchantment, in weariness, in death. Youth is presented as "an illustration of the fundamental principle of the Conradian universe: the paradoxical futility of human endeavour".23

You fellows know there are those voyages that seem ordered for the illustration of life, that might stand for a symbol of existence.... You can simply do nothing...—nor even marry an old maid, or get a wretched 600-ton cargo of coal to its port of destination (pp.93-4).
The theme of death occupies a dominant place in *Youth*—that contradiction of all human endeavour and aspirations. This consciousness produces a tragic sense of life; it is ironic in the sense that it is stubbornly affirmative. While recollecting his past of youthful fervour, illusion, vitality, and aspirations, and the people associated with the experience, Marlow consciously points out the steady march of time and of the inscrutable Nemesis “which lies in wait, pursues, and overtakes” (pp.131-2) so many of them. Captain Beard and Mrs. Beard, and Mahon the mate have all died in course of time, just as the innocent simplicity of Marlow’s youth has vanished through his involvement with the puzzling experiences of the world. Marlow’s experience of the East on his first arrival there is quite embarrassing and bewildering. This is not the East of his dream; it proves now ‘an absurd dream’. The old Marlow observes that he is quick to discover the images of death not only in his fellow crew who touch the East and fall asleep “in the careless attitudes of death” (p.131), but also in the vague, mysterious multitude of an Eastern crowd who stand still looking at the sleeping men who have come to them from the sea. There is no stir, no movement in the branches of the tree along the shore.

The theme of death gains added significance in *Youth* with the death of the Judea. Throughout the story the old ship is personified, made symbolic of age and experience.

*She was all rust, dust, grime—soot aloft, dirt on deck.... it was... a ruined cottage.... She had a primitive windlass, wooden latches to the doors, not a bit of brass about her, and a big square stern (p.95).*

The death of the Judea was like the death of a human being. She was glorified for her fidelity to the seas.

*She burned furiously; mournful and imposing like a funeral pile kindled in the right, surrounded by the sea, watched over by the stars. A magnificent death had come like a grace, like a gift, like a reward to the old ship at the end of her laborious days (p.125).*
And in a bid to offer a tribute to the ship for her 'glorious triumph' the three boats of the *Judea* move "round her remains as if in procession" (p.125).

Conrad shows a distinct evolution in Marlow's style, that highlights his character and the nature of his realisation. *Youth* comprises "vague generalisations and abstractions unsupported by specifics, repetitions that do not clarify the sense, and his references to an epic past that his adventures only burlesque". Marlow also tends to rhapsodise with increased stresses as the story advances. It would seem that for Conrad, the modern artist, the need to express his thoughts on fallibility and mortality as part of human experience, was urgent and yet immensely difficult. He, therefore, has recourse to non-syntactical language which is "a psychic gesture, an effort to replace the temporal dimension of language, syntax, with an ecstatic chant, whose repetitions defy movement".

Ah! The good old time—the good old lime. Youth and the sea. Glamour and the sea! The good, strong sea, the salt bitter sea, that could whisper to you and roar at you and knock your breath out of you (p.132).

With the help of this incantatory language Conrad tries to hint at the passing of something unseen. The sea and its impact are invoked in all their multiplicity. It is an approximation to transcribe the ineffable, rather than a clear statement of his complex experience.

The use of contrasting images in *Youth* has enriched its style; its ironic structure immensely contributes to the exposition of the leading themes in the story. In the scene in which the *Judea* burns, a very meticulous contrast is presented in the description of the burning ship and the surrounding sea.

*The sky was a miracle of purity, a miracle of azure. The sea was polished, was blue, was pellucid, was sparkling like a precious stone... and the ‘Judea’ glided imperceptibly, enveloped in languid and unclean vapours... a pestiferous cloud defiling the splendour of sea and sky (p.110).*

The images of light, clarity, and purity are contrasted with those of dark, impure images. The black, dirty smoke of the *Judea*’s cargo has stained like ‘a
pestiferous cloud’ the absolute purity of the pellucid ocean; it defiles the bright
and splendid countenance of the sky. Similarly, the young, cheerful Marlow’s
dream of the East is contrasted with the hard, mundane, and purely mechanical
way of reaching there. Indeed, this juxtaposition of images is a cardinal aspect
of Conrad’s methods in Youth.27

The image of fire presented through the burning out of the Judea and her final
conflagration at sea symbolically corroborates the theme. Its placing is equally
striking.28

Oh! The glamour of youth! Oh, the fire of it, more dazzling than the flames of the
burning ship, throwing a magic light on the wide earth, leaping audaciously to the
sky, presently to be quenched by time, more cruel, more pitiless, more bitter than the
sea—and like the flames of the burning ship surrounded by an impenetrable
night(p.120).

To the mature Marlow, the flames of the ship symbolised the mutability of
youth; to him, the flames to be quenched suggested how the vitality of youth is
drained by time. Youth’s dazzling glamour would inevitably fade in course of
time and would be surrounded by a bleak ‘impenetrable night’.

In Youth ‘fire’ is also part of the ritual of initiation. Before Marlow’s discovery
of the East, he enters the flames and from these emerges a newly initiated
person. In Marlow Conrad has found “an embodiment of his own metaphor for
existence; and in Youth, in the burning out and final conflagration, he had
found his own sense of his career”.29 Marlow’s youthful vision of the East
“mysterious, resplendent, and sombre” (p.131) becomes Conrad’s vision
achieved through the burning out of the ‘Judea’.30

Thus form and themes are truly blended in Youth. The themes emerge from a
subtle and complex interaction and interrelation of its different formal
elements. After decodification characters and setting, the plot and the narrative
mode, style and language, symbols and imagery are perfectly integrated with
the narrative structure of Youth. The themes emerge from their interplay. The
narrative rhapsodises over the glamour and brilliance, strength and energy, fascination and flamboyance of youth which is again, Conrad reminds us, destined to pass away like all other phenomena. Characters are presented with realistic details against the enigma and mystery of the vast sea that dominates like an inscrutable Nemesis. They strive hard to ward off the impending peril only by striking among themselves a bond of loyalty, fidelity and solidarity, and by a devotion to the profession and craft. With these moral qualities the crew of the Judea could deliver themselves from the crises that had overtaken them. Captain Beard and Marlow are basically egotists bent on personal aggrandizement, and represent the two stages of human life—old age and romantic youth. Mahon too represents old age and his long white beard openly speaks of his considerable experience and authority, although he is second-in-command of the Judea. The crew of the Liverpool hard cases are compared with Marlow in their professional skill and dedication to the service. The dominant feature of Marlow's narration is the careful alternation between realism and romance. In Youth dream and reality fuse and blend. This ambivalence is implied in the shifting tones of Marlow. Youth is both an ode and elegy. The first ever appearance of Marlow as the first-person narrator-cum-protagonist in Conrad's fiction opens up a new possibility of narrative technique. Conrad now discovers a very effective device by which he can maintain a perfect detachment from, yet remain truthful to, his working material in fiction. Truly, in the unification of form and themes Youth marks an advance upon Conrad's earlier fiction, and anticipates his masterpieces like Heart of Darkness and Lord Jim.

Heart of Darkness

Heart of Darkness is recognized as an important short fiction written by Conrad. Subjected to the transmuting process of Conrad's lively imagination, Heart of Darkness is in essence an expression of the social and historical
reality of the Congo Free State. It is an early expression of “a world-wide revulsion from the horrors of Leopold’s exploitation of the Congo.”  The short novel is not, however, a direct representation of conditions prevailing in the Congo in 1890; nor is it a discreet transcription of Conrad’s actual experiences there.

Conrad had this subject of exploitation distinctly in his mind when he told William Blackwood in his first letter about the story that “the subject is of our time distinctly”. He, however, stated that it was “not topically treated”. The truth is that several major themes are explored here in *Heart of Darkness*. Thematically, Kurtz stands at the centre of the novel, from whom emanates the tragedy which ultimately grips Marlow. After Kurtz’s death Marlow essentially lives the life of Kurtz in painful agony and with an excited mind and imagination that needs comfort and solace. In the words of Walter F. Wright, “the tragedy of Kurtz and the education of Marlow fuse into one story, since for Marlow that tragedy represents his furthest penetration into the heart of darkness”.

The anti-colonial theme is another major argument of *Heart of Darkness*. The imperial attitude of the nineteenth century, the primacy and even the complete centrality and superiority of the West over the millions of the ravaged, tortured, and economically oppressed colonial peoples of Africa is beautifully captured in the complex and rich narrative form of this great novella *Heart of Darkness*. Conrad briefly dwells upon two quite different but intimately related aspects of imperialism: the idea that is based on the power to take over territory; and the practice that essentially disguises or obscures this by developing a justificatory regime of self-aggrandizing, self-originating authority interposed between the victim of imperialism and its perpetrator. Primitivism and cannibalism as issues of great concern also come up for treatment in the story in which Marlow repeatedly states that he is recounting a spiritual voyage of self-discovery: And his journey has been through the temptation of atavism. In this short novel Conrad has brilliantly evoked a primordial human history through suggestive depiction of the rich and
gorgeous wilderness in the Congo shrouded in an impenetrable darkness. Conrad has not only depicted wilderness; he has in fact personified it and thought of it as a living organism. So that the impact of wilderness, made more mysterious by its utter solitude, on Kurtz and other colonial people coming in contact with it, has been overwhelming. Themes of restraint and abandon, of the conflict between dream and reality are also other major concerns of Conrad in Heart of Darkness. But the unique feature of Conrad's narrative skill and technique is that these themes exist there in the narrative in a sort of chain reaction, very much interrelated with, and frequently overlapping one another.

The nineteenth century assumption that progress would ultimately lead to man's self-deification has been summarised by Winwood Reade in his book The Martyrdom of Man (1872):

> Finally, men will master the forces of nature; they will become themselves architects of systems, manufacturers of worlds. Man then will be perfect; he will then be a creator; he will then be what the vulgar worship as a god.  

And the white Europeans were virtually endowed with this role of "the rightness of a god", when they went out to govern the colonies. In Heart of Darkness Kurtz comes to represent this nineteenth century view. No doubt he leaves for the Congo primarily to make money: "... it was his impatience of comparative poverty that drove him out there" (p.108). He is thus a representative of economic individualism, although he ventures into Africa, equipped with all sorts of moral ideas.

Kurtz is engaged in bringing the light of civilization to Africa's dark tribes. But once he is liberated from all restraints of civilization, and the wilderness speaks to him "things about himself which he did not know," (p.83) he surrenders himself to the primitive forces within and lets loose all his "forgotten and brutal instincts" (p.94). His conscience and that "reason's gift" are powerless against the appetites that Kurtz satisfies in association with the savages "below him on
the evolutionary chain of being". The wilderness has taken on him a terrible
vengeance for the "fantastic invasion". And its whisper which is irresistible and
fascinating "echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core"
(p.83).

Sartre defines man as "the being whose plan it is to become God." Conrad has
embodied the unreal and extreme nature of the plan in the fate of Kurtz whose
steady moral degeneration in the Congo has only culminated in his final leap
back into the darkness, and not in a movement forward in which the
replacement of God is achieved as envisaged in nineteenth century thought.

But this demoralised Kurtz is sharply different from that prefigured in the 17-
page report to the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs.
In this report, he begins with the argument that the white people have attained
progress to such an extent that when they went into backward countries like the
Congo, they

... must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings —
we approach them with the might as of a deity .... (Pp.71-2)

Kurtz also states that the white people can do a lot to improve the conditions of
life of the savages. The "magic current of phrases" flows through the entire
report. It is magnificent, a beautiful piece of peroration that he has composed
before he goes to the Congo. His counsel with the immense solitude which
dominate the wilderness has terrible withering effects on him; his soul has
looked within him, and has gone mad and

...caused him to preside at certain midnight dances ending with unspeakable rites
which—as far as I reluctantly gathered from what I heard at various times—were
offered up to him -- ....to Mr Kurtz himself (p.71).
In thus describing Kurtz Marlow is horrified. Marlow suggests that Kurtz’s outlook after his arrival at the Congo has been undergoing a change. As he gradually discards the claims of and commitments to civilized society with its double checks of a police at one corner, and a butcher on the other, Kurtz is irresistibly drawn to the ways of the savages with whom he becomes ultimately identified. This identification has given him the scope to rise to the position of their supreme leader, a god in the eyes of the savages who now worship and adore him. Kurtz asserts his claims to “the rightness of a god” through his monopoly of firearms. The Russian harlequin confirms this basis of Kurtz’s power when he says:

_He came to them with thunder and lightning, you know—and they had never seen anything like it (p.80)._ 

Ironically, Kurtz is attached to the savages to such an extent that he can hardly leave them. He would not venture into another country for ivory, as he cannot forsake them. But then his inner contradiction is expressed in the postscript at the end of his report:

_Exterminate all the brutes! (p.72)_

Kurtz finally hints at the method to deal with the brutes, which contradicts his idealistic approach envisioned in the report. Kurtz is, then, anything but ordinary. Europe has contributed to his making. Marlow and the manager coming to rescue him meet with stiff opposition. It is because Kurtz’s fascination for the abomination in the Congo is profound and inalienable from his self. But Kurtz first came to Africa with “moral ideas of some sort”. This has been hinted at by his sometime journalist colleague in Europe, whom Marlow meets later:

...he had the faith. He could get himself to believe anything—anything. He could have been a splendid leader of an extreme party”. ‘What party?’ I asked. ‘Any party’, answered the other. ‘He was an—an—extremist.’ Did I not think so? I assented (p.104).
Here Conrad ironically presents the moral stature of Kurtz and characterises him as a man possessing all faiths, or any faith. Marlow's confusion is clear in his question—'What party?'—implying that he understands "the faith" to be a single moral ideal to which Kurtz dedicates himself. But the clarification shows that ‘the faith’ is "some quality or ability that enables Kurtz to believe in any creed whatsoever."

Marlow's experience in the Congo, and especially of Kurtz, is that the 'pilgrims' of Europe under the guise of benevolent activities are actually bringing repression and brutality upon the natives. The human skulls fixed on half-a-dozen slim posts that stand in a row near the house of Kurtz confirm the fact that he lacks restraint and the dried-up heads are those of the rebels and are there as an example to the rest of the savages. Kurtz's degeneration has been inconceivable. Marlow rightly comments on Kurtz when he refers to his struggle with the shadow of Kurtz to bring him back to the cabin of the steamboat:

...I had to deal with a being to whom I could not appeal in the name of anything high or low. I had, even like the niggers, to invoke him—himself—his own exalted and incredible degradation. There was nothing either above or below him, and I knew it. He had kicked himself loose of the earth. Confound the man! he had kicked the very earth to pieces (p.95).

Marlow suggests that Kurtz's moral degradation has been "exalted and incredible". He has not simply "kicked himself loose of the earth", but actually "kicked the very earth to pieces."

However, Marlow does not explain Kurtz's culminating experience embodied in the utterance "The horror! The horror!"(p.100) as a cry of selfish despair; he declares that Kurtz has "summed up". And in that case, according to Guetti, "the utterance means that all hearts are in darkness. The morality and meaning are bound to prove unreal; the reality of experience can never be expressed in language. This is exactly the knowledge which Kurtz imparts to Marlow, and for its achievement Kurtz
Kurtz can pronounce a judgment upon the “adventures of his soul” on this earth. And in exploring the ultimate truth Kurtz is destroyed. His cry ‘The horror!’ is “… the expression of some sort of belief; it had candour, it had conviction… it had the appalling face of a glimpsed truth….” (p.101) Marlow believes that Kurtz’s cry proclaims “a revulsion against his darker self, a sign that he has not been lost completely.” Marlow is convinced that for Kurtz “It was an affirmation, a moral victory….” (p.101)

On the contrary, Marlow has been unable to achieve as much, despite the thrilling and vibrating call of the wilderness, chiefly because he is torn throughout the narrative “between the desire to achieve a realisation as final as Kurtz’s and the conviction that he must deny such a realisation if his life is to have meaning.” It is for this reason that Marlow declares his sympathetic allegiance to Kurtz to the last and even beyond (p.101).

Similarly, there exists in Kurtz a dichotomy between his speech and his unvoiced self. On the last part of his journey to the Inner Station when Marlow is still feeling the warmth of the blood of his “second-rate helmsman” in his shoes, he has been reflecting on Kurtz with a kind of despair as if Kurtz were “something altogether without a substance”(p.67). Marlow comes to imagine Kurtz not “as doing, you know, but as discoursing”(p.67)—the man presents himself as a voice. Of all his gifts, the most remarkable is

... his ability to talk, his words—the gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness(p.68).

Marlow’s failure to discover the meaning of Kurtz and his experience is underlined by Marlow’s use of the ambiguous and the paradoxical in the passage: ‘bewildering’ and ‘illuminating’; ‘exalted’ and ‘contemptible’; ‘stream of light’ and ‘the deceitful flow of darkness’. Marlow’s insistence on
the adjectives and conflicting images of light and dark seems to convey the 
nightmarish and dream-like condition of Kurtz’s experience, which no 
language can adequately concretize:

... No, it is impossible; it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch 
of one’s existence—that which makes its truth, its meaning—its subtle and 
penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream—alone...(p.39)

Marlow suggests that this inability to attribute meaning to experience is 
universal. In highlighting Kurtz’s loneliness and remoteness from the world of 
meanings Marlow actually symbolises the general condition of human 
experience: “We live, as we dream—alone ....”

*Heart of Darkness* is considered “a powerful attack not only on Belgian 
colonisation but on Western expansion in general.” That is why Conrad gives 
a more universal implication to his treatment of the anti-colonial theme in 
*Heart of Darkness*. Marlow’s judgment on the achievement of the ‘pilgrims’ 
who had gone to the Dark Continent for some civilizing work has been inspired 
with hateful scorn:

> The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who 
have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty 
thing when you look into it too much(p.10).

For the undermining act is carried out there on a scale tantamount to utter 
robbery and butchery perpetrated with violence and blindness. Clearly, Conrad 
wants to convey his realisation that imperial or colonial experience in black 
Africa has been disastrous for the whites who, because of their complexion, are 
filled with empty vanity and intolerable hypocrisy, and who virtually unleash a 
rule of oppression and repression on the savage natives of Africa in the name of 
fake works of progress and civilization. In Section One of *Heart of Darkness* 
Marlow closely observes and depicts with caustic irony the horrible scenes of 
killing and enslaving of the native population. Six black men in their extreme 
emaciation move in a file, balancing small baskets full of earth on their heads:
“each had an iron collar on his neck, and all were connected together with a chain...rhythmically clinking” (p.22) -- they move with “complete death-like indifference.” (p.23). And a white man—“the product of the new forces at work”—strolls behind them with a rifle. Moral degeneration has swallowed up the souls of the ‘pilgrims’—the term ‘pilgrim’ itself is sarcastic—so much so that they call the natives ‘criminals’, while choosing to flatter themselves as “the reclaimed.” (p.23). The scene at the Company’s Station has been one of waste of materials and meaningless blasting of rocks—the sort of actions which in no way contribute to the progress and development of the savage people. Thus in the dark and incomprehensible wilderness, terms like ‘criminal’, ‘reclaimed’, and ‘progress’ receive a new connotation of ironic meanings.

Profoundly shocked at this scene of brutality, Marlow moves ahead and in a moment realises that he has virtually “stepped into the gloomy circle of some Inferno” (p.24) where the black shapes “in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair” have withdrawn to die. For the whites operating there are more interested in keeping steady and uninterrupted the flow of ivory from the inmost depths of Africa, rather than in caring for the welfare of the savages who supply them ivory. So the scene of general waste shows the whites’ moral degeneration, although they initially went there equipped with all kinds of lofty moral idealisms. Marlow, however, is repulsed and makes no secret of his sympathy for the oppressed when he haltingly observes:

They were dying slowly—it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now,—nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom (p.24).

Marlow has made the general situation more poignant by concentrating on an isolated savage who is extremely emaciated with sunken eyes and blind vacant look. “Genocide becomes meaningful only if we sense the plight of individuals”.48 Marlow then describes the other slaves as graphically as this one. He is horror-struck and painfully agonised to see these black figures dying
in the very heart of darkness. By letting Marlow confront the human waste which crosses all limits of endurance in the Congo, Conrad intends to present “his view of Marlow as a man being tested by an irrational and anarchic situation.” Moreover, Conrad’s objective in the novella is not merely to record “the description of a journey but the creation of a chaotic, amoral atmosphere which tempts Marlow.” Conrad, therefore, outlines the immense waste of metals and materials before he depicts the listless deaths of the Africans under the cruel system of the Europeans.

This is related to another important and insistent aspect of Heart of Darkness—Marlow’s feeling of the sense of unreality as he follows his journey up the river. Sailing down the coast of West Africa, Marlow notices—

...a man-of-war anchored off the coast. There wasn’t even a shade there, and she was shelling the bush. It appears the French had one of their wars going on thereabouts. Her ensign dropped limp like a rag; the muzzles of her long six-inch guns stuck out all over the low hull; the greasy, slimy swell swung her up easily and let her down, swaying her thin masts. In the empty immensity of earth, sky, and water, there she was, incomprehensible, firing into a continent (p.20).

Marlow is vehemently ironic when he states that there is “a touch of insanity in the proceeding.” In this alien environment, in the tepid, echoless air, the sluggish, greasy swell, and above all in this sheer scale and emptiness of land and sea, the firing of the French ship into the dark continent seems to be without any apparent motive or purpose. Even firing from the six-inch gun proved ineffective and turned out to be nothing better than ‘a small flame’, ‘a little white smoke,’ and ‘a tiny projectile’. The shattering report sounds like ‘a pop’, the death-dealing shell appears like ‘a tiny projectile’, and the target to be destroyed becomes ‘a continent’. This fatuous incident brilliantly highlights the unreality of experience and demonstrates that

the intelligibility of what men do depends upon the context in which they do it. The first important thing that Marlow's journey reveals to him is that what made sense in Europe no longer makes sense in Africa.
The discordant note and the absurdity of the experience evoke in Marlow a mixed reaction—"a sense of lugubrious drollery."

The same sense of unreality persists when Marlow disembarks and confronts the objects of progress as well as the instruments of progress in the dark continent. Marlow notices, for example, that a railway track is apparently being built; but he can make little sense of what is happening in the name of progress. The activity of the engineers is confined to "objectless blasting." Familiar artefacts ironically appear like strange beasts: a boiler is "wallowing in the grass," a truck lies "on its back with its wheels in the air." None of the white men present there—for example, the manager, the brick-maker and the 'pilgrims'—even impresses Marlow as having any merit whatsoever. Marlow's whole account of them is contemptuously ironical and sarcastic. For Marlow finds that they are engaged in internecine activities:

they beguiled the time by backbiting and intriguing against each other in a foolish kind of way. There was an air of plotting about that station, but nothing came of it, of course. It was as unreal as everything else. The only real feeling was a desire to get appointed to a trading-post where ivory was to be had, so that they could earn their percentages (p.35).

Marlow sees through the pointlessness of it all. This sense in him is further strengthened when he looks about the Central Station and finds to his utter surprise—

These men strolling aimlessly about in the sunshine of the yard. I asked myself sometimes what it all meant.... By Jove! I've never seen anything so unreal in my life! And outside, the silent wilderness surrounding this cleared speck on the earth struck me as something great and invincible, like evil or truth, waiting patiently for the passing away of this fantastic invasion (p.33).

In sharp contrast to the white people's general attitude of apathy and indifference in the Congo, Marlow's conviction is that through work only he can keep his hold on "the redeeming facts of life." Thus Marlow has emphasized the distinction between the two levels of reality and their contrast with the unreality of the white men. There is the reality of work and its
efficiency; and there is the reality of the darkness of the jungle. James Guetti elaborates this point in the following manner:

*Marlow uses the term 'reality' in two ways: the primary reality is the suggested essence of the wilderness, the darkness that must remain hidden if a man is to survive morally, while the secondary reality is a figurative reality like work, an artificial reality by which the truly real is concealed or even replaced. And Marlow admits that this reality of the second sort is simply a deluding activity, a fictitious play over the surface of things.*

It is the tension between these two types of reality which is of vital interest in the narrative sequence of *Heart of Darkness*.

According to the Victorian moral imperatives, work has a deep spiritual significance and its influence on the individual is immense. As Walter Houghton remarks:

*Except for God, the most popular word in the Victorian vocabulary must have been work.*

In *Heart of Darkness* Conrad lays emphasis on this redeeming quality of work. On his journey up the river Congo, Marlow has glimpses of primitive tribal dances in “wild and passionate uproar” (p.51) which strikes a responsive chord in him. But he does not go “ashore for a howl and dance” (p.52) because he is committed to his job as captain. Marlow states: “There was surface-truth enough in these things to save a wiser man” (p.52). With practical virtues like restraint and fidelity and with an integrated self Marlow meets Africa and Kurtz.

Obviously, the description of his encounter with some African canoes paddled by “black fellows” is an illustration of Marlow’s firm and conscious grasp of the norms and conventions of his own society; that is, of restraint and rationality:

*Now and then a boat from the shore gave one a momentary contact with reality. It was paddled by black fellows. You could see from afar the whites of their eyeballs glistening. They shouted, sang; their bodies streamed with perspiration; they had faces like grotesque masks—these chaps; but they had bones, muscles, a wild vitality,*
To Marlow, the black people are perfectly suited to the wilderness. With expressionless faces as if they are wearing "grotesque masks," they possess a kind of wildness, vitality, and energy which is very comforting to the eyes of Marlow. The blacks are real because "they wanted no excuse for being there." Even when Marlow is occasionally tempted to respond to the throb of the jungle drum, to the call of the wilderness, he does it precisely because of its sheer savagery and here he confronts the "truth stripped of its cloak of time" (p.52)—that is, a truth which exists prior to the truth that civilization has brought about, and which is therefore timeless or permanent. Marlow thus acknowledges that the primitive is fundamental. Marlow also points to a counter-truth that civilization is not to be taken as something given, but as something achieved in a persistent challenge against vital and elemental nature and savagery. This "anti-thetical conception of reality" is at the centre of *Heart of Darkness*. And in this light alone could the spectacular degradation of Kurtz be fully understood. Marlow is distinguished from the manager in that he never becomes a party to the exploitation of the primitive. What separates Marlow from Kurtz is that he never approves of Kurtz's surrender to the primitive. Kurtz has shed his inheritance of all the cultural values he has taken so ostentatiously into Africa. On the contrary, he takes a "high seat among the devils of the land" (p.70).

In *Heart of Darkness* Conrad has evoked a primordial human history through suggestive depiction of the rich and gorgeous wilderness in the Congo shrouded in an impenetrable darkness. Reaching the Central Station, Marlow imagines to have heard an "ichthyosaurus... taking a bath" (p.43). Later he can visualize that "going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were Kings"(p.48):
we were wanderers on prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet. We could have fancied ourselves, the first of men taking possession of an accursed inheritance, to be subdued at the cost of profound anguish and of excessive toil (p.51).

The strangeness of the scene seems to have confounded Marlow who realizes that facing this “accursed inheritance” means launching a hard struggle against this mysterious and incomprehensible force in darkness.

Marlow’s attempt to penetrate the wilderness of the Congo flashes across his mind the case of the Romans first, who faced a similar situation when they came to England to conquer it and when it was “one of the dark places of the earth” (p.7). They must have felt:

> the savagery, the utter savagery, had closed round him,—all that mysterious life of the wilderness that stirs in the forest, in the jungles, in the hearts of wild men. There’s no initiation either into such mysteries. He has to live in the midst of the incomprehensible, which is also detestable. And it has a fascination too, that goes to work upon him. The fascination of the abomination—you know, imagine the growing regrets, the longing to escape, the powerless disgust, the surrender, the hate (p.9).

Marlow’s intention has been to present the forceful analogy between a decent young citizen in toga and Kurtz, and between the Roman’s sense of savagery in ancient Britain and Kurtz’s in darkest Africa. Conrad also makes his narrator reveal why civilized life is constantly threatened by the savage: it is because “all that mysterious life of the wilderness that stirs in the forest, in the jungles,” stirs also “in the hearts” of men (p.93).

In tune with this prehistoric earth Marlow also presents “the prehistoric man” of whom he has a sudden glimpse, crawling towards Kurtz:

> But suddenly, as we struggled round a bend, there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage (p.51).

These wild tribes howl, dance, spin around, and make horrid faces; their combined activities produce the effect of “a black and incomprehensible frenzy” (p.51). And the wilderness of the earth appears like “a thing monstrous
and free'. Marlow's fearful assumption that they are in "proximity to a great human passion let loose" (p.61)—the "unrestrained grief" of the savages which itself constitutes a great danger for the 'pilgrims'—comes true hours later. Marlow's steamboat, when just eight miles below the Inner Station, is attacked by the natives, who kill his helmsman. In the same way Fresleven, Marlow's predecessor, met his end while trying to assert his self-respect in this lonely and god-forsaken wilderness.

Apart from being sombre, this African wilderness is rich and gorgeous. And by his vivid description of detail Conrad creates the evocation of the powers of evil or darkness:

*The great wall of vegetation, an exuberant and entangled mass of trunks, branches, leaves, boughs, festoons, motionless in the moonlight, was like a rioting invasion of soundless life, a rolling wave of plants, piled up, crested, ready to topple over the creek, to sweep every little man of us out of his little existence* (p.43).

The jungle manifests a fine fecundity, an abundant and dynamic vitality. Conrad's prose enacts motion in stillness in a language of seeming contradiction e.g. stationary exuberance; soundless life; and arrested motion. This volatile impression of the wilderness is further enriched by the presentation of Kurtz's black woman. With the "wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman" she moved to the "slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments".

*she was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress. And in the hush that had fallen suddenly upon the whole sorrowful land, the immense wilderness, the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life seemed to look at her, pensive, as though it has been looking at the image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul* (p.87).

The colossal body and magnificent appearance of the woman is presented through a strange reconciliation of opposites and is, therefore, subversive of easy categorization. By attributing contradictory qualities to the native woman Conrad shows her capable of both abandon and restraint. Savagery apart, she embodies the rich fecundity and abundant vitality of the jungle.
Now that Marlow has encountered the wilderness full of "unspeakable secrets," he feels "an intolerable weight" oppressing his breast, "the smell of the camp earth, the unseen presence of victorious corruption, the darkness of an impenetrable night" (p.89). This corruption, corruption of flesh, which is the dark smell of the wilderness, emanates from the cannibals whom Marlow suddenly discovers among the native stokers of his steamboat. Halted by dense fog near their destination of the Inner Station, Marlow and his companions hear an outburst of shrieking from the invisible bank, a vibrant call from the jungle that excites the repressed cannibalistic instinct of the stokers. The stokers' headman, young, black, broad-chested, and powerful, turns to Marlow and "snapped, with a bloodshot widening of his eyes and a flash of sharp teeth":

*Catch 'im...Give 'im to us'*

"To you, eh?" I asked; what would you do with them?"

"Eat im!" he said, curtly, and leaning his elbow on the rail, looked out into the fog in a dignified and profoundly pensive attitude (p.58).

Marlow with his precarious grip on existence is quick to realise that these men must be hungry, must be growing increasingly hungry for this past month. At the same time Marlow is reminded that "they had brought along a provision of hippo-meat which went rotten, and made the mystery of the wilderness stick in [his] nostrils" (p.50). Marlow discovers in their savage abandon that virtue of self-possession which sets them apart; their restraint in leaving untouched the defenceless cargo of so-called 'pilgrims' virtually at their disposal, especially when they are severely tormented by lingering starvation. While expressing his unqualified gratitude for the impressive behaviour of the cannibals, Marlow is not impervious to the necessity of a legitimate self-defence that he instantly takes by tipping overboard the dead body of the helmsman (p.73). For he cannot approve of the 'ominous murmur' below deck among the woodcutters about his late helmsman. They are scandalized at the swift action taken by Marlow who, however, decides otherwise:
Marlow's handling of the helmsman's corpse suggests that the horror of an onslaught from the cannibals has been still uppermost in his mind. And for Marlow precisely the darkest, the most oppressive moment is when he observes suddenly that the headman of his woodcutters "turned upon him [the Russian] his heavy and glittering eyes" (p.79). Of all things, Marlow becomes at once conscious of a queer, dark and unaccountable feeling and to him the whole earth appears to be drowned in damnation:

"... I assure you that never, never before, did this land, this river, this jungle, the very arch of this blazing sky, appear to me so hopeless and so dark, so impenetrable to human thought, so pitiless to human weakness (pp.79-80)."

Yet these savage cannibals are intended as a glaring contrast to the white agents of the Trading Company. While the white 'pilgrims' symbolize greed, avarice, self-centredness, unscrupulousness, superficiality, and absence of moral backbone, the cannibals are equated with work, efficiency, and above all self-restraint. Conrad wants us to see "how Kurtz's great looting adventure, Marlow's journey up the river, and the narrative itself all share a common theme: Europeans performing acts of imperial mastery and will in (or about) Africa" with tremendous violence and waste.56

Another important theme of Heart of Darkness is the utter solitude of the wilderness. Conrad suggests how this solitude agonises the soul of Fresleven who lacked restraint in the wilderness; how the powers of darkness secretly assault and possess Kurtz and place him on a high seat among the devils of the land:

"The wilderness had patted him on the head, and, behold, it was like a ball—an ivory ball; it had caressed him, and—lo!—he had withered; it had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation.... (p.69)"
It is significant that the devilish attack on Kurtz by the powers of darkness is presented in "sexual and cannibalistic terms". Letting go, giving in to an absolute abandon, Kurtz loses all self-possession and is consequently open to a counter-possession—possession of the kind of wild abandon which is in effect the same as that of the savages. Reduced to his own nullity, Kurtz is a notable example in Conrad of "the moral nihilism which is the concomitant of such disintegration".58

Another distinctive feature of Heart of Darkness is the nightmare disorientation which becomes a familiar aspect of Marlow's African experience. The narrative of Heart of Darkness is a record of "remote Kinship" with the "wild and passionate uproar", of a "trace of response" to it, of a final rejection of the "fascination of the abomination". Jacques Berthoud59 argues that Conrad's use of "non-naturalistic devices" expresses the sense of dream, of phantasmagoria and nightmare which, Marlow claims, is the essence of his experience.

Throughout his narrative Marlow insists on its dreamlike quality:

It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream—making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt ...(p.39)

Even before leaving Brussels for the Congo Marlow feels as though he "were about to set off for the centre of earth" (p18), not the centre of a continent. The brooding Marlow leaves his familiar rational world, is cut off from the comprehension of his surroundings. His steamer moves "along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy" (p51). As the crisis approaches, Marlow and his ship pass through a silence that "seemed unnatural, like a state of trance" (p56); and soon a few miles below the Inner Station they enter a deep fog. Likewise, Kurtz is shrouded in enigma:

The approach to this Kurtz grubbing for ivory in the wretched bush was beset by as many dangers as though he had been an enchanted princess sleeping in a fabulous castle (p.61).
Conrad’s irony is obvious when he draws the analogy of the unspeakable Kurtz and the mythic “enchanted princess”; and there might be some significance in the fact that here “the double is imagined as an entranced feminine figure.” Marlow’s task is to break the spell of the wilderness which has captivated Kurtz.

Before Marlow and the pilgrims meet Kurtz, it is imperative that civilized trappings or aids should be removed. This is dramatised by the token removal and death of the half-savage guide. The helmsman falling dead at Marlow’s feet spills blood on his shoes, and Marlow is “morbidly anxious” to change them and in fact throws them overboard. “The fear of blood may be, however, a fear of the primitive toward which Marlow is moving. To throw the shoes overboard would then mean a token rejection of the savage, not the civilized-rational.”

Marlow’s moral shock is therefore profound when he discovers to his horror that the cabin is empty and his secret sharer gone. He follows the crawling Kurtz through the grass, and comes upon him “long, pale, indistinct, like a vapour exhaled by the earth” (p.93). And soon after Kurtz is dead, his body is taken off the ship, and finally buried in a “muddy hole”. Marlow’s nightmarish experience comes truly to an end with his lie to Kurtz’s ‘Intended’: “I laid the ghost of his gifts at last with a lie” (p.69).

In the light of this dream-content of the narrative it is only appropriate that the unspeakable rites and unspeakable secrets must remain unspoken. For “a confrontation with such a double and a facet of the unconscious cannot be reported through realistic dialogue.” And the conversations between Marlow and Kurtz must remain as shadowy as the narrator’s conversations with Leggatt in *The Secret Sharer*.

To give form to the themes and ideas in *Heart of Darkness* Conrad employs various structural, narrative, rhetorical, and linguistic devices. The plot of the
novella comprises a journey by Marlow, impelled by the ‘fascination of the abomination’, to the heart of darkness, the confrontation of the wilderness, the death of Kurtz, and his return to the city with a mind radically altered by past experience. The novella is a frame-story, wonderfully entangled by a narrative within a narrative, a flashback within a flashback, a series of quotes within quotes. It is a bildungsroman, an initiation into darkness and chaos, calmly framed by a prologue and an epilogue. In the novella Conrad presents the narrative set retrospectively in the first-person retrospect maintaining a strict chronology, and with no dislocation of time. Conrad also introduces multiple points of view with the two mediating narrators who unfold the story. Also remarkable is the presence of a complex image pattern throughout the narrative, and subtle use of symbols and impressionistic techniques. Linguistically, Heart of Darkness presents a syntax and verbal pattern, sometimes uncanny and incomprehensible, but heavily leaning on adjectival phrases. Characters include Kurtz, the Russian harlequin, the helmsman, the manager, the accountant, and the brickmaker, and their sketchy treatment creates an atmosphere both shady and shadowy. The binary opposites of light and darkness invest the novella’s atmosphere with deeper significance. The material objects referred to are the rivets, the staves of the pilgrims, and the wizened heads on the posts surrounding Kurtz’s house, and, of course, the ivory. Heart of Darkness opens with an unnamed narrator’s account of an evening spent aboard the yawl ‘Nellie’ as it is narrated to four other men who are identified by their professions only; and they, too, passed the time in storytelling. Conrad sets the story on the deck of a boat anchored in the Thames; as Marlow tells his story the sun sets, and by the end of the narrative the heart of darkness has reappeared in England; outside the group of Marlow’s listeners lies an undefined and unclear world. By that world Conrad suggests ‘the potential of a reality that seemed inaccessible to imperialism’, just beyond its control.
For, despite their European names and mannerisms, Conrad's narrators are not average unreflecting witnesses of European imperialism. They do not simply accept what goes on in the name of the imperial idea; they think about it a lot, they worry about it, they are actually quite anxious about whether they can make it seem like a routine thing. But it never is. Conrad's way of demonstrating this discrepancy between the orthodox and his own views of empire is to show how ideas and values are constructed and mystified through dislocations in the narrator's language. Marlow, for example, is never straightforward. Conrad's 'self-consciously circular narrative forms' draw attention to themselves as 'artificial constructions'. Marlow alternates between garrulity and stunning eloquence, and often makes peculiar things seem more peculiar by surprisingly mistating them, or rendering them vague and contradictory. Thus, Marlow says, a French warship fires 'into a continent'; Kurtz's eloquence is enlightening as well as fraudulent.

The whole point of what Kurtz and Marlow talk about is in fact imperial mastery, white Europeans over black Africans and their ivory, civilization over the primitive dark continent. By accentuating the discrepancy between the official 'idea' of empire and the remarkably disorienting actuality of Africa, Marlow unsettles the reader's sense not only of the very idea of empire, but of something more basic, reality itself. For if Conrad can show that all human activity depends on controlling a radically unstable reality to which words approximate only by will or convention, the same is true of empire, of venerating the idea and so forth. With Conrad, then, we are in a world being made and unmade more or less all the time. What appears stable and secure—the policeman at the corner, for instance—is only slightly more secure than the white men in the jungle, and requires the same continuous, although precarious, triumph over an all-pervading darkness, which by the end of the tale is shown to be the same in London and in Africa.⁶⁴ The primary narrator recounts one tale that was told to them that evening. The largest portion of Heart of Darkness is the narrator's verbatim recording and recounting of Marlow's
story. Marlow’s tale, actually told to us by the narrator, replicates Marlow’s own voice. Thus, Marlow’s tale, apparently spoken in Marlow’s voice, is actually voiced by this unnamed narrator. The subtlety of Conrad’s narrative technique is that “the mediating narrative voice, actually always present, vanishes and we believe that we are alone, face to face, in absolute solitude with Charles Marlow”. So, the mediating narrator is simultaneously present and not present in the text. In *Heart of Darkness* our first view of the protagonist Marlow is that of a man radically altered by a past experience. Here the tale-proper begins with the protagonist’s explanation of how he got the appointment which necessitated his excursion up a river. The river excursion is distinguished by three scheduled stops—a number rich in mythic significance; the third and last stop is the soul-altering confrontation with the mysterious Kurtz. *Heart of Darkness* begins and ends in a cyclic manner, on the yawl ‘Nellie’. The opening scene is a meditative moment, one of considerable placidity. Charles Marlow with an ‘ascetic aspect’ sits among others aboard the ‘Nellie’. The calm and orderly serenity of the world outside Marlow creates a sharp contrast to the tumultuous chaos within him.

Structurally, the short novel is divided into three parts: the first break occurs when Marlow is at the Central Station; the second is just at the point of his arrival at the Inner Station when the manager with the escorts has gone to the house of Kurtz, and Marlow is found talking with the enigmatic Russian and has not yet met Kurtz. The Russian suggests that the spread of freedom and progress depends on the removal of all ‘restraints’, and thus represents “the ideal of absolute liberation from religious, social, and ethical norms”. In the third section of the narrative the combination of the Russian’s direct commentary and Marlow’s reflections on it prepares the way for the first appearance of Kurtz, and Marlow at long last meets Kurtz. One significant thing about this division is that each break is not intended to provide a new direction in the narrative; on the contrary, the narrative continues where it
leaves off—the impression remaining unaltered. Apparently, these breaks are found to be necessary; for the story first appeared in serials in “Blackwood’s Magazine” in February, March, and April of 1899. A serialized episode always stops at a sensational moment. For example, the second break suspends for the moment Marlow’s conversation with the Russian, which continues as soon as the narrative resumes. According to Mr. Paine, a pause further occurs in part three at the point when the steamer turns back downriver. This pause in action might “help dramatize the changes that are soon to occur for Marlow and Kurtz, but it is not a controlling factor.”

The striking unity of the story is achieved first from its narrative framework. The frame situation is developed precisely by the primary narrator before Marlow begins the interior story whose unity is ensured by its being rooted entirely in Marlow’s consciousness from its beginning and ending in the “sepulchral city”. The introductory frame of *Heart of Darkness* covers the first ten pages of the story (pp.5-18). This section again may be divided into two nearly equal parts: the primary narrator’s description of the natural and human scene from the deck of the ‘Nellie’, and Marlow’s own introduction to his tale.

On board the yawl ‘Nellie’, anchored at the mouth of the Themes at evening, are five friends and former sailors, sitting meditatively and watching the sun set over the “monstrous town” (p.7); a Director of the Companies, a Lawyer, and an Accountant, in addition to Marlow and the narrator who gives no information about himself. Of them all, Marlow alone still goes out to the sea. Not just a straightforward recital of Marlow’s adventures, Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* is also “a dramatization of Marlow himself, the former wanderer in colonial regions, telling his story to a group of British listeners at a particular time and in a specific place. That this group of people is drawn largely from the business world is Conrad’s way of emphasizing the fact that during the 1890s the business of empire, once an adventurous and often individualistic enterprise, had become the empire of business.”

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The narrator broods briefly on the human history of that waterway; by raking up "abiding memories" (p.6). They are the memories of the countless voyagers who set out from the Thames, and especially of the explorers from Sir Francis Drake to Sir John Franklin. With the "ships whose names are like jewels flashing in the night of time" they had gone out on it

*bearing the sword, and often the torch, messengers of the might within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire* (p.7).

Conrad historicises the theme of exploration and discovery. By now Conrad, the skilful artist, is eminently successful in setting up the novel's basic symbolic dualism through accurate representation of the time and the place in the novel. The light in the sky and the luminous estuary are contrasted with the darkness along the banks of the Thames and over London. But the reference to the explorers from "within the land", bearing the torch clearly indicates that the narrative does not exclusively conform to the traditional symbolic meanings of black as evil and white as good. Here, for instance, the two opposites are intermingled, for example, of the torch of civilization, illuminating, although it came from within the land" which is just shown as dark. This symbolic interplay is continued when the sun finally sets, lights appear on the shore, and Marlow all on a sudden interrupts the narrator's reverie to remark:

*And this also... has been one of the dark places of the earth* (p.7).

With this comment Marlow steps out of the frame narrative. Marlow's intervention turns the narrator's description to Marlow himself. Conrad could probably never have used Marlow to present anything other than an imperialist world-view, given what was available for either Conrad or Marlow to see of the non-European at the time. Independence was for whites and Europeans; the lesser or subject peoples were to be ruled; science, learning, history emanated from the West. It is true Conrad scrupulously recorded the differences between the disgraces of Belgian and British colonial attitudes, but he could only
imagine the world carved up into one or another Western sphere of dominion.

Conrad’s tragic limitation is that even though he could see clearly that on one level imperialism was pure dominance and land-grabbing, he could not then conclude that imperialism had to end so that ‘natives’ could lead lives free from European domination. As a man of his time, Conrad could not grant the natives their freedom, despite his severe critique of the imperialism that enslaved them.⁶⁹

Unlike other seamen, Marlow is a curious “wanderer” who “did not represent his class” (p.8). As for his tales, he is again not typical; to Marlow—

the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel, but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine (p.8).

The narrator’s metaphors of kernel and shell, glow and haze and halo place the narrative of Heart of Darkness within the general ‘impressionist’ position. The arrangement of an usual seaman’s yarn is “centripetal”. Here the story, the narrative vehicle, is the shell, the larger outer sphere; it contains a smaller sphere, the inner kernel of truth. For the central core of meaning the reader is directed to look inside it. As to Marlow’s tales, the arrangement is reversed; it is typically “centrifugal”. Here the story, the narrative vehicle, is the smaller inside sphere, while the reader is made to go outside it in search of meanings which like the “misty halos” are not normally visible, but which the story—the glow, that is—dimly illuminates. Thus the story element is allowed to play a subordinate role. This has been more clearly stated in Conrad’s manuscript:

the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside in the unseen, enveloping the tale which could only bring it out as a glow brings out a haze.⁷₀
The implication of the passage quoted earlier is that the outer sphere of larger meaning is unmistakably infinite, because the haze has no comprehensible circumference; but the finite glow is needed to make the haze visible. Symbolist overtones are heard in

\[ \text{the Infinite is made to blend itself with the Finite, to stand visible, and as it were, attainable there.} \]

Later, Virginia Woolf also describes the aim of modern fiction to be the expression of life seen as “a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope.”

Both Conrad and Woolf suggest the relationship between the symbolist and impressionist perspectives in fiction.

With his comment on England as having been one of the dark places on this earth in the past Marlow soon plunges backwards into England’s remoter past and reflects on the ancient Romans coming to English shores, to “the very end of the world”, full of “sandbanks, marshes, forests, savages” with “death skulking in the air, in the water, in the bush” (p.9). Marlow also imagines “a decent young citizen in toga “coming from Rome to the ancient England of darkness, who was strong enough to face darkness, but ultimately found that savagery

\[ \text{had closed round him,--all that mysterious life of the wilderness that stirs in the forest, in the jungles, in the hearts of wild men. There’s no initiation either into such mysteries.... (p.9)} \]

Marlow asserts that the Romans applied their brutal force, indulged in “robbery with violence”, and took to “aggravated murder on a great scale” in order to satisfy their greed. And they were going “at it blind—as is proper for those who tackle a darkness” (p.10). The term ‘blind’ is significant and is synonymous with moral darkness; it would reappear in other contexts too. The Romans’ “unselfish belief in the idea” might justify ‘conquest’ to themselves;
but Marlow thinks that this was not victory over the darkness but submission to it. By this argument Marlow suggests that the work-ethic of the British colonist and his devotion to efficiency fortified him against the darkness. The Romans, on the contrary, lacked this restraint, and became more vulnerable. Marlow asserts that Roman imperialism had been much cruder and simpler. Marlow contrasts Roman colonizers with their modern counterparts in an oddly perceptive way, illuminating the special mix of power, ideological energy, and practical attitude characterizing European imperialism. The ancient, he says, were ‘no colonist; their administration was a squeeze and nothing more’. Such people conquered and did little else. By contrast, ‘what saves us is efficiency—the devotion to efficiency’, unlike the Romans, who relied on brute force, which is scarcely more than ‘an accident arising from the weakness of others’. Today, however, the conquest of the earth, Marlow explicated, is redeemed by an “idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea—something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to...” (p.10). In his account of his great river journey, Marlow extends the point to mark a distinction between Belgian rapacity and British rationality in the conduct of imperialism. 73

Like the primary narrator’s insistence in the prologue on the conflict between light and darkness, Marlow too suggests here that darkness and light, savagery and civilization are not opposites, but co-exist in the hearts of all men. Marlow thus tries to frame his own tale, preparing his listeners and the reader for an account of his own journey towards the abomination, towards the darkness outside civilization. Describing Marlow as an unusual man, the primary narrator says that Marlow’s strangeness is explicit in the way he sits among the “normal” Englishmen in

the pose of a Buddha preaching in European clothes and without a lotus-flower (p.10).
The still Buddha pose suggests the concentration on inner life. Finally, Marlow introduces his tale with an explanation of its nature:

"to understand the effect of it on me you ought to know how I got out there, what I saw, how I went up that river to the place where I first met the poor chap. It was the farthest point of navigation and the culminating point of my experience.... It was... not extraordinary in any way—not very clear either (p.11)."

He was more concerned with the effects of the facts on him rather than with the facts themselves. Thus the tale would be subjective filtered through Marlow's consciousness; it would be vague and incomprehensible like the "misty halos". This introduction is significant "both as the end of the prologue and as the prologue to Marlow's own narrative". Marlow mainly bases his tale "more on directly reported sights and actions". Thus the narrative structure is much enriched and strengthened with impressionistic particularity.

Marlow presents a highly selective series of details which are again intensely visualized. They are mainly given as natural, unexplained observations and their symbolic connotations would take us far beyond the primary sense of the fateful, uncanny, and impassive atmosphere of the scene; we are made conscious of the existence of a rigid, mechanical, blind, and automatised world.

The introduction consists of a series of Marlow's progressive initiations. Each incident is carefully selected and treated for its larger thematic and symbolic implications. The first extended episode of Marlow's frantic move from London to Brussels "the whited sepulchre" is related to his search for a job in a Trading Society on the Continent, and his subsequent appointment as captain of a steamboat by the same company. The four other main stages of the first section recount Marlow's voyage out, the company station, the overland journey, and the Central Station. They are arranged chronologically, with occasional flashbacks and anticipatory parentheses. At each stage again, some particular episodes are selected and highlighted so as "to amplify or complicate
Marlow’s internal process of moral discovery, rather than to recount his journey”.

A chance encounter with a map of Africa in a London shop-window drives Marlow to Brussels in search of a job. He gets the appointment quickly in the Trading Company, through the intervention of some influential women and his aunt. He is to replace a Danish captain named Fresleven, “the gentlest, quietest creature that ever walked on two legs” (p.13) who nevertheless was killed by the natives over “a misunderstanding about some hens”. Possibly he lost his self-restraint in an effort to assert his self-respect in some way and “whacked the old nigger mercilessly”. This led the chief’s son to desperately make a tentative jab with a spear at the white man—and of course it went quite easy between shoulder-blades” (p.13). Marlow also tells of his discovery some months later of the remains of Fresleven’s body lying where it had fallen and

*the grass growing through his ribs was tall enough to hide his bones. They were all there. The supernatural being had not been touched after he fell (p.13).*

The Fresleven scene, though outside the scope of the inner story, is significant in several respects. It serves the purpose of warning Marlow beforehand of the dangers in the Congo. His audience is also alerted of the wider implications that this brief scene so powerfully contains. Fresleven was corrupted by the “noble cause”—civilizing the natives, which meant subjugating them to the white man’s hunt for ivory. Marlow ironically presents the natives’ view of the white man as “supernatural”, because the ‘supernatural’ Fresleven had become a mere skeleton when Marlow sees his remains—all bones, and the presence of bones suggests cannibalism. The ‘grass’ is again the recurrent image suggesting the fecundity of the jungle and the impact of wilderness. The death of Fresleven anticipates the death of Marlow’s helmsman in a fight with the natives below the Inner Station. The natives’ cannibalism and their view of the white man as ‘supernatural’ are developed later in the presentation of Kurtz and the savage crew of Marlow’s steamboat.
The Fresleven scene is, however, outside the scope of the inner story which begins in Brussels—the “whited sepulchre” that Marlow never names, just as he never actually names Africa, the Congo, or the Congo River. Death imagery dominates the description of his visit to the Company offices in Brussels. Dead silence pervades the whole atmosphere. Two women, “one fat and the other slim”, sit at the office entrance, “guarding the door of Darkness, knitting black wool as for a warm pall” (p.14). As Marlow enters the office, the slim woman leads Marlow up to the door where the ‘compassionate’ secretary takes charge of him and brings him to the director of the company, sitting behind a heavy writing-desk. In about forty-five seconds he is out from “the sanctuary” and back into the outer room, waiting for the simple formality of medical examination. The house is “as still as a house in a city of the dead” (p.16). Finally, the doctor comes and asks Marlow whether he would allow him [the doctor] to measure his head “in the interests of science”. The doctor’s query if there is ever any madness in the family irritates Marlow, but the doctor is unconcerned and insists that “it would be interesting for science to watch the mental changes of individuals, on the spot....” (p.17). The slim knitter’s appearance increases the sense of the non-human. For she does not talk to Marlow, nor does she apparently see him, and her movements are unrelated to other human beings. Her shape bears resemblance to an umbrella and its tight black sheath. She represents a “dehumanised death in life to herself and to others”, and prefigures a symbol of what the trading company actually brings to its employees. The older knitter, on the other hand, with her wart and flat cloth slippers, presents a stark visual image of physical and spiritual deformity combined with heartless unconcern and imperturbable self-complacency. The director of the company with his ‘pale plumpness’ suggests hollow benevolence. In describing the featureless tycoon Marlow is ironic. Marlow by telling less about the external and factual aspects of the scene intends to fix his attention more on the internal and moral. The doctor’s request to measure Marlow’s head points to specific later issues in the narrative—to Kurtz’s skull
and those on his fence posts, and to the physical and mental collapse of Kurtz and Marlow at the end. The doctor's action projects the hypocritical pretences of the medical examiner. All these details bring into focus the horrors underlying the modern world. Marlow is thus able to illuminate the haze which hangs like a "pall" over the society of which the doctor, the clerk, the knitters, and the pale plumpness are the symbolic representatives. He has been initiated into the silent lies of civilization. There is a lack of genuinely reciprocal dialogue; there exists no shared understanding in this society among its individuals. Even Marlow cannot or does not speak out. Marlow in fact confronts a general intellectual and moral impasse whose narrative climax is reached when he is compelled to lie to the Intended of Kurtz; this gap is once again "the reflection of the same breakdown of the shared categories of understanding and judgement".  

At his meeting with the company people, Marlow is quick to perceive that there is "something ominous in the atmosphere" (p.15), that he is entering into "some conspiracy." At the same time his aunt considers him "something like an emissary of light... a lower sort of apostle" (p.18). These conflicting attitudes lead Marlow to think of himself as a kind of "impostor". His uneasiness is conveyed in the lines:

*The best way I can explain it to you is by saying that, for a second or two, I felt as though, instead of going to the centre of a continent, I were about to set off for the centre of the earth* (p.18).

Marlow is haunted with this illusion of unreality which is strengthened during the voyage and repeated in quite different terms when he returns to Brussels.

In his rites of passage in a French steamer to Africa and then upriver towards Kurtz Marlow's journey seems slowly to take on the hue of an enigmatic quest. The coast as it slipped by the ship seems to be "whispering, Come and find out" (p.19). Marlow is overwhelmed by the impression of the vastness of the land against which the ship and the settlements it visits are "no bigger than
pinheads” on the “untouched expanse” of the jungle looking “so dark-green as to be almost black”. Custom-house clerks and soldiers are “flung out” in this “God-forsaken wilderness” without any specific objective. With no point of contact Marlow feels himself isolated and imprisoned “within the toil of a mournful and senseless delusion”. And this “almost featureless” and enigmatic coast seems to “keep me away from the truth of things” (p.19). The voice of the surf, “like the speech of a brother”, is the only consolation to Marlow. And the wild vitality, the energy of movement of black figures occasionally appearing in a boat provides only a momentary contact with reality. To Marlow their presence is quite natural—“they wanted no excuse for being there”.

This dynamic movement of the black natives is immediately juxtaposed with the scene of the French man-of-war “shelling the bush”. It appears as if the French “had one of their wars going on thereabouts” (p.20).

This grotesque scene depicts explicitly the waste, ineffectiveness, and cruelty of the colonial presence that Marlow had observed only at a distance, and from the outside. The warship represents the same lethargic malevolence that Marlow had already experienced at the trading company’s offices. Again the scene prefigures the catastrophe of isolation and dissolution that Marlow finds at the heart of the continent. It also stands “as an objective correlative of the already repeatedly articulated theme of civilization versus barbarity” in the novel. The dark-and-light contradiction is forcefully carried out in the opposing images of the greasy swell and the white surf, the limp flag of the “pilgrims” and the bracing energy of the natives. The blindness of imperialism is hinted at in the ‘pilgrims’ blindly firing at the “enemies” hidden out of sight somewhere.

Marlow’s experience at the company’s Outer Station is horrifying. He is forced to confront the human consequences of the waste, ineffectiveness, and cruelty of the colonial presence. A file of six emaciated blacks is severely tortured and they slowly pass Marlow “with that complete, deathlike indifference of unhappy savages’ (p.23). Relics of civilization and its utter devastation are
manifest and prominent in the "boiler wallowing in the grass", the "decaying machinery", and the "vast artificial hole". And the sound of blasting from the cliff reminds Marlow of the French man-of-war firing into the continent.

The huge waste of human powers further shocks Marlow as "I had stepped into the gloomy circle of some Inferno" (p.24). It is the grove of death "where some of the helpers had withdrawn to die" after repression under enslavement. These shapes are "nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation" mercilessly discarded to rot away just as the useless machinery is condemned to waste in the dark land. Much more poignant is the scene of the young black with sunken eyes, dying in that pitiful grove. A "bit of white worsted round his neck" symbolises a kind of fetish by wearing which he wants to propitiate the white intruders. Ironically, this painful scene focuses the administrative ruthlessness of the whites who prefer not to notice the miserable upshots of their system.

Soon after his meeting with the chief accountant of the company station Marlow learns of the same ruthlessness of the whites in Africa. He is the problematic representative of Marlow's other positives—work and efficiency. With his 'white cuffs' and 'snowy trousers' the accountant appears to be a miracle to Marlow who, however, admires him because "in the great demoralization of the land he kept up his appearance. That's backbone" (p.26). And he is hollow at the core, although he is very much "devoted to his books, which were in apple-pie-order". The apparent orderly accounts kept by him exclude all other human values. A violent "babble of uncouth sounds" made by the native carriers infuriates the accountant: "When one has got to make correct entries, one comes to hate those savages—hate them to death" (p.27). It is a premonitory echo of Kurtz, no doubt. But these comments of the accountant amply prove that he has atrophied his natural sympathy and become horribly inhuman. Another reason for the accountant's existence is that Marlow from him first hears the name of Kurtz who "is so indissolubly connected with the memories of that time" (p.26). Conrad's handling of the episodes of the
accountant and the dying African suggests the symbolic confrontation between the two world views—the blind civilizing work of the white Europeans on the one hand, and the oppressive deaths of the natives due to their indifference and inhumanity, on the other.

The same images of waste and abandon, of oppression and death, and of the basic confrontation between black and white is continued and expanded till Marlow reaches the central station with the white colonisers whose only concern there, Marlow learns, is:

*to make money, of course. What do you think? (p.29)*

In reality, this is the only faith that Marlow finds among them, and not a vestige even of a devotion to efficiency. Ironically, Marlow finds himself surrounded by the white people who are void, morally, emotionally, and spiritually. The Central Station is also dominated by the same flabby and weak-eyed devil as in the earlier station. There is the brick-maker who made no brick despite his stay there for a year—a sort of “papier-mache Mephistopheles” who prompts Marlow to think in terms “that if I tried I could poke my forefinger through him, and would find nothing inside but a little loose dirt, may be” (p.37). Then there is the manager who rules there by virtue of his sheer iron constitution. He rises to the position because he is immune to disease, has “no entrails” (p.31). His hollowness is also spiritual. To Marlow, he inspires only uneasiness, while “he had no genius for organizing, for initiative, or for order even” (p.31); his smile suggests “a door opening into a darkness he had in his keeping” (p.31).

Then there is the man in black moustaches who fights the fire by filling his bucket with “about a quart of water” (p.33) which, ironically enough, has a hole in the bottom. Marlow wants to expose their spiritual inanity when he persistently describes them as “pilgrims” some of whom also carry the ‘staves’, the symbol of authority. Pilgrims normally unite themselves for a single
journey by a religious goal. "Pilgrims" of the story pursue no such religious
goal. Marlow's use of the term is, therefore, ironic. Because these 'pilgrims'
wait at the station for the chance to make money on ivory. This is their goal.
And they spend their time in constant intrigues and backbiting against one
another with no positive actions whatsoever.

From the outset Marlow employs the methods of "reflexive reference and
casual foreshadowing". He learns from his conversation with the brickmaker
that Kurtz is held in high esteem for his philanthropy. A year ago in this very
station in the brick-maker's room Kurtz himself has painted —

\[a \textit{sketch in oils, on a panel, representing a woman, draped and blindfolded, carrying}
\textit{a lighted torch. The background was sombre—almost black (p.36)}.\]

The figure of justice with a lighted torch in the darkness symbolizes for Kurtz
his mission. But on Marlow the painting creates an "unsettling impression".
The representation of the woman in the sketch is distinctly typical. Instead of
the scales of equity, she carries the "lighted torch" which is conventionally
associated with "the two values—education and hope for the future". Obviously, Kurtz represents colonialism as enlightenment through these
images. The ironies of the painting are equally apparent. It is confounding and
ambiguous that the bearer of the torch should be "blindfolded". Second, as
Kurtz paints the woman, "the effect of the torch-light on the face was sinister".
A torch normally has the effect of illuminating the darkness; but here it only
makes the lady's face "look sinister". Thus the painting anticipates and
interrogates. It is an expression of the dark inversion of the colonizer's own
professed commitments to civilization. But to the brickmaker Kurtz is 'a
prodigy', 'an emissary of pity, and science, and progress'. It is from him that
Marlow comes to know of Kurtz for the first time, and also to detect the feeling
of hostility which the 'pilgrims' bear towards Kurtz. Even the brickmaker
thinks of Marlow, along with Kurtz, as belonging to the "new gang of virtue".
For Marlow has been recommended by the same people in Europe who also had sent Kurtz here.

Marlow never tries to break his spell and “went for him near enough to a lie” (p.38) to let him continue to believe that he has influence in Europe, and that he is allied with Kurtz. All his way to the Inner station, Marlow always feels the growing need to dissociate himself from the doings of the white people. The more he feels disgusted with the ‘pilgrims’, the more does he find a deeper intellectual and moral identification with his imaginary picture of Kurtz. Marlow believes at this stage that Kurtz, like him, is devoted to the work-ethic.

Marlow’s work-ethic and his urgent demand for the rivets for repairing the steamer are inter-related. Ironically, there are buckets of rivets in the outer station, but no one thinks of sending some to the Central Station where they are needed. Marlow’s expostulation that he likes “what is in the work,—the chance to find yourself. Your own reality...” (p.41) is significant and points to one redeeming grace of civilization’s restraints which hold us all back from chaos and helps us maintain our normal existence. The introduction of the foreman at this stage is justified in that he seems to personify that work-ethic which Marlow has just enunciated. Despised by other ‘pilgrims’ for his devotion to work, the foreman is separate from others. His physical description resembles that of Kurtz:

He was a lank, bony, yellow-faced man, with big intense eyes. His aspect was worried, and his head was as bald as the palm of my hand (p.42);

As Marlow describes Kurtz later in the story (pp.69, 85), he has “the lofty frontal bone” and is “impressively bald” like a ball of ivory. When Kurtz appears suddenly from the bushes, Marlow sees through his glasses that he is lank and thin like an apparition and his eyes “shining darkly for in its bony head”—“an animated image of death” (p.85).
Another major scene during Marlow's stay at the Central Station is the conversation between the manager and his uncle, which Marlow overhears from the deck of his steamer. The scene provides Marlow with new information about Kurtz; it also refers for the first time to the Russian whom the manager alludes to as "that scoundrel" (p.46). The manager's indignation at Kurtz is excessive and he was worried as to what should be done to Kurtz and "the pestiferous absurdity of his talk" (p.47). The uncle only encourages his nephew to "trust" in the wilderness, by stretching out his arm to the jungle. In this talk between the uncle and the nephew Marlow "seemed to see Kurtz for the first time"—a distinct glimpse and he is "rather excited at the prospect of meeting Kurtz very soon."

Marlow is preparing to meet with Kurtz by exposure to the wilderness as the steamer "toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy" (p.51). The earth seems unearthly and the journey seems "like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world" (p.48). The purpose of this river passage is to point to the complete estrangement of Kurtz's world from ordinary "civilized" reality Marlow has known before he undertakes this adventure. Marlow becomes increasingly aware of his isolation as "we were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings". His interest in Kurtz increases:-

*For me it crawled towards Kurtz—exclusively; ...we penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness (p.50).*

Amidst these enigmatic surroundings, his sudden glimpse of the gyrations of the black savages behind the curtain of trees and the enthralling sound of the roll of drums hovering in the air combine only to increase his sense of unreality. It appears as though

*we were wanderers on prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet (p.51).*
Marlow's discovery in the hut of reeds, fifty miles below the Inner Station, of the old and worn copy of Towson's *An Inquiry into Some Points of Seamanship* further adds to the enigma of the situation. What the book conveys to Marlow is "a singleness of intention, an honest concern for the right way of going to work" (p.54). The book also symbolizes "tradition, sanity, and the moral idea, found lying, an incongruous mystery, in the dark heart of Africa". But Conrad withholds the information till Marlow meets with the Russian much later (p.77) and tells us that the hut and the book belong to the Russian.

The French gunboat firing into the dark continent anticipates the blind firing of the "pilgrims" into the jungle when the ship is attacked. Marlow hears of Kurtz's first attempt to emerge from the wilderness long before he meets Kurtz in the flesh. And Marlow returns again and again, with increasing irony, to Kurtz's progressive pamphlet. Kurtz's initial benevolent attitude to the savages and his subsequent moral degeneration are sharply contrasted by using the pamphlet as a leitmotiv.

The scene of the attack by the natives on the steamer is narrated with great intensity. The thick rush of arrows from the natives, which Marlow initially mistakes for sticks, and the pilgrims' blind and random firing into the bushes and raising a cloud of smoke that rivals the deep fog on the river constitute the tumultuous action of the battle. Marlow abruptly terminates it by sounding the steam whistle and the natives vanish in "mournful fear" and "great commotion" in the bush (p.66). As Marlow learns from the Russian, the attack "in its essence purely protective," is "undertaken under the stress of desperation" (p.62) and at the orders from Kurtz himself who "hated sometimes the idea of being taken away" (p.90).

The upshot of this battle for Marlow is the loss of his helmsman. During the battle he lets go the helm and fires from the window of the pilot-house into the bush, when spear pierces his ribs. Marlow ruefully comments that the fool-nigger is killed because he has "no restraint, no restraint—just like Kurtz—a
tree swayed by the wind” (p.73). Marlow, however, prefers the helmsman for his devotion to duty. He remarks:

*I am not prepared to affirm the fellow was exactly worth the life we lost in getting to him [Kurtz] (pp.72-3).*

The helmsman has, after all, “done something, he had steered” (p.73); he and Marlow share the “subtle bond” of a common task, and “a claim of distant kinship” is affirmed.

The death of the black helmsman is a re-enactment of the death of the Dane Fresleven in quite analogous terms. It is this Dane—Marlow’s poor predecessor—who educated the helmsman, and ironically, Fresleven too dies of an attack with the spear. A similar plan is followed in the pilgrim announcing the death of the helmsman: “He is dead” (p.67). It foreshadows the manager’s house-boy’s announcement of Kurtz’s death in “a tone of scathing contempt”: “Mistah Kurtz—he dead” (p.100).

While the helmsman in the narrative stands for lack of restraint, the Russian—the brightly patched harlequin in the Inner Station—signifies liberation. Just as Marlow’s meeting with the manager is preceded by his meeting with the accountant, so the Russian himself prefigures the first appearance of Kurtz. He himself serves the function of an informer for Marlow about Kurtz. This is analogous to the role of the clerk and the physician in Brussels, the Swedish captain, the accountant and the manager of the Outer Station; and the brickmaker and the manager, and his uncle at the Central Station.

At the Inner Station, the first man Marlow sees is not Kurtz but the Russian whose youthful appearance is evident from his “beardless, boyish face”, with “smiles and frowns chasing each other over that open countenance like sunshine and shadow” (pp.75-6). The spontaneity and self-doubt of this youth makes him fall an easy victim to the terrible power and authority of Kurtz. As the Russian feels that he has no great thoughts, so he listens enthralled, Marlow
reports, to the “splendid monologues on ... love, justice, conduct of life—or what not” (p.84). The Russian’s more important and significant role is that he helps illuminate the characters of Marlow and Kurtz and supplies specific background information on Kurtz and his activities. On the way to the Inner Station Marlow with his glasses sees, near a house, half-a-dozen slim posts “with their upper ends ornamented with round carved balls” (p.75). On a closer scrutiny Marlow is simply horrified to learn that “these round knobs were not ornamental but symbolic” (p.82); they are the black, dried, sunken “heads of the rebels”, as the Russian states with some embarrassment, and constitute the “objective correlative” of the tale Marlow is being told here by the Russian. This revelation endows Marlow with a powerful insight into Kurtz’s character:

They only showed that Mr. Kurtz lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts, that there was something wanting in him.... (p.83)

The young admirer of Kurtz also gives further clues to the character of this “pitiful Jupiter” (p.86) who has come to the natives “with thunder and lightning... and very terrible... you can’t judge Mr. Kurtz as you would an ordinary man” (p.80). Evidently the appetite for more ivory has got the better of his “less material aspirations” and led him to conduct “a raid either across the river or down stream”, bringing with him all “the fighting men of that lake tribe” (p.81). Speaking of Kurtz’s malignant nature, the Russian recounts how one day Kurtz even tried to shoot him because he possessed some ivory which Kurtz wanted back. The Russian gave him the ivory, but could not leave him even in hostile circumstances because of his profound devotion to Kurtz. For Kurtz makes him see things. “I tell you”, the Russian cries, “this man has changed my mind” (p.78). The second part of Heart of Darkness ends on this note.

It is a combination of the accidents of circumstance, a reliance on reports that are outdated, and the pressures of personal need, which fills Marlow with a vague sense of being captured by Kurtz’s mysterious power. Even at this stage
Kurtz's power is only verbal. And at the time of the helmsman's death Marlow thinks that Kurtz too may be dead by this time. Marlow states: "I made the strange discovery that I had never imagined him as doing, you know, but as discoursing" (p.67). And now that Marlow sees the 'pilgrims' appear suddenly "from the ground", as it were, carrying Kurtz on a stretcher, he is frustrated to know that the gesticulating Kurtz is all bones—"an animated image of death carved out of old ivory" (p.85), with the eyes "shining darkly in its bony head" (p.85). Marlow sees him open his mouth wide:

\[\text{it gave him a weirdly voracious aspect, as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him (pp.85-6).}\]

The deep voice that Marlow so eagerly waits to hear speaks, but it sounds only faintly because of the distance that still separates them.

Marlow is already horrified to hear the Russian describing the dried heads on the poles as "the heads of rebels". Now his horror is turned in another direction. Kurtz's long, emaciated body is carried on board the ship. Marlow hears his deep, grave voice for the first time, while the man seems incapable even of a whisper. When the manager describes Kurtz's methods as "unsound", because "the time was not ripe for vigorous action" (p.89), Marlow feels embittered by his hypocrisy which is distinctly vile and amoral, and turns "mentally to Kurtz for relief" (p.89). In the face of the manager he calls it "no method at all" and thereby aligns himself with Kurtz, asserting that Kurtz is "a remarkable man". Marlow finds comfort in the reflection that "it was something to have at least a choice of nightmares" (p.89).

With profound commitment to Kurtz Marlow says to the Russian: "I am Mr. Kurtz's friend in a way" (p.90). To appease the Russian's fear that his idol's [Kurtz's] glory would suffer if Marlow leaves him among the enemy, Marlow assures him that "Mr. Kurtz's reputation is safe with me" (p.90). No doubt, Marlow's promise is ironic. The Russian means to say that Marlow should
keep from the world the secret of Kurtz’s depravity. The irony is that Marlow reveals this secret to his friends on the “Nellie”. At the same time, he never discloses the “real” Kurtz to the Intended. Thus Marlow makes himself liable to a double lie.

Marlow successfully handles Kurtz’s secret departure from the ship, followed by his return. Moving downstream, Marlow fears “Kurtz’s life is running swiftly, too, ebbing, ebbing out of his heart into the sea of inexorable time” (p.97). Time is also approaching for Marlow when he too would be “numbered with the dead” (p.97). Kurtz speaks to Marlow of his childish desire “to have kings meet him at railway-stations on his return from some ghastly Nowhere” (p.98). He asks Marlow to close the shutter on the wilderness and then rebels pitifully: “Oh, but I will wring your heart yet!” (p.98)

As Kurtz struggles in his impenetrable darkness with a tremulous mutter “I am lying here in the dark waiting for death” (p.99), Marlow “looked at him as you peer down at a man who is lying at the bottom of a precipice where the sun never shines” (p.99). Marlow quickly notices in the candlelight the change over Kurtz’s features and sees on “his ivory face”

*the expression of sombre pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror—of an intense and hopeless despair (p.99).*

And then comes that pronouncement—“The horror! The horror!”—which he cries twice in a whisper “at some image, at some vision” (p.100). Marlow blows out the candle and joins the pilgrims at mess. Suddenly the manager’s boy appears with the contemptuous announcement that Mr. Kurtz is dead—“Mistah Kurtz—he dead”. Aware that “the voice was gone”, Marlow “remained to dream the nightmare out to the end, and to show my loyalty to Kurtz once more” (p.100).

Structurally, Kurtz’s death-cry constitutes the turning point of the narrative. It is that “culminating point of my experience. It seems somehow to throw a kind
of light on everything about me—into my thoughts”. Marlow alludes to this at the beginning of the narrative and the crisis or the “culminating point” is “the appalling face of a glimpsed truth” which Kurtz learns for himself by boldly stepping over “the threshold of the invisible” (p.101). Although Marlow is permitted to draw back his “hesitating foot”, he has the last opportunity of “peeping over the edge myself” and seems to have lived through Kurtz’s “extremity” (p.101). Hence his affirmation: “I understand better the meaning of his stare”. He thinks that Kurtz is “a remarkable man”, because “He had something to say. He said it.” Kurtz’s cry is

*an affirmation, a moral victory, paid for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions* (p.101).

As J.H.E. Paine explains: the victory for Kurtz is that he has turned the world inside out, and “understood the symmetry and the interpenetration of darkness and light, of savagery and civilization”. It is this knowledge which Marlow brings back with him and “That is why I have remained loyal to Kurtz to the last, and even beyond....” (p.101) Kurtz has made him see the truth of things. Usually, the horror is seen as a pronouncement on “the essential depravity of man and his civilization”. But surely, the main object of Kurtz’s condemnation is himself, and what he has done in the heart of darkness. It is a “moral victory” in that it is, as Marlow feels it, “an acknowledgement of the horror of his former deeds”. Thus Lawrence Graver argues that Kurtz has the attraction of the romantic outlaw who crosses “the boundaries of conventional morality” and explores “the possibilities of living on the other side”. In any case Kurtz is intended as the “climactic example of the inner moral void” which Marlow finds in all the representatives of the white people in Africa.

Immediately after Kurtz’s death scene the narrative of *Heart of Darkness* shifts to Brussels. The episodes on the steamer’s downriver trip and Marlow’s return to Europe are omitted. His condensing of time here only contributes to
strengthen our impression of the similarities between the heart of darkness and the “sepulchral city”. Back in Europe, Marlow feels that the world around him looks so unreal, as it appears to have been full of pretence, irritating and highly offensive. He falls ill and realises that

\[\text{It was not my strength that wanted nursing, it was my imagination that wanted soothing (p.102).}\]

He has to settle matters concerning Kurtz with the three visitors who contribute further to Marlow’s as well as our understanding of Kurtz and his situation. The opinions of Kurtz’s colleague, relative, and journalist-friend demonstrate that they fail to judge Kurtz properly. He still remains an enigma to them.

The final scene with the Intended is treated in some detail. As entrusted by Kurtz, Marlow goes there to deliver her portrait and a packet of letters. He wants to lay “the ghost” of Kurtz with a lie which is again anticipated by several lies and deceptions adopted by Marlow earlier in the narrative. First, Marlow anxious to quicken the ship’s repairs and the rescue of Kurtz “went for him near enough to a lie” (p.38). He lets the brickmaker believe that he has influence in Europe and threatens him that his career would suffer if he does not arrange the supply of rivets. At the same time he states that he hates, detests a lie. “There is a taint of death, a flavour of mortality in lies—“ (p.38). Second, to pacify the Russian, he agrees to suppress the truth about Kurtz. The third is related to Kurtz himself. In order to persuade Kurtz to come back from the wilderness Marlow tells him the lie that his “success in Europe was assured” (p.94).

Marlow’s description of his approach to the house of the Intended is filled with death imagery and is reminiscent of his visit to the Company station. Stopping at the door, a vision of Kurtz being carried on the stretcher flashes across his mind, and makes him feel that he alone will “have to keep back” his awareness of the “conquering darkness” for the “salvation of another soul” (p.105). Reflecting on Kurtz’s utterance: “I want no more than justice....” (p.106)
Marlow finally meets the Intended and perceives that she "had a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering" (p.106). Wearing black, she is in mourning and full of profound praise and admiration for Kurtz. "It was impossible to know him and not to admire him"—this is the kind of belief and confidence that illumines her. Marlow is touched by her deep sorrow; but her self-flattering delusions about Kurtz make him angry. This feeling of anger, however, subsides before "a feeling of infinite pity" (p.110). Finally, the Intended's prayer for "His last word—to live with" forces Marlow to confront once again with a choice. He then communicates slowly: "The last word he pronounced was—your name" (p.110). The lie is spoken. Silence flows in as Marlow ends the inner story with his last reflection:

_I could not tell her. It would have been too dark—too dark altogether (p.111)._ 

Thus Marlow hides the truth about Kurtz for the sake of the Intended, and by so doing he both recognizes the darkness of the horror and the danger it poses for "civilized" man.

Conrad uses subtle imagery to maintain the compactness and unity of action in *Heart of Darkness*. Its most distinctive features are the repetitive structure, the binary opposites of light and darkness, and the reiteration of themes with the help of a series of objects or elements that produce the effect of intensity and expansion. The rank jungle grass is repeatedly mentioned in the story. In the heart of darkness Marlow discovers Fresleven's body lying where it had fallen and "the grass growing through his ribs was tall enough to hide his bones" around the abandoned boiler at the Outer Station. Then during Marlow's 200-mile trek across the country to the Central Station he mentions several images evocative of his overall journey. He tramps through "long, burnt grass", through abandoned villages, surrounded by "a great silence above and below". At the Central Station Marlow sees one evening "a grass shed full of calico, cotton print, beads... burst into a blaze so suddenly...." (p.33) And this brings
him in contact with the impostor brickmaker. After their conversation which centres mainly on Kurtz, and how the wilderness would ultimately consume him, the manager and his uncle turn back uphill with their shadows trailing them "slowly over the tall grass without bending a single blade". Also the particular natives who belong to Kurtz, carry him on a stretcher, and stand waist-deep in the long grass, with the Inner Station and the forest in the background. At midnight in an attempt to pursue, capture, and retrieve the "nightmare" of his choice, Marlow follows "the broad trail of Kurtz through the grass". He and Marlow crouch through it as Marlow struggles with his soul. Side by side with this savage grass we also see a more civilized variety "sprouting between the stones" (p.14) outside the Trading Company offices. Obviously, the recurrent grass image suggests the fecundity of the jungle and wilderness, and its impact on those outsiders who come in contact with it.

Another dominant image in the narrative is that of the binaries light / darkness. Most of Marlow's misunderstood objects are described in this way: the grove of death is placed against the "bright sunshine"; the clarity of the seaman's manual versus the metaphorical darkness surrounding Marlow when he finds it; the black eyelids and white teeth of the skull. The background of Kurtz's sketch of justice is a "sombre, almost black" figure, while the torch lights up the face. The scene with the Intended is presented in the intense interplay of light and dark images: looking at the photograph of the Intended Marlow comments that "the sunlight can be made to lie, too" (p.104)—she has a beautiful expression. The black mourning is contrasted with the smooth whiteness of her forehead; and the "lofty frontal bone" of Kurtz is conjectured against the glitter of her unfallen tears in the twilight.

Moreover, all the "bearers" have aspects of black and white about them, and specially Marlow whose burden of truth is "sombre enough", and "not very clear...." The white agent had been struck down by the jungle, and the black native beaten by the 'pilgrims'. Kurtz's cry—"The horror! The horror!"—is
dark to the core, so dark altogether that Marlow immediately seeks light as protection. What Conrad wants to convey through this narrative is that darkness and light, savagery and civilization are not opposites, but co-exist in the hearts of all men. The frame scene prepares for this thematic interconnection—the sunset, the boat poised between London and the sea and the narrator's reflection on England's former glory, dimmed by Marlow's comment: 'And this also has been one of the dark places of the earth" (p.7).

In fact, the interplay of light and darkness has been present throughout Heart of Darkness as "an aura" much like the "misty halos" to which the narrator-witness refers in presenting Marlow's tales; it permeates the work at all levels. The brightness of the sunshine, of the accountant's impeccably white clothing, cf the Russian's clothes and attitudes, are set in relief against the blackness of the jungle gloom, the dark motives of the company men, and the horror of Kurtz's demoralization. The supreme example of the lie—the lie of a civilization which went out morally equipped to civilize the savages as a pretense for repressing and plundering them, reveals the dark truth about Kurtz who believes in that lie. And his perpetration of savagery without limits is far more darkly horrifying than the "bizarre" customs of the natives. With this burden of truth Marlow is ultimately led to the sombre task of revealing and affirming the underside of colonization. And the prevalent mood in this narrative is one of frustration and dark despair.

It is evident that Heart of Darkness enjoys its classic status not merely for Conrad's ideas, but mainly for "the literary innovations". The impressionistic method is one such aspect of his narrative technique. As has already been mentioned, Marlow adopts a special kind of story-telling which has two distinctive qualities roughly "categorised as symbolist and impressionist". The symbolist aspect is represented by the shell of the nut or the haze around the glow; "but the sensory quality of the metaphor, the mist and haze, is essentially impressionist". In Heart of Darkness mist or haze is a very persistent image
and largely contributes to the creation of the atmospheric conditions through which the meaning of the story would be only "fitfully and tenuously visible".89

Like Edward Garnett, Conrad thinks of impressionism "as primarily concerned with visual appearances".90 This is confirmed by his use of the term in *The Mirror of the Sea* (1906), where he states that "impressionistic" can only mean describing how things look as opposed to stating what is "really happening".91 The distinctive quality of Conrad's writing lies in its strong visual sense. He propounds this in his Preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*-- that art depends for its success on an "impression conveyed through the senses".

*Heart of Darkness* is impressionistic in that it accepts the "bounded and ambiguous nature of individual understanding".92 The imagery affirms this. Marlow's story tries to explore how his awareness of Kurtz's position among the natives in the Congo and his civilizing work there can mysteriously change the way in which Marlow comes to see the world as a whole after he returns to Brussels from the heart of darkness. The narrative form reflects these inward impressions of the enigmatic and problematic nature of experience. The strain of uncertainty and doubt is always a dominant factor in *Heart of Darkness*. One of Marlow's functions is "to represent how much a man cannot know; and he assumes that reality is essentially private and individual".93 As Marlow explains, this is a kind of "dream-sensation" and to communicate it is like "making a vain attempt". "We live, as we dream—alone" (p.39).

One important aspect of Conrad's impressionistic device is termed "delayed decoding"—that is, his attempt at evocative visual description. For it combines "the forward temporal progression of the mind, as it receives messages from the outside world, with the much slower reflexive process of making out their meaning".94 In *Heart of Darkness* Conrad employs this device for the most dramatic action of the story—the attack on Marlow's boat by the natives just below Kurtz's station. The river at this point is dangerous for the steamship to negotiate. Then there is a snag and the deep fog has just lifted. Marlow watches
the pole-man sounding his pole. Suddenly he stretches himself flat on the bow. Simultaneously, Marlow sees the fireman sit down abruptly before his furnace and duck his head. Marlow is amazed. His initial reaction is full of irritation at this sudden change in the normal order of things. He can detect the cause of this change only when he looks at the river “mighty quick” and discovers that

*Sticks, little sticks, were flying about—thick; they were whizzing before my nose, dropping below me, striking behind me against my pilot-house* (p.64).

But Marlow’s understanding of this impression is delayed until he clears the snag before the ship. And then the truth emerges that these objects whizzing past him are not “sticks”, but “arrows”: “Arrows, by Jove! We were being shot at!” (p.64)

The same method of ‘delayed decoding’ is followed in the incident of Marlow’s helmsman being killed by the natives. Marlow, in charge of the ship, could see through the shutter-hole the “vague forms of men” running in the forest gloom, while the pilgrims and the helmsman were firing on the natives through the open shutter. Marlow’s attention is suddenly deflected and he perceives that

*Something big appeared in the air before the shutter, the rifle went overboard, and the man stepped back swiftly, looked at me over his shoulder in an extraordinary, profound, familiar manner, and fell upon my feet… a long cane clattered round and knocked over a little camp-stool. It looked as though after wrenching that thing from somebody ashore he had lost his balance in the effort… but my feet felt so warm and wet that I had to look down. The man had rolled on his back and stared straight up at me; both his hands clasped that cane. It was the shaft of a spear…. (Pp.65-6)*

Marlow’s immediate sense impression is that the helmsman’s sudden unfamiliar recumbent position is a repeat action of that of the poleman and the fireman. And Marlow has been all too busy with navigating the ship to decipher the meaning out of these random sense impressions. When he clears the snag and is confident of the ship’s safe passage ahead, he feels his feet “warm and wet” and looks down. To his horror, he finds that his helmsman has
been struck with a spear which "caught him in the side just below the ribs", and that both his hands clutch the cane which is in fact the shaft of the spear. The interpretation of impressions is delayed mainly because Marlow's field of vision is restricted by many internal and external conditions at the moment of observation when "Something big appeared in the air..." The attack on the ship is on, but he faces another crisis of steering the ship off the snag. The prospect of meeting Kurtz at last must have been uppermost in his mind. In the circumstances Marlow misses the significance of the helmsman being killed. "Conrad's method reflects all these difficulties in translating perceptions into causal or conceptual terms".\textsuperscript{95} The method also convincingly presents the authenticity of the experience.

Thus in a progressive narration in \textit{Heart of Darkness} Conrad has strongly emphasized the themes of anti-colonialism, primitivism and cannibalism, restraint and abandon, dream and reality; wilderness and savagery, solitude, isolation and alienation, death and waste. However, Conrad's prime objective is to show Kurtz's fascination for the abomination and moral degradation culminating in his attainment of supreme knowledge of the horrifying darkness in Africa, and this awesome experience is communicated through the inimitable Marlow. Obviously, the novella also incorporates Marlow's spiritual voyage of self-discovery and his interiorization of experiences, including nightmare disorientation. These themes are interrelated and intermingled with one another, and the exposition of the entire narrative is filtered through Marlow's consciousness. Apart from his horrid experiences, Marlow's knowledge of Africa, drawn from Kurtz, is enigmatic and abominable, elusive and frightening and, therefore, frustrates any attempt at direct communication. Marlow's experiences approximate, as he declares, to a kind of dream-sensation that can hardly be transliterated into real conceptual terms. Indeed these experiences are replete with the themes that determine the multi-layered form of \textit{Heart of Darkness}. As the novella mainly deals with Marlow's spiritual journey of self-discovery Conrad presents the narrative retrospectively
in the first person adhering to a strict chronology, and with no dislocation of time. Then there is the mediating narrator who verbatim records and recounts Marlow's story that constitutes the largest portion of *Heart of Darkness*. Marlow's tale, actually told to us by the primary narrator, is recited in Marlow's own voice. A modern novelist who values the presentation of authenticated details in narrative, Conrad introduces multiple points of view of various characters who constantly keep focussing on all the happenings in the story, and consistently provide clues to its further development. Thus the incidents and events are so structured in *Heart of Darkness* that they refer forward and backward throughout the story invisibly linked, just as the characters, however diverse and different their roles might be, are finely drawn and bound together in their common attempt to serve Europe and Africa, while ironically exposing their own pretences and hypocrisies. The doctor of the sepulchral city, Kurtz, the Russian harlequin, the helmsman, the manager, the accountant, the brickmaker, and, above all, Marlow help the narrative's forward progress. The events and episodes sparingly selected and treated minimalistically illustrate the themes. The novella's form emerges from the symmetry of their arrangements and their inter-relations. The Fresleven scene anticipates the death of Marlow's helmsman in a fight with the natives below the Inner Station. The natives' cannibalism and their view of the white men as 'supernatural' are developed later through the presentation of Kurtz and the savage crew of Marlow's steamboat. Marlow's description of his visit to the Company offices in Brussels is dominated by death imagery. This is reinforced in the course of his meeting with the Intended. The doctor's attempt to measure Marlow's cranium and his further query as to the existence of any madness in Marlow's family is linked with Kurtz's loss of restraint in Africa, and his physical and mental collapse. The doctor's action itself is symbolic of the hypocritical pretences of the medical examiner. The episode of the French warship symbolizes the same lethargic malevolence that Marlow has already experienced at the trading company offices—an objective correlative of the
theme of civilization and barbarity. The waste of human powers is exposed in the dismal picture of the grove of death which shocks Marlow as it also shows the ruthlessness of the white ‘pilgrims’. The chief accountant—who is the problematic representative of Marlow’s other moral positive, work and efficiency—is hollow at the core, and excludes all other human values. He has atrophied his natural sympathy, and become horribly inhuman. Conrad’s handling of the accountant and the dying African suggests a confrontation between the two world views—the blind civilizing work of the white Europeans on the one hand, and the oppressive deaths of the natives caused by the colonizers’ indifference and inhumanity, on the other. The description of the foreman at the Central Station foreshadows Kurtz’s physical features. He personifies the work-ethic which Marlow enunciates so eloquently. The Russian combines many things—harlequin, court jester, existential man—but he is also the fool in the heart of darkness, which brings us full circle into the ironic world of Conrad. Marlow’s interiorization of his horrid experiences in the dark and malevolent Africa is universalized in the narrative describing his confrontation with the heart of darkness. In a continuous unfolding of thoughts, which replaces normal objective narration, Marlow dwells upon various things: beginning from the work-ethic that provides one “the chance to find yourself. Your own reality—for yourself, not for others...” (p.50) to his bitter ironic expression of the appalling sense of mortality. His up-river journey penetrating deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness crawls towards Kurtz exclusively (p.50); his entire journey is strewn with riotous vegetation, great silence, impenetrable forest, terrifying scenes of the primitives, leaping and spinning, clapping and making horrid faces—‘a thing monstrous and free’, ‘a black and incomprehensible frenzy’(p.51). And then Marlow’s interiorization of the Jungian exploration of the mind: “The mind of man is capable of anything—because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future” (p.52). The description of the passage up-river is a dream-narrative, a prose-poem, that must be read aloud, slowly for the utter sensuality of the experience to be felt.
Thus *Heart of Darkness* is interiorized, and psychologically complex, whereas Conrad’s earlier narratives are primarily objective, descriptive, and thematically lucid. Marlow’s interest is centred in Kurtz. Hence, it is Kurtz’s story that Marlow is telling, even before he and his readers meet Kurtz. “But Marlow’s story is the mediating story between the inner one of Kurtz’s invasion of the so-called Belgian Congo and the outer story that Conrad is telling of Europe’s invasion of Africa”.96 All of Europe, we are told, contributes to the making of Kurtz—Europe: safe, civilized, scheduled, masculine, literate, superficially Christian, and dead. Kurtz sets out with a mission to win the hearts of the natives, himself ignorant of the degree to which Africa is dangerous, wild, timeless, feminine, and vibrant. His idealism turns to violence when he discovers how unfitted he is to master the magnificent vitality of a natural world. The difference between Africa and Europe is the difference between two secondary symbols, the European woman who has helped to puff up Kurtz’s pride and the African woman who has helped to deflate him.97 *Heart of Darkness* tells us that total comprehension of the wilderness can come only “by conquest—or by surrender.” The spoilt and pampered favourite, Kurtz comes to a full knowledge both ways, by conquest and surrender. Kurtz’s moral victory is that Kurtz, despite the realization of his own debasement, reveals the capacity of a human soul which can, without any external religious sanctions, struggle with itself, find within itself values by which it can and must judge its actions, and condemn them with “The horror! The horror!”98 Although Kurtz is ‘hollow’ in that he has been false in practice to his ideals, ideas, and words, he can never reject human values or deny their worth. They make possible his “moral victory”. Whereas the Russian’s devotion to Kurtz is based on mutual interactions, and that of the Intended on profound personal conviction, Marlow’s loyalty and devotion lies in his wilful blindness. Of the two nightmares, of both Europe and Africa, which Marlow confronts in the wilderness, the worse consists in the rejection and denial of expressed human values. The lesser nightmare is Kurtz’s degradation. Transported by the flow of
Kurtz’s words, he remains faithful to Kurtz despite all he has actually seen. Marlow’s lie to the Intended is conceived as a measure to underline the importance of the “saving illusion” which warrants “the whole concept of humanity’s upward potential”. Marlow’s use of lies in the novella indicates a consistent pattern of deceit which Conrad employs to expose the inner moral void of the pilgrims. Divorced from any work-ethic, they, like Kurtz, are engrossed in discoursing, intriguing, or backbiting, and in no actual civilizing work. Conrad’s bitter and pungent irony is explicit. To communicate these ideas and ideals against the background of Africa—monstrous, treacherous, ambiguous, and enigmatic—Conrad adopts the devices of symbolism and impressionism, and employs ‘delayed decoding’ as a technique. Again the narrative technique is layered, as the story is filled with minute dots and strokes, and understanding must come from unlayering. Conrad follows the painter’s style. Each of the characters is painted in small strokes, slowly, through indirect discourse, internal monologue, and deduced implications of reported dialogue. Primarily an oral discourse, the story’s appeal is contained as much in its finely woven narrative structure as in the effects of character interplay. Various linguistic devices are also used to delineate the atmosphere suitable for the exposition of the themes. The text bathes in the metaphors of black and white, dark and light, for these binaries are linked to the very process of knowledge, and, conversely, ignorance. Everything, including colours and shades, has to do with knowledge. And Kurtz plays a dominant role in this theme of knowledge. In fact, the role of darkness is more ambiguous; darkness becomes the raw material—an almost palpable substance. Marlow takes it from Kurtz, flourishes it before the manager, withholds it from the Intended, confers it upon his shipmates. Thus these various tools are deftly exploited in *Heart of Darkness* to convey the themes which, conversely, give shape to the distinctive form. These are subtly grouped and juxtaposed so as to express the ideas contained in the narrative. So form and content are interrelated. Themes
are realised and propounded through form. And in *Heart of Darkness* the formal narrative structure contains the complex, challenging themes.

**Typhoon**

Completed in January 1901, *Typhoon* appeared eventually in *Pall Mall Magazine* for January-March 1902, although it was the first Conrad piece handled by Pinker, and was sent to Blackwood's for possible serialization. As early as February 1899, Conrad mentioned it as a projected fiction called "Equitable Division", and again in January 1900 the title of the story had been changed to "Skittish Cargo". Ever since its first appearance, *Typhoon* has been highly spoken of "as a masterpiece of clarity and good sense"; an "almost top-quality work", *Typhoon* is part of Conrad's remembrances of things past. A very important aspect of *Typhoon* is its linear narrative technique, without the customary dislocation of time sequences. Conrad has also laid equal emphasis on the presentation of characters through multiple points of view. He places these characters in a certain setting or environment, both internal and external. Mac Whirr, Jukes, and Solomon Rout on board the *Nan-Shan* are characters made to face a crisis that inevitably brought them into violent conflict with both human and natural forces. This undoubtedly proves to be a probing trial for them. They are able to steer through these crises triumphantly by virtue of courage, determination and professional loyalty. To Conrad, however, the crucial issue is not so much the inevitable encounter between man and the cosmos, as its outcome. A rich pattern of themes is conveyed through the characters with total detachment, and without invasive authorial comment. These are themes of loneliness and isolation; duty and fidelity to profession; human relationships under stress and strain; the nature of mankind and the question of its survival. The language used in *Typhoon* is simple but imagistic, and is marked by a reduction in the use of adjectival phrases. Significance is added by what Conrad called "the picture-producing
power of arranged words". Conrad here shows a penchant for similes rather than for metaphors. The deliberately limited subject is rendered in direct language and through multiple points of view.

Judged by these criteria, *Typhoon* is held to be an artistic feat of the highest order. The events in *Typhoon* are spread over six chapters in which Conrad has presented a group of officer-sailors aboard the steam-ship ‘Nan-Shan’ on her way to Fu-Chau. Under the command of Mr. MacWhirr, the ship carries a human cargo of two hundred Chinese coolies to their home-town of Fo-Kien. The ship’s way is charted through the China seas frequented mostly by hurricanes and typhoons. The story, however, is mainly concerned with the exploration of human relationship aboard the ship. Conrad deliberately puts his characters, especially MacWhirr and Jukes, to a test in an extremely crucial situation against the vast expanse of the sea. They are intended to prove, as sailors, their loyalty to the ideals and values of their profession when the fury of the typhoon hustles the *Nan-Shan* and engages her bewildered crew in a terrible fight with the wind and the sea. It is a crisis external to the ship, where the dictates of fate are inscrutable. Simultaneously, the ship is threatened with another crisis, more formidable and sinister, spurting out from the terrible infighting among the Chinese coolies. Both crises are successfully resolved by the combined efforts of the crew members and the *Nan-Shan* safely reaches her port of Fu-Chau.

This entire narrative has been presented chronologically through MacWhirr. The character of MacWhirr is simple, but "authentic" as Conrad has declared in his Author’s Note.

> *MacWhirr is not an acquaintance of a few hours, or a few weeks, or a few months. He is the product of twenty years of life. My own life.*

On his first appearance MacWhirr is to be gently assisted with his unrolled umbrella by his chief mate Jukes. The very first sentence of the story repudiates
Jukes's superficial verdict at the end. MacWhirr's face - “the exact counterpart of his mind” - presents “no marked characteristics of firmness or stupidity” (p. 151). MacWhirr has no ambition to reach his destination, the treaty-port of Fu-Chau, earlier than expected. Even delay, when justified, does not disturb him. It is his mysterious love of the sea that has prompted this “perfectly satisfactory son of a petty grocer in Belfast” (p. 152) to run away from home and parents, at the age of barely fifteen.

Nevertheless, Captain MacWhirr, as the frame narrator reported, has ‘just enough imagination to carry him through each successive day, and no more (p. 152); he is plain and straightforward. Cherishing no illusion or hallucination, he steadfastly sticks to “the actuality of the bare existence” (p. 152). For him “facts can speak for themselves with overwhelming precision” (p. 155). The celebrated Siamese-flag incident is a fine example of MacWhirr’s obtuseness (pp. 156-157). To Jukes, it is an affront to sail under the Siamese-flag, and he uses the epithet ‘queer’ (p. 156) to express his dissatisfaction. But the superficial and literal MacWhirr fails to grasp Jukes’s meaning and expresses his confidence by saying that there is nothing amiss with the flag in the Nan-Shan. In reality, the flag is a recurrent motif. It has been invoked later in the story by Jukes and the malicious second mate to illustrate MacWhirr’s obtuseness. “He’s too dense to trouble about, and that’s the truth”, comments Jakes on Captain MacWhirr (p. 162).

The sequence of Harry the second engineer’s angry exchange with Jukes is conceived ironically to point out another seeming display of dense-mindedness by MacWhirr. It culminates in MacWhirr’s open threat to fire Harry for his profanity and disturbance of peace on board the ship. Likewise, he reprimands Jukes when he sets out to describe the awful weather in his characteristic imagistic style (p. 167). MacWhirr has not only branded his speech as wild, but also expostulated against “the use of images in speech” (p.168). Conrad’s aim is not to demonstrate the infallibility of the captain, but rather to dramatize
MacWhirr's personal qualities. His resistance to violence includes violence done to language – the improper use of words or the use of jargon that is mystifying.

The storm scene in *Typhoon* provides the necessary background for the test of MacWhirr and Jukes (pp. 179, 181, 182). Strategically central to the action of the story and expository in nature, the storm scene is skilfully dealt with the time sequence of the narrative whose progress is conventional, uncomplicated and straightforward except for a few flashbacks into the past. By repeated reference to the fall of the barometer and the extremely hot and calm atmosphere, Conrad is preparing us for the eventuality which has tremendous impact on other characters too. Simultaneously with this devastating typhoon, the crew of the *Nan-Shan* is faced with another storm of violence among the Chinese coolies below deck. The incident of infighting among the coolies has been detected in time by the boatswain and Conrad has presented this episode through a flashback. The crucial aspect of this tense situation is that MacWhirr and Jukes have to encounter both challenges simultaneously. The test of MacWhirr and Jukes is concerned as much with successfully handling and suppressing the fearful infighting of the coolies as it is with steering the ship boldly and steadfastly through the fury of the typhoon. These challenges from the human and cosmic worlds generate the conflict inherent in the narrative. The real drama in *Typhoon* lies in "the modulations and transformations of nature". MacWhirr's decision to steer his ship through the typhoon no doubt carries a sense of irresponsibility and personal stolidity. For it might result in the ship's total destruction by the immense forces of nature. But then MacWhirr does not indulge in the day-dreams of the past, nor in the illusions and hallucinations of the future; he is only content to live in the eternal present. When Jukes suggests altering the ship's course on the plea of the comfort of the 'passengers', MacWhirr conveys his moral vindication "with the utmost simplicity of manner and tone".
A gale is a gale, Mr. Jukes, and a full-powered steamship has got to face it. There's just so much dirty weather knocking about the world, and the proper thing is to go through it without none of what old Captain Wilson of the Melita calls "storm strategy" (p.175).

Initially, MacWhirr is flippant in responding to the call of the typhoon and his flippancy and delayed approach has been presented ironically. The act is not deliberate; it follows from his apparent innocence and ignorance of the impetuosity of the typhoon on the China seas. But once out of his cabin, he rises to the occasion, and throughout the encounter with the typhoon he shows exemplary courage and self-possession. Simultaneously, he lends necessary moral and spiritual support to his chief mate Jukes when he becomes puzzled and immobilized at the first feel of the squall. MacWhirr too needs active help from Jukes in mobilizing the hands to face and tackle the onslaught of the wind as much as to suppress the infighting among the coolies and to collect the dollars for equitable distribution among them.

Conrad’s impressionistic presentation of the episode of the struggling mass of coolies for dollars below deck is significant in the narrative. Conrad has declared in the Author’s Note to Typhoon that “the interest for us was not the bad weather but the extraordinary complication brought into the ship’s life at a moment of exceptional stress by the human element below her deck”. Concluding the ‘extraordinary’ affair first with a flashback, when the boatswain, going in search of a lamp, detects the trouble below accidentally, and reports it back to the captain. The scene is then unfolded with greater detail through Jukes’s indirect narration. He has gone there with orders from MacWhirr to see and finally to pick up the money. The sudden discovery by the boatswain of the spectacle of fighting coolies, the subsequent attempt by Jukes and the boatswain to contain the fight with the help of other sailors, and Jukes’s gradual restoration from spiritual immobility to a state when he experiences “an access of confidence” (p.217), after peace and order is re-established in the Nan-Shan—this entire sequence of situations is conceived to
bring out the inherent potentialities of the characters involved in the affair. The boatswain's supervisory skill proves of immense help in resolving the crisis. Solomon Rout, the chief engineer along with other engineers, works responsibly and arduously to keep the ship afloat. So both the crises are overcome in a combined effort by the deck-people and fellow-sailors of the engine-room. The Nan-Shan arrives at her port of Fu-Chau broken, torn, and devastated. The precise value of MacWhirr's action, however, remains incommunicable. MacWhirr opens his heart to his wife who is selfish and skims through his words. Solomon Rout doubts his wife's ability to understand 'the clever thing' and remains silent in his letter. Jukes is simply 'unable to generalise': he is too self-centred to grasp the significance at all (pp.220, 222, 223). This ironic comedy of failed communication underlines the fact that the real value here is moral, not material; it is indivisible and cannot be shared.

In Typhoon, Conrad has presented his narrative through multiple points of view. The third-person narrative is interspersed and intermingled with fragments of dialogue and epistolary excerpts from a trio of characters—MacWhirr, Jukes, and Solomon Rout: MacWhirr to his parents and wife, Jukes to "an old chum and former shipmate" (p.161), now serving as second officer on board an Atlantic liner; Solomon Rout to his wife. Conrad presents yet other narrative voices of the wives reading the letters to their other family members. Mr. Rout's wife, for example, selects only the important passages from her husband's reports and then shouts them to his elderly, deaf mother. While the letters no doubt record moments of self-recognition of their respective authors, they also reflect the ironic comments of the recipients and their intricate relationships. Yet another point of view is presented through the partners of Messrs Sigg and son, the owners of the Nan-Shan, who have engaged Mr. MacWhirr as captain of the Nan-Shan. The ship's struggles are given human attributes, while the Chinamen are dehumanised into a compact, struggling mass, so that disorder is presented as a growing common factor of human and non-human worlds alike. Against it is pitted the 'irresistible
precision' of the undisturbed engine-room machinery (p.201): its ponderous movements are enacted in words arranged to make us see in visual detail the heart of that 'full-powered steamship' fit to resist the 'dirty weather'. Conrad's multivalent method has brought out an intricate interplay of human psychology, of human judgements and evaluations.108

In Typhoon the narrative consists of a straightforward chronological presentation of material, without dislocation of time sequences. Conrad's choice of method is determined by the nature of his subject and characters. Typhoon is a study of a hero MacWhirr who thinks and operates on a purely factual level, and who survives the kind of testing which Jim has failed in Lord Jim. Captain MacWhirr has none of the attributes that we find in Jim. He embodies no paradox, is guilty of no compromise or desertion, and is pursued by no nemesis. The literal-minded MacWhirr is not a rounded character like Jim. Without psychological or moral ambivalence, MacWhirr impresses us with his simplicity and spectacular competence. He stays at his post and steams his ship through the storm because he is a man of little imagination and therefore fearless. He can see only the most immediate implications of what goes on around him. 'There were matters of duty, of course -- directions, orders, and so on; but the past being to his mind done with and the future not yet there, the more general actualities of the day required no comment—because facts can speak for themselves with overwhelming precision' (p.155).

For a character like MacWhirr living only in the present, Conrad has to arrange and synthesize the actions and incidents in the linear order in which the protagonist has committed them. In Lord Jim, however, Jim's immediate being is a complex of past and present experiences and has, therefore, to be conveyed through multidimensional time-sequences.

In a conventional linear narrative the action committed by a character is plainly of primary interest, and it is not always helpful to give it away in advance; it is through his actions that the character will be revealed to us, and it is necessary
to lead up to it gradually through a sequence of events. At any given moment in the story the reader is only aware of what has already been told him in a series of direct statements. He comes to know of the characters and their histories only insofar as they have been exposed up to that point of time. Each sentence, each paragraph, each incident recorded is no more than a statement of fact. There are no overtones; there is no diffuse radiance. All this accounts for thinness of structure as contrasted with the rich and complex structure of disrupted narrative method of *Lord Jim*. In *Typhoon* the incidents and episodes are arranged in the order of their happening except for a couple of flashbacks employed to sketch in the background of MacWhirr. The device of flashback is also used to re-create a prior sequence of events, such as the episode of the coolies fighting for dollars. But MacWhirr and Jukes are revealed gradually through their actions and reactions to the incidents and situations which befall them. MacWhirr's dogged simplicity and foolhardy success in outriding the storm is repeated in his ability to find a workable answer in the straightforward equal sharing of the money among the coolies. Like any strictly chronological narrative, *Typhoon* has a beginning, a middle, and a resolution.

*Typhoon* has a setting of great magnitude—the sea in its ferocity tossed by the typhoon, the sea free from all land entanglements. Conrad has pitted his characters against the sea and the sky in the palpitating darkness. The typhoon swoops down, formidable, swift and overpowering, under its tremendous impact the ship is like a toy floating precariously. In an instant the men have lost touch with each other and are isolated. Jukes loses his nerve and is immobilized. Thus setting or environment here assumes major significance and serves to precipitate the crucial action. In strong opposition to the wild and violent sea, MacWhirr realises the need for moral courage and solidarity among the crew. He feels that they need to uphold the values which their profession warrants—action, initiation, and involvement. MacWhirr, Jukes and Solomon Rout manoeuvre the crisis and ultimately bring the ship to her port of safety. True, the cosmos finds men out, reveals their defects and limitations, but what
happens then is up to man, not the universe. For Conrad, the final focus is on the motivating values behind man’s actions and the question is an existential one: How ought one to live?

Conrad uses simple, clear and precise language in *Typhoon* to describe an overwhelmingly physical experience. For the narrator tells us, “Facts can speak for themselves with overwhelming precision”. Physical descriptions in *Typhoon* are specially forceful, with Conrad relying on specific detail and simile rather than metaphor. Images are often mechanistic and have a surface metallic hardness. The sea in snowy rushes of foam is “like a dazzling sheet emitting a bluish glow under the blackness of the cloud” (p. 182). The water in the bilges rolls and lumps of coal skipping to and fro “rattled like an avalanche of pebbles on a slope of iron” (p. 202). The same image is repeated to describe the coolies. They stream like “a mass of rolling stones down a bank” (p. 196), thumping the deck with their feet and flourishing their arms wildly. Jukes clothes are “as heavy as lead, cold and dripping like an armour of melting ice” (p. 186). As soon as Jukes regains his confidence and moral courage, he is prepared to face the storm as a man “safe in a shirt of mail” (p. 217) would watch a point. Engines are described with great affection: “There was the prudent sagacity of wisdom and the deliberation of enormous strength in their movements” (p. 204). Men are often praised for functioning with the vigour of machines. The helmsman’s face is “like a stone head fixed to look one way from a column” (p. 198), thereby emphasizing his firmness and fixity of purpose and unswerving determination. The boatswain growls “like an industrious gorilla” (p.209), and possesses the primitive and supernatural strength and powers needed ultimately to suppress the human storm in the ship. The Chinese coolies are then dehumanised through the use of animal imagery. The coolies moan “like baying hounds” (p. 210), look “like bees on a branch” (p.196), and stream “like a mass of rolling stones”. By this imagery Conrad stresses their bluntness and imbecility, obstinacy and stubbornness. Consequently, Jukes and the boatswain have to apply force to restrain them.
Most of these similes are visual and impressionistic. But because much of the story takes place in total darkness, many of the images are aural as well. The gust of wind comes “like the sudden smashing of a vial of wrath” (p.179). It seems to explode all round the ship with an overpowering concussion, “as if an immense dam had been blown up to the windward” (p.179). The gale then ‘howled’ and ‘scuffled’ about gigantically, and seems to take upon itself “the accumulated impetus of an avalanche” (p.178). The stokehold ventilators ‘hummed’ and Jukes hears the sound. Likewise, “Rancorous, guttural cries burst out loudly” (p.196) on the ears of Jukes and the boatswain as they open the door to see the coolies. And to convey the sound effects Conrad has used a cluster of explosive words respectively: ‘bang’, ‘boomed’, ‘blast’, ‘burst’, ‘crash’; ‘clattered’, ‘rolled’, ‘rattled’; ‘scuffling’, ‘wrestling’, ‘howling’, ‘whistling’ ‘humming’ and ‘boiling’. Again there is the recurrent contrast between the images of light and dark. Repeatedly in Typhoon Conrad draws attention to the real, surface world. The storm scene deserves special mention for its minute visual details brilliantly arranged to evoke the feelings of awe and wonder.

The motion of the ship was extravagant. Her lurches had an appalling helplessness: she pitched as if taking a header into a void, and seemed to find a wall to hit every time. When she rolled she fell on her side headlong, and she would be righted back by such a demolishing blow that Jukes felt her reeling as a clubbed man reels before he collapses. The gale howled and scuffled about gigantically in the darkness, as though the entire world were one black gully. At certain moments the air streamed against the ship as if sucked through a tunnel with a concentrated solid force of impact that seemed to lift her clean out of the water and keep her up for an instant with only a quiver running through from end to end. And then she would begin her tumbling again as if dropped back into a boiling cauldron. Jukes tried hard to compose his mind and judge things coolly (pp. 181-182).

The images used to describe the ship are equally effective and linked with the world of direct sensation. The language of Typhoon is also enriched with marine words and terminology: ‘bridge’, ‘bulkhead’, ‘bunker’, ‘cuddy’, ‘forecastle’, ‘starboard’ and many more. The crew are named more often by their calling, so that terms like ‘captain’, ‘mate’, ‘engineers’, ‘boatswain’,
'black-squad', 'coal-trimmer', 'donkey-man' appear time and again in the narrative. Conrad has also used marine terminology with specific meanings. For example, because of prolonged exposure to the tyranny of the storm Jukes suffers from a kind of weakness in which the undermining 'desire to let go' (p. 182) possesses him when he needs to hang on. In Conrad's terminology, 'the desire to let go', means "cessation of struggle, a corrupt 'craving for peace', a readiness to lose the self in death, for peace is put 'even before life itself'. This desire, in short, is an infestation of man's hidden weakness".  

Conrad uses these marine terms and words, not merely to achieve objective accuracy, but also to enrich the human emotions of the story.

In Typhoon, as in his other fiction, Conrad has presented certain major themes which are brought out through characters and their multiple points of view. A recurrent theme in practically all of Conrad's work is that of isolation, an overt physical isolation shadowed by man's greater spiritual isolation. In Typhoon there are individuals who remain isolated in varying ways and to varying degrees of significance, and whose individual roles are more complex than their commitment to the group. Jukes, Solomon Rout, the helmsman and the boatswain – each in his turn bears the weight of isolation. MacWhirr's isolation is profound and he can expect no relief "from any one on earth". "Such is the loneliness of command" (p.179). But MacWhirr suffers no agonies of conscience, endures no spiritual conflict because he is convinced of the rightness of his action. Other themes include the theme of duty and fidelity to the profession; of the need for solidarity in times of stress and crisis; of the very nature of mankind and its struggle for survival.

From our foregoing analysis of Typhoon we see that its identifiable themes are implicit in the conjunction of events that are bodied forth in the narrative. At the centre of events, placed and related to time and space, are the characters of MacWhirr, Jukes, and Solomon Rout who exemplify their unwavering commitment to duty, fidelity and professional loyalty. The arrangement and
juxtaposition of events and situations illuminate the characters and their essential convictions and attitudes. Captain MacWhirr is simple, literal and unimaginative, and therefore, unresponsive, and unruffled. Only content to live in the stark present and always happy to pass through each successive day, and no more. MacWhirr is tranquilly sure of himself (p.152), and consequently unable "to discover the message of a prophecy" indicated through the ominous fall of the barometer (p.153). He has interpreted it as "some uncommonly dirty weather knocking about" (p.153), while there is every sign of an approaching storm. The flag episode illustrates the same mental trait in MacWhirr—his obtuseness. It also dramatizes the struggle between fact and fancy—between MacWhirr and Jukes—with fact invariably triumphing over fancy. Jukes's discussion regarding the change of course of the ship brings into focus the single-minded purpose of MacWhirr, his high sense of duty to steer the ship through the storm and to eschew the "storm strategy" (p.175).

The storm itself provides the vast canvas against which the characters are measured; their thoughts and emotions, prejudices and predilections, intense activity and corrupt passivity are exposed. As an individual, MacWhirr is as much isolated as Jukes and Solomon Rout, Heckett the helmsman and the nameless, evasive second mate. The sense of isolation of MacWhirr and Jukes is, however, more pervasive and pronounced as they have virtually to wrestle with the storm by their single-handed efforts, when the gale strikes the ship (p.180). Jukes can relieve his loneliness by having the captain at his side. Whenever he is separated from the captain in a deluge of waves or by the fury of the storm, his agonies and suffering are inconsolable. It is only when MacWhirr comes to place his arm on Jukes's shoulder or to hold him in his strong and stout arms that Jukes feels reassured and becomes self-confident once again (pp180,181). Lonely and afraid, he initially grumbles about going down below deck to see the coolies. But moments later he carries out his captain's order as a loyal and obedient sailor. On the contrary, MacWhirr's loneliness causes him no pain or agony. It is the "loneliness of command" from
which he could “expect no sort of relief from anyone on earth”. He can find only occasional moments to go back to his cabin. There he either reads a book on storms and meditates on it, or speaks out in the solitude and the darkness “as if addressing another being awakened in his breast” (p.214). But the climactic occasion is when he extends his arm for something, and was amazingly self-assured at finding the towel in its proper place. He takes the towel out, wipes his face, and emits a murmur: “she may come out of it, yet” (p.215). This humble moment, which occurs during the calm before the worst of the storm, is the story’s climax. These particular situations laden with immense significance, throw light on the respective characters, and also contribute to the total affirmative meaning of the narrative. Likewise, the conception and execution of both the storm scenes—one physical, and the other human—are made to illuminate characters and the kind of life they represent. Conrad shows how MacWhirr and Jukes face their moral tests successfully with courage, firmness, sense of duty and solidarity. In manoeuvring the crises they are actively helped and assisted by other sailors and the crew of the engine-room. The only corrupt force threatening indiscipline in the ship is the self-centred, evasive and mischievous second mate. The authoritative MacWhirr not only thwarts this evil force, but discharges him from the ship. Thus this triumph of moral strength endorses one of the central themes of the text.

*Typhoon* has for its theme the simple story of moral tests. It deals with characters who are equally simple and without any psychological complexity or moral ambivalence. MacWhirr, Jukes, and Solomon Rout reveal themselves through the incidents and situations which Conrad has presented in a straightforward, linear narrative without any time-shifts. He also uses the device of epistolary excerpts for presenting the points of view of different characters. He bases his selection of events and incidents on the principle of coherence and consistence. In this respect the choice of MacWhirr is significant. As Conrad has stated in his Author’s Note: MacWhirr is needed for “a leading motive that would harmonize all these violent noises, and a point of
view that would put all that elemental fury into its proper place” (p.147). This MacWhirr with his “literal mind and dauntless temperament” is integral to the structure of Typhoon. The immense sea and the furious storm create opportunity for the characters to know their defects and limitations, and further motivate them to work in a spirit of solidarity for the sake of survival. The reductive, concrete language proves a very useful means for a fuller enactment of human and physical tensions. So we see that the formal elements in Typhoon are appropriately organised to convey the themes and the characters are shown in every possible perspective to underscore the themes.

Falk: A Reminiscence

At the outset of Youth Marlow the narrator expostulates before his hearers: “You fellows know there are those voyages that seem ordered for the illustration of life, that might stand for a symbol of existence”. No doubt, Youth faithfully records such a momentous experience in Marlow’s life when he is barely twenty-two. Both the tales of Falk: A Reminiscence and The Shadow-Line contain interesting and authentic details from Conrad’s own assumption of a first command. In Conrad’s personal life as a sailor similar moments, as in Youth, appeared—those moments that are fraught with meaning, to which his prolific imagination returns at different periods of life—and these moments are inseparably linked with his first voyage in the Otago late in January 1888. On this voyage he confronted a series of catastrophic situations until he rose to the supreme joys of seamanship, and won the responsibility of the command. In reality, “that trip became the culminating episode in a whole period of emotional crisis”. This remarkable episode has strongly impinged not only on some pages of Lord Jim and on his two personal stories The Secret Sharer and The Shadow-Line, but most eloquently in Falk: A Reminiscence. Of course, in Falk a few paragraphs deal with the sickness of the crew and with the narrator-captain’s ignorance of the command of a ship.
Here the insecure narrator is facing a severe test with Falk as his enemy; he is also bewildered as to how the ship, abandoned by her former captain, could be taken out into the open sea in order mainly to save the ailing crew from imminent death. But the material facts in Conrad are not so important as their spiritual significance. For “Experience in them [the stories] is but the canvas of the attempted picture. Each of them has its more than one intention”. Indeed, the same nostalgic experience is subtly exploited by Conrad in different stories to communicate his perception of truth in respect of life.

In our study of *Lord Jim* and *The Secret Sharer* we discover that Conrad has treated in them by analogy two famous crimes at sea—the abandonment of the *Jeddah* by its irresponsible officers, and the ruthless killing of a rebellious member of the crew on the famous ‘Cutty Sark’. In both Conrad has dealt with a grave problem as to what attitude one should take towards one’s brother or ‘double’ who has committed a crime. A third major crime at sea is depicted in *Falk*—cannibalism on a drifting ship, a murder in order to survive. The story element in each tale seeks to highlight another special area of ‘Conradian discourse’: How far do circumstances attenuate the gravity of the crime? In *Falk* this theme of cannibalism is, however, not central to the story, although this horrid anecdote is integral to the story’s structure, and to our perception of Falk’s sensitive nature and suffering mind.

For Conrad nearly two years—from the February-April 1899 serialization of *Heart of Darkness* to the December 1901 publication of *Amy Foster*—were a period of ‘stagnation’ when none of his magazine pieces would see the light of print—a particularly worrying fact for Conrad who felt his future was full of hurdles. He told Blackwood that his work for ‘Maga’ loomed as big as a mountain, “but now it is more than half scaled at last”. By this time *Falk* was complete, but it was never serialized, the chief reason being its primitive subject-matter—for *Falk*’s pivotal point is ‘horrible’ cannibalism. It was highly improbable that Blackwood, being so orthodox, conservative, and highly
traditional, should accept the story. Later explaining the 'mountain' analogy, Conrad said, although in a jocular vein, that it "is not used to hint at the loftiness of my work, but simply as conveying a notion of its arduousness".127

In three early stories Youth, Heart of Darkness, and Lord Jim—Conrad employed the first-person narrator who has in the past experienced several genuine maturations. "In Youth this maturation is rooted in a new understanding of seamanship; in Heart of Darkness, in a profound reappraisal of what it means to navigate a world without values or sanctions; in Lord Jim, in an increased understanding of the fundamental necessity, yet the hopelessness, of human relationships".128 By virtue of its similarity of thematic pattern and structure Falk: A Reminiscence falls into the category of Conrad’s early sea fiction. The major thrust in Falk centres upon the young captain trying to overcome the difficulties surrounding his assumption of a first command.129

By the time Conrad writes Typhoon and Falk the process of maturation seems to diminish considerably, one reason being Conrad’s relaxation from the tensions of ambiguity that characterize Marlow’s first-person narration. There is close similarity as well as difference between Falk and Heart of Darkness and Youth. The last two, like Falk, are closely related to the assumption of a new command. In Heart of Darkness Marlow’s self-realization is largely complete before he meets Kurtz, the outcast, in the dark African Congo. In Falk the young captain rises to the challenges of the first command, and attains strength, maturity and confidence in navigating his ship only after he becomes seriously involved in a conflict with Falk, that ultimately removes his confusion, and shows the captain the dangers of self-complacency.

As the title Falk: A Reminiscence suggests, the story basically centres on the narrator’s recollection of his encounter with Falk in his youth. Falk more emphatically dramatises "the middle-aged narrator’s struggle to come to terms with and communicate the meaning of a crucial experience of his youth".130
Conrad, importantly enough, underscored this idea [on the narrator] in his Author’s Note:

But what is the subject of ‘Falk’? I personally do not feel any certain about it. He who reads must find out for himself. My intention in writing ‘Falk’ was not to shock anybody. As in most of my writings I insist not on the events but on their effect upon the persons in the tale.\textsuperscript{131}

The last sentence contains the import of the remark—to obviate the effects of the events on the characters rather than the events themselves is of vital significance to Conrad. The impact of the episodes and events depicted in Falk is strongly felt by Hermann and his wife, the narrator and Falk, not excepting, of course, the young girl, who remains silent throughout and therefore more impressively eloquent.

Most remarkable in Falk is Conrad’s handling of the materials in a complex and skilful manner so as to focus attention on a formidable social ‘taboo’—Falk’s cannibalism. In the narrative it is seen not as a ‘criminal barbarism’ but ‘as an act of simple necessity, the admirable egoism of self preservation’.\textsuperscript{132} Fully aware that his subject-matter might be considered offensive, Conrad deliberately arranged the sequence of events in order to highlight and emphasize Schomberg’s malice and Hermann’s so-called innocence and simplicity more than Falk’s conscious guilt that is introduced towards the end of the narrative.

Written in the 1901-02 period, Conrad’s Falk: A Reminiscence and Amy Foster reflect his continuing interest in ‘the quest of a dramatised first person narrator’.\textsuperscript{133} Although Conrad had used the first person narrative method in his first two novels Almayer’s Folly and An Outcast of the Islands and in a few other early tales, he adopted this voice in Falk more intelligently and controlled the reader’s responses “by means of subtle modulations of tone, changing perspectives, deft withholding of crucial information, and manipulation of chronology”.\textsuperscript{134} Conrad originally experimented with these techniques when
writing his Marlow tales. The singularity about *Falk* is that its dramatised narrators, as in *Youth* and in the Marlow tales, are also the characters in the story’s action. The incidents, episodes, and experiences in *Falk* are primarily narrated by the young captain at the moment of his initiation. His account also contains summary statements, reported speeches of other characters combined with direct brief conversational passages, and partial interactions between the narrator and other characters so as to create the impression that the events and incidents are presented with immediacy. For the story of *Falk* is a reminiscence recapitulated by the narrator after twenty years, with wisdom and perspicacity. His entire gamut of experiences is filtered through his struggling conscience. His inability to do proper justice to the projected events in the narrative is shockingly conspicuous. His faltering voice comes to the fore, bewildered by the horrific nature of experiences. He cannot fully shirk his original difficulty in coming to terms with Falk's experience—his journey to the dark primitive cannibalistic world. Possibly, the narrator wants to repress the macabre truth about Falk, and, therefore, withholds Falk’s name for thirteen pages of his reminiscence: “Remembering the things one reads of it was difficult to realize the true meaning... , to get in touch with the real actuality at our elbow”(p.321).

Conrad’s *Falk: A Reminiscence* is, like any other story, rich with some important themes which are communicated deftly in a complex narrative structure or form. Conrad himself described its themes: “Contrast of common sentimentalism with the frank standpoint of a more or less primitive man [Falk himself] who regards the preservation of life as the supreme moral law”\(^\text{135}\). Falk virtually personifies Schopenhauer’s “will to live”, an unconscious striving in man and nature to exist and increase, which is unappeasable. Also Nietzsche’s nihilistic philosophy of will to power impinges strongly on Conrad’s writings. For Conrad and Nietzsche, though admirers of Schopenhauer’s pessimistic philosophy, were equally critical of its principal arguments.
Materialistic pragmatism and its dark and gloomy shadow is a dominant theme in *Falk*. Almost all the characters—Falk and Hermann, the deceased captain, his successor the narrator-captain, Messrs Siegers of the Harbour Authority, even the most shabby and tipsy Johnson—are directly concerned, or anxious, or horrified by the loss or crisis of many.

The most important theme is the silent but passionate love between Falk and Hermann's niece, culminating in marriage. This constitutes the central point of the narrative. The romantic girl is the symbol of life and vitality, of beauty and opulence of form, of innocent fabulous Earth showing off all the purity, sanctity and domesticity, of concentrated emotions and feelings to whom the hungry—almost emotionally starved—Falk is irresistibly drawn. Another parallel and futile love episode is projected between Falk and Miss Vanlo, the sister of Fred. Reportedly Falk's financial hardship stood as the main impediment to the marriage, although Falk paid up all the dues incurred by Fred for his overstay at the port. Fred and Miss Vanlo, however, left the scene broken-hearted.

But cannibalism is the central theme and the main motif that dominates the narrative of *Falk*. Cannibalism as a primitive instinct, both physical and metaphorical, is finely woven into the narrative structure. In *Falk* it is invariably linked with the issue of self-preservation which was uppermost in Falk. Hence its association with the Sophenhaurian philosophy of the will to live.

*Falk: A Reminiscence* is again a remarkable initiation story of a young captain who is for the first time entrusted to command a ship to its port of destination. It is secondary to the main subject-matter which is 'Falk's attempt to get married'. On accepting the responsibility of a command, the young captain has to face a lot of difficulties, both internal and external. Internal difficulty is the young captain’s inexperience, sense of isolation and loneliness, spiritual demoralization of the deceased captain—its horrible legacy of financial
Evil as a powerful force is mainly introduced in *Falk* through the profligate deceased captain, and the lip-smacking hotel keeper Schomberg. Other persistent themes that find expression in the tale relate to the values of loyalty and friendship, morality and fidelity. The narrator’s shifting friendship first with Hermann and then with Falk is handled plausibly and ingenuously. Especially his relationship with Falk is explored with care, caution and suspense. The main issue at stake is the towing of his ship into the sea. And Falk declines to do that on the assumption that the captain is his possible rival in love with Hermann’s niece. The way the narrator-captain converts Falk’s jealousy into a complete surrender to him proves the captain’s presence of mind and mature insight.

Another important theme — that of breakdown — is significantly but impressively interrelated with the other major themes in *Falk*. In fact, “in Conrad’s story the breakdown of categories is intimately related to the more obvious themes of the breakdown of a ship and the breakdown of the human body”. Here the cannibalistic Falk is made to represent a ‘desocialised’ man who finds himself in a completely ‘de-categorised’ world. He fell out of the world and has experienced reality irreconcilable with hitherto unquestioned taxonomies. He has faced, not only the thing classified, but ‘the thing itself’ — ‘the real actuality’ (p.321).

Associated with the theme of cannibalism is the theme of the fragmentation of what should be a discrete unit—that is, mutilation. This theme has a subtle reference to an early part of the story when the narrator describes the ‘Diana’ which is a ship-shop—another breakdown of category. She is then constantly associated with cleaning and washing. The ship’s purity has been, as it were, bloated to ‘a sentimental excess’ (p.268). The narrator almost ironically
comments on her ‘meticulous neatness’: “It was as if every morning that ship had been arduously explored with—with tooth brushes” (p.268). He also describes the family washing in detail:

*It covered the poop entirely. The afternoon breeze would incite to a weird and flabby activity all that crowded mass of clothing, with its vague suggestions of drowned, mutilated, and flattened humanity. Trunks without heads waved at you arms without hands; legs without feet kicked fantastically with collapsible flourishes (p.261).*

The entire passage is ominously symbolic and the horrific disintegration of the human body is suggested. It is again invariably linked with the content of cannibalism introduced later in the story. The reference is to the clothing of the body, and not the body itself. And the clothes are taking various distorted and fantastic shapes as the wind passes through them, as if they are cut into pieces and fragmented for the sake of fusion and assimilation. They look abominable and portentous and anticipate the horrible obnoxious cannibalism aboard the *Borgmester Dahl*.

This rich network of themes is finely woven and integrated into the complex narrative structure of *Falk*. As in *Heart of Darkness*, the initial narrative frame in *Falk* constitutes “several of us, all more or less connected with the sea” (p.258). And the primary narrator, of that group, begins the ‘artless’ tale, hinting with grotesque economy at that which is to follow: The unsatisfactory dinner which brings to mind an image of ‘primeval man’ scorching ‘lumps of flesh’ at his fire and talking of the “hunt—and of women, perhaps”! (p.258). Gathering in a small river-hostelry overlooking the Thames, they tell about “old ships, of sea accidents, of breakdowns, dismastings... of wrecks, of short rations and of heroism—of heroism at sea” (pp.259-60). Possibly, the sight of the German ship with the skipper and his wife on board stirs up the past memories of the secondary narrator who emerges from absolute silence and starts recounting ‘an absurd episode in his life’(p.259) when he was a young man of thirty. And the narrator asserts that this ‘episode’ “concerns only me, my enemy Falk, and my friend Hermann” (p.259). And as we reach the end of
the narrative we see there is considerable deviation and alteration in that relationship.

Though no strict line of demarcation is practicable, the narrative of *Falk: A Reminiscence* incorporates three distinct parts that are perfectly linked, and overlap one another. The first part dwells on the ironic self-preservation of Hermann and his family, including his niece in the *Diana*. The second part depicts the initiation of the captain-narrator new in the line. The third part covers primarily Falk’s silent affair with Hermann’s niece, which matures into marriage only after the captain’s diplomatic handling of the matter with Hermann.

As in the Marlow stories, Conrad’s narrative technique in *Falk* starts with the first person plural—‘we’, ‘us’, ‘our talk’. Then the unnamed narrator recapitulates and recounts his personal experience and thus his participation in the action becomes conspicuous. The narrative mode in *Falk* follows a linear progression. Barring a flashback in which Falk’s dauntless heroism on a drifting ship in the Antarctic is engagingly depicted through indirect narration mingled with brief conversational passages, there is hardly any dislocation of time in the narrative. Conrad also uses very effectively multiple points of view by introducing characters who reinforce the thematic contents of the narrative through their comments, analyses, opinions, and valued statements on one another. Thus the different aspects of reality are presented not through one voice, but through many voices, and thus the authenticity of experience that is unfolded in the narrative is established. The narrative form is further enriched by the subtle use of various structural and linguistic devices, such as parallelism and contrast, delayed decoding and impressionism, images and symbols, and above all, limpid, lucid, and forceful language. Even the instrument of letters (p.265) is employed as an important device to throw light on some vital incident in the tale. Conrad is also very adept at maintaining ‘deliberate caution’ and ‘strained humour’ in order to soften the shock-value of
the narrative. Moreover, in Conrad’s fiction, as in *Falk*, atmosphere works as a powerful regulatory force behind the characters and their actions, and, therefore, claims our special attention. Of course, this wide assortment of formal elements is only arbitrary; for, they act as a ‘corporate body’ to advance and develop the thematic contents of the story. And the perfect integration of form and themes helps communicate the meaning or truth of the narrative more forcefully.

As the narrative of *Falk: A Reminiscence* demonstrates, the young captain, “not yet thirty”, confronts a series of troubles and puzzling situations moments after his assumption of a new command: the presence of a mess of unpaid bills, of papers intimating bribery, of a host of doggerel verses occupying the pages of the Account Book; then the first mate’s mutinous attitude and the second mate’s stupidity make the captain disconsolate and isolated from significant human discourse. Then the illness of the crew members worsens his position, and the report of the steward’s hospitalization frustrates the captain altogether. He deeply muses:

> Altogether I was not getting on. I would discover at odd times (generally about midnight) that I was totally inexperienced, greatly ignorant of business, and hopelessly unfit for any sort of command (p.266).

His depression gets intensified when the Chinese boy steals his last thirty-two golden sovereigns, leaving him “as poor and naked as a fakir” (p.266). He is bewildered and feels that the situations are gradually slipping out of his hand.

Thus wearied, the captain seeks relief in Hermann’s company aboard the *Diana*. This search reflects his desire for “the ‘civilized’, rational values” of the *Diana* and thus a pursuit of mature control over his awkward situation. Throughout the story the captain consciously follows a rational approach to life. His attempt to withdraw from the pressures in his own ship clearly suggests his ‘moral escapism’ from life’s contingencies. Again in the early part of the tale his excessive reliance upon Hermann, and further his imaginative
appraisal of Hermann, not as a seaman, but as "a well-to-do farmer" or a "small shopkeeper" (p.260) shows the captain's significant lack of moral insight. Indeed, the captain is caught in a delusion which makes him blind to the burden of responsibility that a first command demands.

The narrator, however, does not feel comfortable in association with Falk on the Diana, who looks remote and enigmatic. Falk's silence and uncommon behaviour, his low indistinct muttering as a parting gesture to Hermann's wife and niece, and his oft-repeated strange manner of drawing "the palms of both his hands down his face, giving at the same time a slight, almost imperceptible shudder" (p.272)—indeed this conduct makes Falk the representative of "primitive, instinctive values", and further isolates him from the people about him. The narrator too is deeply impressed by Falk's attitudes and profound gravity, and he treats him as a new force and "remarkable exhibit of civilized stature".

In fact, Falk's enigmatic and unpredictable nature quickens the self-awareness of the captain who is otherwise relaxed and self-complacent with the order and discipline of his profession. When Falk ignores the captain's turn already settled by the Harbour office, and tows the Diana instead in advance downriver, the captain, though initially bewildered, awakens finally from his moral lassitude and perceives "all the unreason, all the fatuous unreason, of our complacency" (p.277). This outright abrogation of the order reduces the narrator-captain to a still more distraught condition, and challenges his dignity: "How insignificant and contemptible I must appear, for the fellow to dare to treat me like this—I reflected suddenly, writhing in silent agony" (p.283). Failing to obtain redress against Falk's action from the Harbour Office, the narrator begins to regard himself as "a foolish figure", and his condition is simply nerve-racking at this point: "I perceived myself involved in hopeless and humiliating absurdities that were leading me to something very like a disaster.... I felt myself about to go out of my mind with worry and
desperation", he confesses (pp.291-92). His self-respect is further mortified and his agony deepened when he learns that Falk has declined to tow his ship "this day or any other day. Never" (p.290). He desperately tries to extricate himself from this demoralizing condition by seeking help from a former pilot Johnson, but that too proves abortive. He seems on the verge of a breakdown. Ironically, at this crucial moment he discovers in himself a genius for handling his critical situation. For right at that time Falk arrives at Schomberg's coffee room, and the narrator, seizing the sudden opportunity, persuades Falk to move into the fresh air of the open verandah where he initiates a private discussion with Falk. The narrator acts under a double motive: firstly, to soothe Schomberg's fear of a 'stag fight' that might damage his property, and secondly, to isolate the two men from the other customers' interference.

Under the façade of a card game and two long drinks the narrator hopes to turn the long discussion between himself and Falk into a resolution of the conflict that has particularly jeopardised the prospect of towage of his ship. From this talk emerges one unique aspect of Falk's character—his yearning for both respectability and companionship. To the narrator, Falk's only concern seems to be "self-preservation":

Not selfishness, but mere self-preservation. Selfishness presupposes consciousness, choice, the presence of other men; but his instinct acted as though he were the last of mankind nursing that law like the only spark of a sacred fire.... Obviously he was the creature of the conditions to which he was born. No doubt self-preservation meant also the preservation of these conditions. (p.300).

Thus Falk's essential self is revealed. The narrator tears open "the simple, natural, and powerful" self of Falk. He frankly confesses, "And the more I saw into him the more I saw him" (p.301). For the first time he discovers in Falk, without his hat, the massive features of his physique: "It was an anchorite's bony head fitted with a Capuchin's beard and adjusted to a Herculean body" (p.301). Several mythic allusions employed for Falk's depiction only suggest the narrator's wonder, sitting face to face with Falk. Gradually he wins Falk's
confidence, and comes to recognise Falk’s silence, egoism, and peculiar mannerism as great ‘masks’ to hide his deep and profound feelings. The narrator’s improved insight helps him to overcome severe paralysis of will that has dogged him for the last several weeks. He now becomes more prudent and pragmatic, and intelligently extricates himself from the dangerous rivalry with Falk over Hermann’s niece with a white lie:

*My dear Falk, I will tell you that I am already engaged to an extremely charming girl at home, and so you understand...*(p.306)

Thus the narrator sets Falk’s doubts and anxieties at rest. And lest Falk should suspect his intentions the narrator resolves to act as an ambassador to talk to Hermann on Falk’s behalf—a very straightforward and confident move by the captain. He also steadily declares that he would not only obtain Hermann’s consent for Falk, but also stand by him in his crucial moments (p.307). The narrator feels elated: “I felt I had the winning cards”, and the stake is roughly speaking, ‘the success of the voyage’ (p.305). No doubt the narrator’s generosity considerably alters his relations with the proud and distant Falk, and their intimacy grows. The captain’s fear of Falk has yielded to sympathy and affection. So that he can now badger Falk with the plain accusation of bribing Johnson or with the hazardous reminder of the Vanlo affair, without offending him in any way. Moreover, Falk possesses “the hard, straight masculinity that would conceivably kill but would not condescend to cheat” (p.309). The narrator is mentally relieved to have been able to change the accursed situation into a positive move in his favour. For assured of the captain’s astute diplomacy, Falk relents and agrees to tow the narrator’s barque within a cable’s length from the *Diana*.

Apparently, the narrator thinks his role as ambassador as “all too extravagantly nonsensical” (p.309); but he is fully aware that its successful accomplishment would not only mend his past misunderstandings with Falk; this would also provide him necessary strength and confidence to be a successful captain. He,
therefore, takes the role seriously: “I conceived that it would be best to compose for myself a grave demeanour” (p.309).

The narrator’s reference to Falk in Hermann’s presence sparks off a violent outburst of feelings in Hermann who at once unleashes a series of diatribes against Falk that would only smash his dream: Falk’s supposed cupidity and conceit, his disregard of the importance of passion, his outrageous treatment of the shipping in port (‘he saw they were at his mercy’), his manner of walking, and finally his shameless and blatant disclosure of past cannibalism. Virtually, the last bit of information infuriates Hermann so much that he could shriek out only one word—the horrible ‘beast’ who should be outside the ken of society:

*He [Hermann] choked, gasped, swallowed, and managed to shriek out the one word, ‘Beast’!* (p.315)

The captain is upset, but undaunted, and utilizing his immediate experience of tolerance and persuasion that he acquires in his talk with Falk, he allows Hermann ample time to cool down before he takes up the matter again.

The narrator urges Hermann not to believe Falk and tries his best to disarm Hermann of his misgivings and anxiety, saying that Falk’s story of cannibalism “is true just as much as you are able to make it; and exactly in the way you like to make it. For my part, when I hear you clamouring about it, I don’t believe it is true at all” (p.319). Though himself thoroughly convinced of Falk’s cannibalism from “Falk’s words, looks, gestures” (pp.318-19), the narrator still resorts to this superb diplomacy in order to save his ship first, and then to propitiate Falk’s tremendous will to live in company with the girl. He also persuades Hermann to accept Falk as a very prospective candidate for his niece:

*I assured him on my own personal knowledge that Falk possessed in himself all the qualities to make his niece’s future prosperous* (p.331).
Basically good at heart, Hermann soon changes his mind and wishes the captain-narrator "to help him to resume relations with Falk. His niece... had expressed the hope I would do so in my kindness" (p.331). Thus Hermann gets over his moral 'squeamishness' and agrees to the marriage proposal of his niece with Falk simply because he looks upon the whole thing as an acceptable business transaction. Firstly, he needs not see much of them after their marriage, as he cannot bear the sight of Falk; secondly, it is ridiculous to take home a girl with her head turned, a girl that weeps all the time and is of no help to her aunt; thirdly, a considerable amount of return passage money would be saved by this marriage.

Unlike Hermann, the narrator warmly appreciates Falk's post-cannibal achievements. The way Hermann settles the matter conclusively with Falk strikes the narrator-captain as absolutely vulgar, who, however, comes to acknowledge Falk's superiority. For this central episode reveals yet another aspect of Falk's character—a man with the real core of heart, a man with "a vision both of inner desire and of personal responsibility". The narrator is convinced that Falk's knowledge of the unconscious would make his future life happy and prosperous. On their marriage being settled, both lovers now "come together as if attracted, drawn and guided to each other by a mysterious influence. They were a complete couple" (p.331). Much like Marlow after the Congo experience, the narrator is much overwhelmed with the knowledge that he is finally "in touch with the real actuality at our elbow" (p.321).

Indeed, we feel that the epithets 'friend' and 'enemy' as applied by the narrator to Hermann and Falk respectively at the outset of the story have ironically changed their places towards the end of the narrative. The narrator now finds a greater fraternal and spiritual affinity with Falk, while Hermann miserably loses much of his esteem and allegiance. This conspicuous change has been plausibly wrought in the narrative structure by means of the apt presentation and fine delineation of the characters of the narrator, Hermann and Falk. For
Falk, Conrad even reverses his direction to the very primitive antediluvian world of obnoxious cannibalism, which doubtless points out a discrepancy in the realistic fabric of the narrative. That horrible episode in Falk’s life, though reminding us of his ‘unfortunate’ primitive instinct, throws a powerful light on his tolerance, presence of wit about him in crisis, and strong determination to preserve his own self at any cost. It is the same motive which impels him to seek the proximity of the youthful ‘goddess’ on the Diana.

But Schomberg, the notorious scandal-monger of the shore—evil incarnate—, is bent on defiling Falk’s character by attaching various stigmas to his name. Possessed of a depraved mentality, Schomberg is actually mean, selfish, very shrewd, inordinately boastful, and full of malice to those who scorn him or avoid his small hotel for tiffin, meal, or tea or drink. Falk, thriving on a different gastronomy in his post-cannibalistic stage, desists from going to Schomberg’s place, and thereby earns his displeasure; and adverse comments and abominable remarks are spread about him [Falk]. These subversive statements do not seem to reach Falk’s ears, who always maintains a sedate gravity and careless attitude towards all.

Schomberg is thus notorious for his detestable habit of floating rumours about Falk in particular. It is amazing how he can generate the tremendous enthusiasm and ability to collect various information on men and matters about the place. His adept use of them is equally stunning, although he can hardly press his statements with any amount of credibility. For his reports are suspect and misleading, which on probe and verification turn out to be blatantly false. There is “always the essential falseness of irresponsibility in Schomberg’s chatter” (p.283). His presence in the story is amply justified by the way he maliciously pursues his objective to prejudice the narrator’s mind with some dubious reports about Falk. So Schomberg offers an essential point of view, which raises some important questions about Falk.
In fact, Schomberg enlightens the narrator on Falk and his past, but not always logically and reasonably. Desperately angry with Falk, Schomberg only empties his deep disgust and vituperation on Falk, and is bent on degrading his character by calling Falk mean, selfish, miserly, and even relentlessly cruel to the crew of his tugboat. He even makes sarcastic remarks about Falk's gastronomy, thus anticipating the theme of cannibalism. He is pungently critical of Falk's indiscreet and indiscriminate attitude to women, and cites as an example the pathetic case of Miss Vanlo. He thinks financial stringency has led Falk to desert Miss Vanlo, which is far from the truth. Obviously, Schomberg helps the narrator attain sufficient foreknowledge about the characters in the story. Schomberg also stimulates the narrator's imagination by thrusting on him the idea that Falk is after Hermann's niece. This is further reinforced by the injured constable's haughty reference to the bickering rivalry over the girl. The narrator is suddenly awakened to the complexity of the matter, and prepares himself to cut the Gordian Knot and to extricate his ship from this bleak and demoralising atmosphere.

In Conrad's fiction the setting is an essential aspect of form, treated with great care and delicacy. Its vividness authenticates the narrative. The characters' dynamic associations and interactions with the setting are revealed in a very suggestive way. The characters moving in close proximity with the setting infuse life into it; conversely, its impact on the characters becomes pervasive. Conrad builds the atmosphere with hints and suggestions that subtly relate it to the thematic content of the narrative, and anticipates more often than not some major incidents later in the story. Thus Conrad's effective treatment of the setting in his fiction makes it structurally essential. This holds good in *Falk: A Reminiscence* where Conrad attributes great value to the exposition of its setting that enables us to explore Falk, among others, in the right perspective.

The opening paragraph of *Falk* is intriguing and thought-provoking and creates the atmosphere in which the frame of the story is cast. Here Conrad highlights
some significant aspects of the narrative, of which food is most conspicuous. Apart from this, the deliberate use of some choice epithets is intended to push the time-frame of the narrative back to the primordial primitive days. Conrad seems to have worked painstakingly on this particular paragraph with tremendous effort and accuracy. *Falk* begins, however, the traditional note, as in *Youth* and *Heart of Darkness*:

> Several of us, all more or less connected with the sea, were dining in a small river-hostelry not more than thirty miles from London, and less than twenty from that shallow and dangerous puddle to which our coasting men give the grandiose name of 'German Ocean'. And through the wide windows we had a view of the Thames; an enfilading view down the Lower Hope Reach. But the dinner was execrable, and all the feast was for the eyes.

> That flavour of salt water which for so many of us had been the very water of life permeated our talk. He who hath known the bitterness of the ocean shall have its taste for ever in his mouth. But one or two of us, pampered by the life of the land, complained of hunger. It was impossible to swallow any of that stuff. And indeed there was a strange mustiness in everything (p.258).

In this part Conrad has no doubt introduced the conventional mode of narration, by combining the two acts of eating and story-telling. It appears that Conrad has primarily laid emphasis on the various aspects of oral functions demonstrated by such groups of words as 'flavour', 'talk', 'taste', 'mouth', 'hunger', and 'swallow'. And this is perfectly corroborated by the fact that eating of different kinds is persistently referred to in the narrative. The food which the sailors are taking in the hostelry is execrable and detestable and they are all deeply aghast at its horrible sight. "There was a strange mustiness in everything".

Likewise the chop that the narrator endeavours to eat at Schomberg’s coffee-room proves stale and tasteless. Conrad also mentions the barrels of rotten meat that had to be thrown away overboard the *Borgmester Dahl* strictly for hygienic reasons. As a result, during the prolonged drift of the *Borgmester Dahl* in the Antarctic, Falk and the other sailors had to encounter a serious food scarcity which actually goaded them, for sheer self-preservation, to the abominable act
of cannibalism. Falk alone, however, returns to the human world with a bitter taste in the mouth and a deep scratch in the soul that can only find peace and solace through candid self-confession before Hermann, although fully aware that such confession might be self-destructive. Here attention may also be drawn to the range of words relating to different states of food, different kinds of cooking, used during the narrator’s conversation with Schomberg—raw, boiled, fried, roasted, and by implication stale and rotten; the ‘rotten meat’ is specifically mentioned during Falk’s reference to the ‘unfortunate’ episode in his life to the narrator.

The rest of the paragraph points to the other facet of the setting which links itself to the primitive times and enforces the treatment of the theme of primitivism in the narrative.

The wooden dining-room stuck out over the mud of the shore like a lacustrine dwelling; the planks of the floor seemed rotten; a decrepit old waiter tottered pathetically to and fro before an antediluvian and worm-eaten side-board; the chipped plates might have been disinterred from some kitchen midden near an inhabited lake; and the chops recalled times more ancient still. They brought forcibly to one’s mind the night of ages when the primeval man, evolving the first rudiments of cookery from his dim consciousness, scorched lumps of flesh at a fire of sticks in the company of other good fellows; then, gorged and happy, sat him back among the gnawed bones to tell his artless tales of experience—the tales of hunger and hunt—and of women, perhaps! (p.258)

Almost everything in the passage seems to indicate some strange dissolution, and a general state of depletion is emphasized: decay, deterioration, decline and decrepitude—‘rotten planks’, worm-eaten furniture, ‘chipped plates’, the ‘decrepit old waiter’ and so on. The very depiction of the dining room takes us instantly back to primordial times further reasserted by the references to ‘lacustrine dwelling’ and ‘inhabited lake’. With his great narrative skill Conrad has finely juxtaposed the prehistoric and antediluvian with the present, and this overlapping of time sequences acts as “a prelude to a tale which will question the accepted differences and distances between the primeval or primitive and the civilized”. Also this deft presentation of time conveys the idea of
'primeval man' just beginning to cook and then to narrate, suggesting that these two acts are coeval and inextricably linked. The idea is further reinforced by the proximity of two expressions 'gnawed bones' and 'artless tales'. Indeed, the whole framework in which a group of sailors is eating a rotten meal in an old restaurant bordering on disintegration, is a suitable ironic device for a story about cannibalism. And prior to the emergence of the single narrator who tells the story of Falk, the group of people are said to be discussing a number of topics, including the 'break-downs'. Apart from the initial reference to the break-down of ships, the story will touch upon many other kinds of breakdown—the breakdown of community, of values and rules, of categories, conventions and ideas, of language, and finally the breakdown of body itself (p.261). So Conrad lets the initial speaker set the stage for the mature captain's reminiscence and the ironic setting merges the civilized with the primitive. The river-hostelry, 'stuck out over the mud of the shore like a lacustrine dwelling', anticipates the union between Hermann's 'civilized' niece who instinctively responds to Falk's interest and Falk who circumspectly courts her. Thus the passage, on which Conrad worked heavily to give it the shape it received, is wholly relevant to the form and themes of the story.

The Eastern seaport with its sordid atmosphere which is capable of corrupting people is also sharply presented in *Falk*. For contact with this miasmic atmosphere is crucial to the narrator's changed attitude towards Falk and Hermann. The terrifying search for the missing Johnson to pilot the narrator's ship provides an appropriate prolepsis to the narrator's discovery of the purity of Falk's instincts. This search through the city with the help of the sergeant confronts him with crude situations and obnoxious odours pointing to man's primitive instincts in an ineffective demoralized social organisation. Here is a 'surrealistic urban inferno', where horrors are piled on horrors and where objects take on animated identities of their own. The narrator recalls, "An empty Australian-beef tin bounded cheerily before the toe of my boot" (p.294). The description of the Johnson episode is grotesquely picturesque as it reveals
the sardonic and sarcastic attitude of the narrator. Though the native compound of the Johnsons is very clean, the actions of Mrs Johnson seem primitive: “the big native woman, with bare brown legs as thick as bedposts, pursuing on all fours a silver dollar that came rolling out from somewhere” (p.294). Actually Johnson with the right hand chucks another dollar into space which she captures in the wing, while in his left hand he holds a banana. There is something sinister and malicious in that incident. Significantly, the narrator withdraws from describing this humiliating adventure:

But why dwell on the wretchedness, the breathlessness, the degradation, the senselessness, the weariness, the ridicule and humiliation and—and—the perspiration of these moments? (p.295)

Yet, Conrad has interspersed this scene with animal imagery and dead decrepit bodies that expose its repulsive wretchedness: ‘bloated carcass’, ‘fat pig’, ‘old hag’, dead dog, mound of garbage, mudhole and others (p.294). Even the native woman Mrs Johnson is humiliated to an animal posture of subjection on the floor. The banana that Johnson holds implicitly suggests food and sex, and the dollars reveal his—however temporary—economic strength. The central concerns of Falk are signified here: “the uses and abuses of power, bodily power, economic power, power through language; the banana, the dollar, and the mouth”.148

In Falk the great Buddhist Pagoda appears recurrently as a refrain to remind us of its profound spiritual significance. The irony of contrast is very sharp and obvious—between the material preoccupations of Hermann and his family, Falk, and the narrator himself on the one hand, and the solemn spiritual renunciation symbolised by the Pagoda, on the other, where the shaven priests intently practice penance. Close to the Pagoda lies the ‘sheltered anchorage’ enclosed by a group of uninhabited rocky islets, where the ships are towed before their final embarkation on the sea. The whole scene offers the panoramic view of ‘a very intensely blue sea’ (p.274) ahead, and a bare coast
and the muddy edge of the brown plain with the sinuosities of the river behind. To this point are drawn both the ships of Hermann and the narrator at a distance of one furlong from each other. A profound silence reigns over the rocks, the shore and the sea. In this desolate arena Falk, passing close to the Diana, takes off his hat and raises it 'aloft before the nymph of the grey print frock' (p.308). This act is his solemn declaration of love and assertion of life. Falk's confession of guilt—his nefarious crime on the Borgmester Dahl—occurs on board the Diana. Again the central episode of the story, the marriage between Falk and Hermann's niece, is resolved and accomplished on the deck of the Diana. Just as Hermann's growing family strongly advocates the principle of living intensely and vigorously, the act of marriage between Falk and the girl announces their irresistible yearning for life and its abundant pleasures. In the distance the stupendous black Pagoda looks on, preaching spiritual enlightenment through the principles of annihilation and salvation: 'the worthy reward of us all' (p.308), the narrator remarks.

In his endeavour to effect a perfect integration of form and themes, Conrad knew that character portrayal is as integral to the narrative mode as is the subtle and specific uses of the language spoken by the characters. In Falk the language, compared with that of Conrad's other fictional works, is less convoluted, more simple and direct. Minimal use of adjectives makes the sentences limpid, swift, and direct in this appeal. The images, to depict a character or a situation, are sparsely used and are mostly drawn from nature and the animal world. The dead captain used to draw his 'hair brushed forward above the temples in a manner reminding one of a boar's tusks' (p.265). The allusion to an inferior animal like a boar suggests not only the stupidity and obstinacy of the captain, but also his awful obsession with primitive instincts that wrecked his career and life. Falk is compared to the mythic 'centaur'—a composite character. This suggests a combination of Falk's Herculean figure, his long tresses, and his accuracy with the bow and arrow. His strong desire to marry Hermann's niece is initially foiled. Yet his nonchalance and calm
tranquillity links Falk to a ‘wary old carp’ (p.275). A carp is cautious, and watches and waits before it comes to the surface for his prey; similarly, Falk observes the situation before he discloses his secret thoughts. His varied experience makes him cautious by nature. Conrad uses the seal image for Hermann. Seated in his chair, Hermann’s white shirt-sleeves are visible, ‘propped up like the flippers of a seal reposing on the strand’ (p.312) in absolute darkness. The seal, a sea creature, is fat, flabby, and glossy, and reposes in the warmth of the strand. Hermann is likewise heavy and flabby, moves around the sea, and brings the ship to anchor for repose close to the shore. His repose is jarred by deep, gloomy, grave thoughts about his niece and the cannibalistic Falk’s proposal to marry her. The darkness outside endorses his total confusion and bewilderment.

The most impressive and striking image in *Falk* is that of the whale. Falk’s bleak marginalised condition in the narrator’s cabin is compared to that of ‘the floundering of a great whale driven into a shallow cave in a coast’ (p.320). A shallow cave is hardly spacious enough for a great whale, so it has to struggle with a dismal inscrutable fate for self-preservation—the kind of struggle against entrapment that Falk, the Herculean owner of the tugboat, is undergoing in the narrator’s small cabin. The image of a horse which rages and scampers at the sight of an undesirable object is also used for Falk. Schomberg is the offensive object. To Falk, Schomberg is disgusting, repulsive, and dishonest. His very sight angers Falk. Then Schomberg is also a real ‘toad’ (p.298) for his gossipy and scandalous nature, and for his inordinate ability to concoct stories to malign Falk and the narrator.

Conrad’s adoption of allegorical and symbolic devices to universalize the theme of primitivism gives an added dimension to *Falk*. Classical overtones mingle in such a way as to suggest a fusion of hunting and cannibalism and seduction: Diana, huntress and patroness of maidens; a scattering of islets which look like a ‘cyclopian ruin’ (p.308); Hermann’s niece with her hair
unplaited and covering her "all round as low as the hips, like the hair of a siren" (p.329). Conrad also mentions early creatures like centipedes, scorpions, and lizards, which, like the classical allusions, "tend to distance the events of the story and give them archetypal status". In spite of its technical subtleties, *Falk* deals with certain events that appear brutal, grotesque and incongruous in a domestic romance. The reader's sense of credibility is severely tested.

Another striking feature in *Falk* is the conscious way the language is exploited by Conrad to capture the different voices of the speakers. The reported speech in the narrative is seldom introduced or concluded with the conventional "he said". The tone, volume, and modulation of the characters' utterances are often given, and the physicality of sound is emphasised. To take some examples of words and phrases used in the story: people whoop, yell, mutter, grunt, make 'loud hospitable ejaculations', talk volubly, set tongues clacking, babble, mumble, hiss, fume, fret, speak in undertones, lecture the narrator with 'deafening gibberish', shoot out a string of words, and so on. At one point Hermann begins "to mumble and chew between his teeth something like German swear-words" (p.273), the niece simply 'moves her lip slightly', while Falk makes "a deep noise in his throat" (p.275). Schomberg 'mouths' his gossip, and he in particular is 'unable to hold his tongue'. Throughout *Falk*, Conrad deliberately strives to impart the idea that language cannot fully express the content and meaning of an experience. What in reality it achieves is an approximation to the core idea or central truth. Therefore, an impression of imprecision, of an inexactness of expression persists in *Falk*. The narrator warns his audience of the difficulty of grasping Falk's experience:

> So difficult is it for our minds, remembering so much, instructed so much, informed of so much, to get in touch with the real actuality at our elbow. (p.321)

Even when the elusive experience is shared, it is a demanding task to translate that experience into comprehensible language. The experienced narrator faces difficulty in rendering the themes realistically.
To sum up, Conrad in *Falk* has presented a series of themes which are integrated with the form. Critics have pointed out some incongruities inherent in the story’s plot-structure—the incongruities that are mainly related to the presentation of Falk’s past life remarkable for his act of cannibalism on the *Borgmester Dahl* in the Antarctic. The main theme of the narrative concerns the marriage between Falk and the young girl. Other associated themes are materialistic pragmatism, commitment to faith, loyalty and fidelity, primitivism and cannibalism, fraud and gradual demoralization and death, the captain’s initial test, and finally the sense of painful isolation and deep desolation leading to the narrator’s self-awakening. Thus the narrative is ‘able to express the most profound ideas’ which lie implicitly in the conjunction of events that are bodied in the story. Events and episodes, carefully selected as components of the narrative reveal the individual characters and their relationships. These events embody the action of the story based on the personal experiences of the narrator. But for a flash-back, the narrative is presented chronologically. Of the various relationships explored in *Falk* one is between the narrator and Hermann and his wife. Initially, it is Lina’s rag-doll that falling on his boat compels the narrator’s attention to the girl on the *Diana* who impresses him. Soon after, the joint chase of the Chinese boy fleeing with the captain’s money brings the narrator and Hermann closer still. The narrator’s visits to the *Diana* originally intended for mental and spiritual relief, become more complex with Falk’s regular visits, and he is dragged into greater trouble that seriously impedes the fulfilment of his professional responsibilities. Falk is enamoured of the girl, but unable to express his strong feelings. Falk presumes the narrator to be his rival in love. The episode of the towing operation of the *Diana* highlights two things: Falk’s jealousy and desperation in isolating the girl from the narrator; secondly, the narrator’s awakening from easy complacency, from his lethargic dreamy state. It is Schomberg who first brings Falk’s earnest yearning for the girl to the narrator’s knowledge. He begins to believe in the conjectured theory of Falk’s love and rivalry when the sergeant mentions it again on his return.
from Johnson. Here Conrad uses multiple view points. This helps the story move forward naturally through the interactions of different characters. The movements and actions of the characters seem asymmetrical. He, however, keeps referring to the financial constraints of the characters whose immense preoccupation with materialistic pragmatism is starkly conspicuous. The narrator-captain is penniless; Hermann is persistently smothered with the idea of reducing the expenses of the return passage home. The narrator advocates Falk's sound financial position as the most plausible reason for becoming the suitor of the girl, although Falk ruthlessly combines in himself inflexibility and indifference. As the only tugboat owner in the river, Falk is "a bloated monopolist to boot", and extracts from the merchant skippers "his pound and a half of flesh" (p.271)—which contains a veiled reference to the cannibalism that features in the last part of the narrative.

Falk's conscious guilt is the incongruous part of the narrative. Other incongruities crop up through the allegoric and mythic devices Conrad adopts to delineate Falk and the girl in their super-imposed heroism and beauty. These seem to threaten the realistic fabric of the narrative as the readers are hardly prepared with cogent hints and remarks for this unfortunate eventuality. Falk's dramatised relationship with the young captain remains vague and indistinct; its plausibility and credibility in the narrative are open to question. It is the same kind of relationship as Kurtz had with Marlow. Kurtz and Marlow wrestle in the jungle for the highest possible stakes. The narrator and Falk too at long last confront each other in a mock-arranged card-game at Schomberg's hotel, while Schomberg waits breathlessly for a violent stag fight. This episode creates an anti-climax in the story and Conrad has consciously built it into the narrative structure to provide comic fun.

To make the story of Falk 'less objectionable and less analytical', and more satisfying to the popular imagination, Conrad made substantial changes in an early version of the story. These deletions are mostly of two kinds: specific
details about the sexual promiscuity of the captain’s predecessor, and passages describing the psychological dilemma of the captain himself. Indeed, the absence of ‘intelligence and a rich inner life’ weakens the narrator’s character; the narrator lacks the energy and quickness of Marlow, and thus cannot emerge as a powerful antagonist to counteract Falk’s appeal.

Notwithstanding the charge of loose structure and of the lack of sufficient plausibility in the characterisation of the narrator, *Falk: A Reminiscence* as a shorter fiction has merits of its own. Conrad has incorporated his major themes in a form that is deftly moulded by means of structural and linguistic devices, setting and atmosphere. Plain and lucid language with few epithets communicates the matter and meaning easily and comprehensibly. Long, involved, and complex sentence patterns are replaced by quick, clear, and direct prose unhindered by the burden of copious imagery. Indeed, a cluster of themes is interwoven into an appropriate form which conveys in *Falk* the infallible impression that all the parts are bound in one great unity. Evidently, the narrator’s narrative—*Falk: A Reminiscence*—becomes his ‘personal tribute to purity of passion in a world infested by duplicity and hypocrisy’.

**Amy Foster**

After *Falk* was completed in May 1901, Conrad finished *Amy Foster* in June 1901 and *Tomorrow* early the following January; they appeared, respectively, in the *Illustrated London News* in December 1901 and the *Pall Mall Magazine* in August 1902. The story of *Amy Foster* centres on the disastrous marriage of Amy Foster, a dull-witted, kind-hearted, sympathetic daughter of the soil, and Yanko Goorall, a Carpathian mountaineer of Central Europe, who is shipwrecked on the Kentish coast of England, while emigrating to America to get rich quickly. The story is about the lonely tragic death of Yanko on a stormy night in a foreign soil, caused mainly by Amy’s betrayal at the crucial
moments of his life. Faced with a different race and culture, Yanko fails to evoke pity and sympathy in the natives of Brenzett and Colebrook as in Amy.

As for the narrative's source there exist a number of opinions. Literary sources include an anecdote in Ford Madox Ford's *The Cinque Ports* (1900), Flaubert's *Un Coeur Simple* and the nineteenth century Polish emigrant-tale. Ford's *The Cinque Ports* has dealt with an almost similar situation. It relates a shipwrecked German sailor in Kent who was ill-used by the local people, and finally seeks refuge in a pigsty, where he places himself in the hands of the police. Ford claims that Conrad has taken the story from him and then rewritten it with an ironic twist. According to Jessie Conrad, Ford's only ground for the claim was that he pointed out to Conrad the presence of the graves of one or two foreign seamen in Winchelsea churchyard:

*This fact and a story—a mere fragment heard during a meal in a country inn—gave Conrad the material he needed. The actual character, Amy Foster, was for many years in our service, and it was her animal-like capacity for sheer uncomplaining endurance that inspired Conrad.*

There had been attempts to find biographical parallels in the context of the story, which is often treated as 'a fictional projection of Conrad's sense of personal estrangement'. His isolation, his frequent ill-health, and his difficult marriage are generally thought to be reflected in the melancholy relationship of Yanko Goorall and Amy Foster, his English wife. This is evident in Conrad's working titles of the story *A Husband* and *A Castaway* that definitely sought to emphasize the vital role of the protagonist Yanko rather than that of Amy. Possibly the thought of better commercial prospects for the story urged Conrad to choose the present title *Amy Foster*. And the *Illustrated London News* published the story with Amy's two prominent illustrations for grand effect.

Apparently, Conrad intends to incorporate in *Amy Foster* his favourite theme of estrangement—that feeling of separation from the native land which he personally experienced in his life. No doubt he treats the theme dispassionately
and with commendable success. The narrative form of *Amy Foster* comprises a unique blend of some constituent parts of the narrative, a strict adherence to the time sequence combined alternately with its dislocation or distortion, the character delineations in a setting that appropriately places the narrative on a realistic plane, and the adoption of various rhetorical and linguistic devices. The essential purpose of the narrative's components is to work coherently towards the attainment of a form that would best express its themes.

As in other narratives, Conrad in *Amy Foster* has dealt with a cluster of ideas or themes that are subtly woven into a neat and compact narrative structure. One basic theme of the story is the fear of the Incomprehensible that assails the minds of the protagonist Yanko Goorall and Amy Foster ever since they are married on this English coast. This inherent fear not only isolates them, but also makes them suspect each other over the only child's possession. Thus the root cause is mooted early in the narrative for their final separation. The other dominant theme is man's craze for material prosperity combined with a sharp sting directed at the religious practices of the day. To this is added the identity problem for an alien located in a culturally different environment. However, the central and crucial situation in *Amy Foster* relates to the personal tragedy of Yanko, and of Amy who now is consigned to a placid life in her native village, living with complacence and resignation. It is important to note how Conrad has amazingly inter-related and integrated the themes and form of the story. *Amy Foster* becomes the classic example of a well-knit story. The reasons for *Amy Foster*'s attraction for the readers are certain biographical echoes and some faintly recognizable literary parallels. All these taken together render the story more suggestive and multivalent in appeal.

Conrad has thus embodied the themes of *Amy Foster* in a fictive framework with a narrative mode and structure where virtually two narrators—the anonymous frame narrator and Dr. Kennedy the secondary narrator—combine to unravel the story. Here the village doctor Kennedy tells a visiting friend
about the marriage of Amy to the lone survivor of a shipwreck, Yanko. Throughout Conrad is most careful to avoid any direct identification between himself and the protagonist. Hence the story is told through the device of a conversation between an impersonal anonymous listener ‘I’ and the real narrator Dr. Kennedy. Before the actual story of Yanko’s personal tragedy together with Amy’s dull and imbecile life is taken up in the narrative, Conrad introduces the primary narrator who gives a fine and graphic description of natural scenes of the countryside vis-à-vis the desolate and enchanting seascape of Eastbay. He offers some vague glimpses of the valley with a church tower and a lighthouse faintly seen among the wild trees and vegetation, and a Martello tower distantly located on the coast. He also carefully notes the curving sea coast with the anchorage ground mile and a half “due north from you as you stand at the back door of the Ship Inn in Brenzett” (p.228). This anchorage ground is a ‘trustworthy bottom’ well-known to the skippers of small craft. This precise depiction of setting invariably acts as a suitable prelude to the incidents that are to follow, and makes plausible the coincidence of Yanko’s arrival on the coast as a veritable wild animal, rootless and floating. The primary narrator also proffers all necessary explanations, summaries, and reported dialogue. The patient listener ‘I’ further provides the continuity of the narrative, and gives it the dimension of time; for example, “Kennedy discoursed… He remained silent. Then he went on….” Yanko hardly speaks English and Amy Foster is stolid and inarticulate, although their lives are, Conrad asserts, confronted with conflicting human impulses. The fear of the unfamiliar is reportedly creating a rift between the two. Here the role of Kennedy is crucial. As a reflective observer, with scientific detachment he interprets their life. As an attending physician he communicates intimate details with his intelligence and wide experience, and places the narrative in a larger context. He is, however, never able to speak with the authority of Marlow, as he is more an observer than a participant in the story, and, therefore, lacks the rhetoric which Marlow commands. But doubtless Kennedy has “a thematic
and structural necessity for Conrad. Kennedy gathers information about Yanko and Amy, partly from his intimacy with the local people, partly from Smith and old Swaffer, and partly from Yanko's impassioned confession during Kennedy's talks with him.

In *Amy Foster* Conrad has drawn a sharp contrast, although implicit, between two groups of characters: one group includes the experienced and knowledgeable persons like Kennedy and the anonymous primary narrator; they are experienced and, therefore, open, frank, liberal, and unbiased. They ironically survey the other group of characters in Brenzett and Colebrook. Enclosed by the sea and defended and surrounded by the valley and mountains, these country people are mostly egotistic and unimaginative. While the prosperous feudal lords try to perpetuate the instruments of torture with occasional display of generosity doled down to the people as Swaffer does to Yanko, the poor farm-hands still serve the masters with loyalty and devotion. Amy Foster and Issac Foster mainly represent the second group who consciously think and act in a body. Virtually of this group, Yanko Goorall, poor that he is, boldly aspires to become rich by working in America—the imagined land of gold; but the terrible shipwreck on the coast of Eastbay has, by ruining his hope, foisted on him a series of troubles and misfortunes. In his art of characterisation Conrad directs close attention to each character's minute move and gesture, manner and attitude that truly mark out his essential features.

*Amy Foster* revolves round the characters of Yanko Goorall and Amy; and here Conrad examines the elasticity of a marital bond struck dramatically by the two culturally disparate young man and woman, and its eventual break-up when exposed to a series of trials, tribulations, and privations. The story contains a neatly constructed plot with Yanko and Amy at its centre, while other characters play a significant role in its steady development. The narrator Kennedy, by virtue of his professional commitment in the villages, maintains
the essential link with the characters and establishes a deep intimacy with them. Conrad’s presentation of Yanko and Amy is as skilful as is his use of multiple points of view, contrast and parallelism, and other literary and linguistic devices. This indirect narrative mode places the characters in their right perspective, and shows in greater detail their nature and behaviour, social, moral and ethical attitudes, and deep religious fervour—their distinctive inalienable features that endorse the story’s thematic pattern.

Yanko Goorall, the protagonist, is “a being lithe, supple, and long-limbed, straight like a pine”, “full of vitality with a buoyant heart” (p.232). He strides with “a freedom of movement” and ‘graceful bearing’, with a ‘startled glance’ and ‘lustrous black eyes’. These features in combination invest Yanko with the strange impression of ‘a woodland creature’ on this foreign coast—a castaway, a poor emigrant from Central Europe, “bound to America and washed ashore here in a storm” (p.233).

Ambitious of becoming rich, the poor Yanko plays himself into the vicious grip of a few fraud-agents who persuaded him to believe that in America he “could find places where true gold could be picked up on the ground” (p.237). Thus Conrad points to the lurking presence of evil in society. His journey by ship for America not only proved terrifying,—

An awful sickness overcame him, even to the point of making him neglect his prayers....(p.235)

—but the journey ends disastrously, where he becomes the lone survivor. Ironically, the terrible shipwreck not only disrupts his romantic dream of a decent prosperous life in America, but forces him to choose a life of strife and struggle.

Conrad’s depiction of Yanko’s life on the English coast is strictly chronological. And to contrast his bitter present life with his elegant past life in Berlin Conrad has manipulated a flashback very effectively. What fascinates
Kennedy most is Yanko's soft, singing and vibrating tone. The flashback focuses on Yanko’s romantic temperament and adventurous spirit combined with his characteristic innocence and ignorance. This recapitulation brings to light another notable thing in Yanko's life: his acute need for money that provokes him to undertake this hazardous adventure. Yanko's father procures him the passage money for America, and Yanko pledges to send his father money at least twice a year. The emergent truth is that Yanko is impulsive, emotional and is easily tempted and beguiled by the external appeal of things just as he is fascinated by Amy's generosity and strikes a bond with her as suddenly as he can remain frigid about it when the child becomes their source of discord. A second flashback in the story places Amy in the right perspective and unravels her plain and simple life. Both Yanko and Amy show themselves as having possessed some common characteristics. Initially with their parents' help, both Yanko and Amy seem to be instinctively compelled to work for financial prosperity. Obviously, material gain is their only motto.

Aboard the ship chartered for America, Yanko is severely haunted and tormented by a sense of confinement, of claustrophobia, and this horrid sensation is suggested by the recurrent use of the image of a netted animal. He struggles “instinctively like an animal under a net” (p.233). This dreadful feeling pursues him even at Smith's woodlodge or Swaffer's outhouse. Only he believes his unwavering trust in God would mercifully liberate him from his awful predicament in an unknown world.

The state of Yanko's character in Brenzett is more vividly brought out by Conrad through the device of multiple points of view conveyed through a group of characters. Each character throws light on the various facets of other characters. Yanko's agonising loneliness is thus fully focussed. His foremost patron in the Eastbay is Smith who performs a social duty by confining the shabby Yanko in his woodlodge. His wretchedness made worse with desperate cries in that hovel compels Amy to look pitifully at him. She offers him the
much-needed bread, and Yanko in turn kindles the spark in Amy’s imagination, that soon gets transformed into intensified love between the two. In old Swaffer’s custody Yanko through work proves his worth and regains his dignity. His rescue operation of old Swaffer’s grandchild from sure death dispels at once the misty fog around him and opens up before him vistas of opportunities. Yanko’s life, that was shaky and humiliating, takes a new turn. The pious touch comes from old Swaffer who rewards Yanko, in recognition of his service, with a cottage and an acre of land. This rescue episode is significant, both thematically and structurally. Firstly, it enables Yanko to live afresh with dignity; secondly, the gift from the surrogate father accelerates the process of his marriage with Amy, and thus the seeds of tragedy are planted in this emotionally surcharged relationship. But the marriage of Yanko and Amy did not mature very smoothly. Yanko’s very declaration is vehemently opposed by “a hundred futile and inappreciable reasons” from Amy’s people. Smith warns Amy against Yanko who is ‘surely wrong in his head’ (p.251); her mother ‘moaned’ over Amy dismally; Mrs Finn dins the message into Amy’s ears, urging her that “this man, my dear, will do you some harm some day yet” (p.251). The village people are almost convinced that “as if the man had done something to her” (p.252). Yet, Yanko’s whistle with “the weird and mournful tune” has been an irresistible call to Amy. Doubtless these harsh comments on Yanko must have worked adversely on Amy, later on.

To unimaginative Smith, Yanko seems an ‘escaped lunatic’—‘a wandering and probably dangerous man’ (p.240). Strangely enough he connects the dirty and despicable Yanko with the shipwreck in the vicinity. Smith’s impression of him has not been baseless altogether. Yanko’s ‘inexplicable strangeness’ discernible from his matted locks and ‘discomposing manner’ and his jabbering voice virtually strengthen Smith’s impression of Yanko as being a lunatic. In fact, he looks dreadful in the eyes of the local people. And he confronts a series of hostilities from all corners—the old and the children alike; who throw stones or torture Yanko when he solicits compassion from them. In this state Amy
Foster appears before him with "the aureole of an angel of light" to whom he can look up for love and sympathy (p.243). His predicament in Smith’s woodlodge and shrill cries only unravel a wrecked soul. Kennedy states:

*Before his excitement collapsed and he became unconscious he was throwing himself violently about in the dark, rolling on some dirty sacks, and biting his fists with rage, cold, hunger, amazement and despair. (Pp.240-41)*

Amy’s loving care and sympathy ameliorates Yanko’s desperation and inspires him to look at life with a dreamy sense of romance. An “instinctive love of life” suddenly overwhelms Yanko:

*At night, when he could not sleep, he kept on thinking of the girl who gave him the first piece of bread he had eaten in this foreign land (p.247).*

Yanko thus reflects on the girl at old Swaffer’s house. It is again Swaffer who, by bringing Yanko in his care, restores ‘Smith’s lunatic’ to some recognizable human dignity (p.245), and the rescue episode at Swaffer’s cottage ushers in a turning point in Yanko’s life. This incident further deepens his relationship with Swaffer whose attitude to Yanko undergoes a certain changes:

*But from that time they laid out his meals on the kitchen table… I believe that from that day, too, Swaffer began to pay him regular wages (p.248).*

Now Yanko is privileged to enjoy life more freely, and is very eager to adapt himself to the social ethos of the village, not without, however, some rebuffs or repulsion from the people, particularly owing to his indelible stamp of foreignness. In Yanko’s ghastly appearance Amy discovers a really good-looking man who in turn “had found his bit of true gold” in Amy’s heart— “a golden heart, and soft to people’s misery” (p.250). His surrender to Amy is significant, and surprising too: “Suddenly he dropped the bread, seized her wrist, and imprinted a kiss on her hand” (p.243). Soon after Yanko marries Amy, though amid much stiff opposition, and their marriage allows them to move freely and to crave for more material prosperity—possibly the motto with which he set out from Berlin.
The craving for material prosperity, it appears, a dominant pursuit with the Eastbay people, -- that Eastbay where Yanko landed in a shipwreck. This is further endorsed by America where gold is to be picked up in the street merely for the asking. So allured by the promise in America, Yanko abortively endeavours to reach it and ironically arrives in England to suffer execrably. Amy Foster also serves in Smith's New Burns Farm for obvious financial gains. Her prospective marriage only scares Issac Foster as he might lose her wages.

All this information about Yanko and Amy, the narrator Kennedy has meticulously gathered from Yanko during friendly chats with him over a period of two or three years when Yanko's powers of self-expression improved considerably. Kennedy states:

_I have been telling you more or less in my own words what I learned fragmentarily in the course of two or three years, during which I seldom missed an opportunity of a friendly chat with him (p.237)_

Kennedy's narrative mode is generally simple and lucid, and the story moves forward in a linear chronological manner with hardly any dislocation of time.

Conrad has also appended a couple of flashbacks as a structural device by which he explores subtly the past history of Yanko and Amy so that their present predicament and development are effectively interrelated. The straightforward narration of Amy Foster used alternately with flashbacks helps Conrad immensely to project the characters and their actions, incidents and episodes with greater credibility and authenticity. In this way Kennedy learns about the characters and tackles them successfully. The first flashback is intended to describe Amy's parentage with their pecuniary hardship, forcing Amy, at fifteen, to earn for the family. It also reveals Amy's kindness, altruism, and compassionate nature pitted against her inert, torpid mind. The second flashback of nearly eight pages gives Yanko's simple, unadventurous life in Berlin, and his insistence on emigrating to America for quick financial
prosperity. Incidentally, it focuses on Yanko's romantic temperament and courageous spirit combined with his characteristic naiveté and ignorance. Surprisingly, both Yanko and Amy are impelled by their urgent need for money which is the central theme of *Amy Foster*. Every other character seems to be motivated with a passion for money, the only exception being Dr. Kennedy. Yanko’s father procures him the money for passage to America. Amy’s parents put her to service for money to be utilized for the uplift of the family. Even old Swaffer is supremely conscious of his position as a feudal lord who acts as a father surrogate to Yanko, helping him in a magnanimous way. Kennedy’s subtle reference to a German philosopher reinforces the theme of materialism in the story. In fact, the Dutch philosopher and physiologist Jacob Maleschott “summed up his doctrine of scientific materialism....Moleschott’s *Lehre der Nahrungsmittel* (1852) and *Der Kreislauf des Lebens* (1852) gave considerable stimulus to nineteenth-century materialism”.

Kennedy’s approach to materialism is purely munificent and egalitarian. He hardly shows a propensity or fervid desire for terrestrial fame and riches, though his prospects in the past were bright and resplendent as a scientific investigator.

Amy Foster presents a true tragedy – the tragedy of attraction and misunderstanding or an absolute lack of understanding, and at its pivotal point lies in the action of Amy Foster the titular heroine. Preoccupied with stark, downright materialism which motivates their actions in the story, both Yanko and Amy, though racially and culturally different, belong virtually to the same social stratum dominated by the economically poor and deprived. They are unstable, wretched, and easily gullible. Appearing as a crushed person who is haunted by the spectre of isolation, Yanko is assailed by a desperate need for anchorage. Basically imbecile and torpid in mind, Amy is content to lead an ordinary, homely, and unadventurous life. Only she is endowed with an innate sense of pity, love, and sympathy. Thus an ailing toad at once enkindles her sense of deep pity. Likewise, she exhibits a kind of piteous gesture to Yanko at
a very critical juncture of his life. Amy is not afflicted with any sinister fear. No repulsive feeling deters her from undertaking a generous act for Yanko. Yet Amy’s pity and compassion are soon transformed into a passion of love for Yanko. The inexplicable fear of “the Incomprehensible that hangs over our heads” (p.230) is another powerful force that drives them together. Disturbed by the same fear, the marital life of Yanko and Amy is split up, particularly over the right of absolute authority over the child. The root cause is embedded in the ‘essential difference of races’, which constitutes a dominant theme of Amy Foster. Horrified by the approach of ailing Yanko for the little child, Amy scampers rashly from the cottage lest Yanko should seize her child—the only child on which she impulsively bestows all her hope and trust.

As in Heart of Darkness, Conrad in Amy Foster is mainly preoccupied with the revelation of the soul wrestling with or sinking beneath its own weakness, the elemental forces of Nature, or the mysterious force of circumstances—struggling, yielding, suffering, but always solitary, individual, isolated. Conrad seems predisposed to create characters who are essentially individual, and separated from, or comparatively untouched by human banal relationships. This very principle has led Conrad to choose as characters those simple village-folk, those crude and primitive souls who are by nature and circumstance cut off from all the complex inter-action of organised society, so that Conrad can plunge into their inmost hearts and explore the secret springs of their action.

Amy Foster truly belongs to this category: she is a lonely, solitary, isolated, suffering simple village girl, struggling for survival against thwarting circumstances. Amy, like Yanko Goorall, stands, as it were, on the border line between the primitive and civilized; she “exhibits the mixed and uncertain forms that are characteristic of Conrad’s half-castes”. Unlike Yanko whose devotion to religion is self-evident, Amy, forcibly involved in material pursuits drudging at Smith's farm, does not manifest any leanings or allegiance to religion. In fact, the religious fervour of the local people at the church has been
ruthlessly eclipsed by their warm enthusiasm for material prosperity. There are no ‘images of the Redeemer’ by the roadside; the existence is ‘overshadowed, oppressed, by the everyday material appearances, as if by the visions of a nightmare’ (p.247). Passive, inert, all but illegitimate in the eyes of her society, and as a kitchen-maid occupying its lowest rung, Amy seems to have been redeemed partly by her act of pity and sympathy for Yanko. Her feeling for the animals is more savage than sentimental as the grey-parrot episode illustrates.

Her face bears a ‘vague shape’ with a ‘curious want of definiteness’ (p.231); her brain ‘a white screen’ (p.257); her speech is characterised by ‘a sort of preliminary stammer’ (p.231); even her costume with its ‘stout boots’, ‘absurdly slender parasol’ (p.232), and ‘white cotton gloves’ (p.251) point to her simplicity and plainness, her lack of definiteness. In spite of her stolidity, Amy has her flights of romantic imagination that actually prompts her to be kind to Yanko, and this pity is surprisingly transformed into impassioned love for Yanko:

*She fell in love silently, obstinately—perhaps helplessly. It came slowly, but when it came it worked like a powerful spell; ...fatally, as though she had been a pagan worshipper of form under a joyous sky—.... (p.232)*

Yanko’s enchantment for Amy works powerfully and overwhelms her slowly as suggested by Conrad’s deliberate repetition of the soft smooth ‘l’ sound in the passage. Also there hovers a fatality in Amy’s choice of Yanko’s ‘form’ and she holds him with the vehement possessiveness of a pagan. Enchantment and obsession are curiously linked. The reduction in one may lead to the dissipation of the other. Thus in their strange involvement is hidden the hint of future doom. This is very subtly incorporated in the narrative pattern of *Amy Foster*. In a tricky situation Amy displays a “solid conviction... that the man ‘meant no harm’,” and Amy appears to Yanko “with the aureole of an angel of light” (pp.239, 243). The marriage with Amy allows Yanko the outcast to formally acclimatize himself to this society; this also induces Amy to think that
in the primitive obscurity of her existence she too has found in Yanko what was not there. She is, however, not long in "perceiving that he is a romantic idea of her own inept making, that his genuinely buoyant nature is a dark cipher to her, and cannot inform her life, that her love for him fades". Finally Amy abandons Yanko, as she feels creeping over her "the terror, the unreasonable terror, of that man she could not understand" (p.255). At his pathetic death, her life returns to her earlier primitive state, living in the cottage alone with her little child. Likewise, Yanko spent all his life in horrific loneliness, except for a brief period of joyous love-making.

Thus the two basic themes of abject loneliness and the fear of the Incomprehensible—these two themes being the two inalienable conditions of modern life to which Yanko persistently aspires—are the root causes of Yanko's tragic end. Amy's memory of Yanko passed away like a shadow or mist over the white screen of her mind. The fear of "the Incomprehensible that hangs over all our heads" (p.230) is defined by Conrad as the "essential difference of races". The element of dreadful uncertainty governs the lives of Yanko and Amy; and many of their irreconcilable domestic differences, by nature mysterious, have reportedly originated in this unaccountable fear. Ever since the birth of John the tussle for the absolute possession of the child has escalated between Yanko and Amy. Doubt and mistrust rapidly overtake love and loyalty. The spark of romantic attraction is snuffed out by maternity. Lack of articulation is a known weakness in Amy, arising from her stolidity and mental inertness. Added to this are the feelings of cultural isolation, emerging from the chance crossing of two different cultures—German and English. Initially driven by love and passion, Yanko and Amy ignore their subversive effects. Yanko's crooning to the little child in an incomprehensible language rouses in Amy an unreasoning fear. Terror of, rather than attraction to, the unfamiliar and incomprehensible, overwhelms her completely, particularly when manifested in language. The scene in which Amy ironically responds to the sick man's request for water in his own tongue, by snatching her baby and
running away is "one of Conrad's most convincing statements of human isolation".\footnote{164}

In reality, Yanko's sense of 'utter loneliness' (p.238) begins to prevail over him from the moments he finds himself immured in the dark emigrant bunk of the ship. This theme of isolation is central to the story of Amy Foster. In a society where people value material prosperity rather than spiritual values, they are apt to become isolated from each other, and their selfish separation sometimes has traumatic effects. Isolation has its sinister effects on Amy Foster as well as on the taciturn religious Miss Swaffer. Lonely in his personal life, old Swaffer fondly nurtures an inexplicable caprice for something 'outlandish' which he must possess exclusively, and which he then shows to others for self-satisfaction. Kennedy is basically a lonely and isolated man; prompted by his unappeasable curiosity and investigative habits, he keeps himself busy with his practice rounds in the valley and meets people on the way. Kennedy's penetrating mental power, acting like a corrosive fluid, has destroyed his ambition (p.229), and possibly precludes him from entering into marital life. As a character Kennedy seems to incarnate all the good qualities of a successful social worker. His altruistic attitudes are highlighted by his hearty laugh, brisk talk and lively manners with the patients.

Yanko's loneliness dogs him ever since he is thrown out as an outcast. Impelled by a desperate need for human communication, he 'disturbed and startled' (p.238) the West Colebrook fishermen by heavy knocks on the walls of weatherboard cottages, accompanied by a piercing voice crying strange words at night. The forcible incarceration in Smith's woodlodge makes Yanko ruthlessly violent, rolling on dirty sacks and biting his fists in rage before becoming unconscious. His 'inexplicable strangeness' and weird aspect horrifies people. It appears as though "an overwhelming loneliness seemed to fall from the leaden sky of that winter without sunshine" (p.246). He discovers affinity only with the three old Norway pines on the bit of lawn before
Swaffer’s house, which “like brothers to him at that time” (p.247) remind him of his own country:

_He had been detected once, after dusk, with his forehead against the trunk of one of them, sobbing, and talking to himself, (p.247)_

The poignant scene shows Yanko’s growing homesickness as penetratingly as his deep and earnest longing for human association. Also the spiritual significance of the scene is to be noted. Possessed of a natural religious feeling, Yanko embarrasses the ‘young ladies from the Rectory’ in their effort to prepare him for conversion. They fail to ‘break him of his habit of crossing himself’, which is to them a vulgar practice compared with wearing a cross. Yanko is then surprised at the ‘little steel cross’ worn by Miss Swaffer at her belt. For the religious practice of the young ladies is as superficial as their attempt at cultural self-improvement through struggles with Goethe and Dante. But Yanko’s faith in God is profound. He is, therefore, confounded at the sight of the impoverished churches ‘among so much wealth’. This is starkly realistic and bleakly satirical of the prevailing materialism. Still the last word in his mouth ‘merciful’ reasserts his unwavering faith in God; Yanko is not harshly critical of life.

To fulfil the demand of realism in _Amy Foster_ Conrad has subtly presented the characters in a setting which, perfectly matching with their nature and action, renders them more alive, vibrant, and natural. It is mainly the primary narrator who vividly delineates Colebroolc and Brenzett situated amid the valley and the sea-coast with the church tower prominent among them:

_The high ground rising abruptly behind the red roofs of the little town crowds the quaint High Street against the wall which defends it from the sea. Beyond the seawall there curves for miles in a vast and regular sweep the barren beach of shingle, with the village of Brenzett standing out darkly across the water, a spire in a clump of trees: and still farther out the perpendicular column of a lighthouse, looking in the distance no bigger than a lead-pencil, marks the vanishing point of the land (p.228)._
The country of Brenzett, low and flat, stands out against 'the barren beach of shingle' with 'a vast and regular sweep'. The 'high ground' with the 'green slope' and 'white road' reaches up to the valley, 'broad and shallow'. The relics of the past still survive in 'the dilapidated windmill' with shattered arms, and the Martello tower, of the time of the Napoleonic Wars, squatting at the water's edge. Conrad has employed words like 'curve', 'perpendicular', 'high', 'low', 'flat', 'regular sweep' and 'irregular oval of dots' to describe the dimensions of the landscape and the seacoast with geometric precision and exactitude. Conrad highlights the fact that the bay is land-locked with the seawall guarding the valley from the sea. The shipwrecked Yanko crawls in the dark over this wall, and rolls down the other side into a dyke. In the midst of the 'wide garden trough of pastures and hedges' stands Foster's cottage, and a mile away from the road lies Smith's isolated farm house where Amy works. The coast is also known in the naval chart as a safe anchoring ground for the ship in storm and distress, and this information makes plausible the eventuality of a shipwreck that plays a pivotal role in the story.

A second passage would more cogently document the role of setting in the narrative:

> From the edge of a copse a wagon with two horses was rolling gently along the ridge. Raised above our heads upon the sky-line, it loomed up against the red sun, triumphantly big, enormous, like a chariot of giants drawn by two slow stepping steeds of legendary proportions. And the clumsy figure of the man plodding at the head of the leading horse projected itself on the background of the Infinite with a heroic uncouthness. The end of his carter's whip quivered high up in the blue (p.230).

Obviously, Conrad has adopted the impressionistic method in painting the sunset scene with its red glow filling the harrowed field with 'a rose tinge'. The sky is specklessly blue, and 'the background of the Infinite' has been exquisitely built up, where the insignificance of man pitted against this background is etched. The visible 'clumsy' man asserts his self 'with heroic uncouthness'; but the sweating toil and struggle of man continues, and the image of the 'powdered clods' which in the sunset glow seemed bathed in
'minute pearls of blood' of uncounted ploughmen, serves to enforce the sullen and sinister setting. The wide expanse of the grass-land against the rising ground assumes a 'gorgeous and sombre aspect' (p.232), and a sense of sadness seems to be oozing out of the silent fields. The passing men appear to be enveloped in the deep melancholy of 'an over-burdened earth', as if their uncouth bodies are 'loaded with chains'. They walk past unseeing, with downcast eyes, and weighted feet and shoulders, suggesting utter loneliness and inertness of mind. It tends to focus in prolepsis the piteous predicament of Yanko, which he can neither overcome nor master despite his persistent struggle with 'heroic uncouthness'. The carter's whip that 'quivers high up in the blue' seems to symbolise an instrument of torture, and Yanko too receives its lashes, while roaming, shabby and shaggy, on the village-road. At this point Conrad has drawn a powerful contrast between the temporarily joyous buoyant Yanko and the native people wearied and sagging. Soon Yanko received a tremendous setback, and his spirit of jollity and freedom gave way to a sense of horrible isolation and depressing melancholy. And for this the gloomy setting of Amy Foster is no less responsible than his domestic differences with Amy.

To integrate and assimilate the formal and thematic elements in the narrative Conrad has deployed certain rhetorical and linguistic devices which enrich the style of Amy Foster. The devices adopted are the use of images, symbolism, parallelism and contrast, compounded with occasional impressionistic touches. The style is simple in execution and rich with thought. Remarkably free from effusive expressions, it avoids excessive use of polysyllabic high-sounding adjectives. However, Conrad persistently asserts "that fear of the Incomprehensible that hangs over all our heads ..." (p. 230), and this idea is a refrain in the story.

The story of Amy Foster is the result of Kennedy's profound 'investigative' curiosity. There is an amazing 'scientific order' in the detailed account of his experience. As the emphasis is laid on the distinct and precise expression of
ideas mainly about Yanko and Amy, the language of the story is bound to be simple, direct, and straightforward with fewer images. A recurrent feeling of confinement and claustrophobia persists in Amy Foster, which is aptly conveyed by the image of the net. Yanko is 'a wild creature under the net; his wretched state is comparable to that of a bird caught in a snare' (pp.244, 256,233). Even 'the net of fate had drawn closer round him already', when he realises the differences between himself and Amy becoming incomprehensible. The same image is also applied to describe Yanko’s little son Johnny who is lying on his back, with his black eyes, “with his fluttered air of a bird in a snare” (p.257):

*He was different: innocent of heart, and full of good will, which nobody wanted, this castaway, that, like a man transplanted into another planet, was separated by an immense space from his past and by an immense ignorance from his future. His quick, fervent utterance positively shocked everybody. (p.249)*

Couched in simple and direct language, the passage aptly points out Yanko’s rootlessness, in the word ‘castaway’. His estranged condition and a feeling of foreignness are explicitly conveyed through the extra-terrestrial image of a planet and Yanko’s eventual transportation to it, that is, to this coast of England. To Yanko, the past and future are blurred and dismally dark with no glimmer of hope. The repetition of the word ‘immense’ suggests the nature of his complex and mysterious response. Yet he keeps up his ‘good will’ and innocence that is reflected in his ‘quick’ move and ‘fervent’ tone. Here lies his difference from the people who only scorn and despise him. Their abject apathy towards him is evident: ‘nobody wanted’. Conrad maintains a strict economy of words. The syntax is simple and direct. The immediacy of effect is gained by the sparing use of adjectives, and by elimination of cumbrous and involved structures. The poetic intensity of the description is aimed at securing our sympathy for Yanko:

*They [Yanko and Amy] wouldn’t in their dinner hour lie flat on their backs on the grass to stare at the sky. Neither did they go about the fields screaming dismal tunes.*
Many times have I heard... a voice light and soaring, like a lark's, but with a melancholy human note, over our fields that hear only the song of birds. (p.249)

Conrad uses parallelism and contrast as essential components of his narrative technique. The characters, incidents, and episodes are arranged and juxtaposed in a manner that, by contrast and parallelism, not only highlight the complexity of the narrative structure, but also enhance our understanding of the narrative. The incident of a desperate flight caused by the fear of the incomprehensible features repeatedly in the story. Yanko flees from his native country in the direction of America—the land of gold although he is finally betrayed by his ill-luck. On another occasion he fled on being beaten, pelted, and whipped by the villagers of Brenzett and Colebrook. Suddenly confronted with the savage look of Yanko who lurches straight towards Mrs. Finn, she out of terror “ran like the wind with perambulator as far as the first house in the village” (pp.238, 239). Similarly, when Smith’s grey parrot attacked by a cat shrieks for help in human accents, Amy “ran out into the yard stopping her ears, and did not prevent the crime” (p.231). For Smith this is another evidence of her stupidity, although Kennedy would ascribe the reason to “a curious want of definiteness” in her whole aspect (p.231). Likewise terrified by the haunting sense of an unaccountable fear, Amy decamps and runs away with the child in her arms when Yanko “in fevered dismay, indignation and wonder” (p.255) calls after her twice down the road. Amy flies on that fateful night three miles and a half to the door of Foster’s cottage. Thus Conrad through hints and expositions of similar situations prepares us for Amy’s ultimate treacherous flight, which is tantamount to her betrayal of all moral and spiritual values; and Amy’s heartless abhorrence for Yanko spells doom for the latter.

Thus Amy Foster is a powerful narrative in which Conrad has expostulated that the case of a dramatic relationship between two foreign nationals, though built up in fits of passion and in exacting circumstances, is hardly tenable as soon as the communication-gap between the two is unconsciously widened and finally frozen up in mystery. With the little boy at the centre of their attention it is only
ironic that their [Yanko and Amy] bond of mutual love and amity, of faith and loyalty, of trust and obedience should have reached a crisis. Conrad has deliberately exposed the problem of splicing two different cultures—as represented by Amy Foster and Yanko Goorall—in a semi-urban country background. However, an incomprehensible fear is what seizes both Yanko and Amy, a fear which they never could discard, leading them to an awful predicament: a lonely painful death for Yanko, and an isolated, almost primitive life for Amy caring for the little child. Conrad’s narrative technique, in which Kennedy chronologically relates to his listener friend the painfully tragic life of Amy Foster and Yanko Goorall, proves very effective in revealing the characters in the story. Their multiple points of view are subtly manipulated to focus various aspects of reality with great fidelity. The incidents and episodes issuing into action are finely woven into the narrative structure that is far from being complex. There is hardly any instance of a superfluous incident or episode in the organisational pattern. Conrad has handled the language with skill and utmost economy. The sentence structure is direct, straightforward, clear and lucid. Ambiguous epithets and equivocal expressions are rigorously pruned in this story. And Conrad’s efforts to unify and integrate the form and themes in *Amy Foster* are meticulously accomplished.

**Notes and references**

**Youth**


2. Caedric Watts, ed. and intro., *Heart of Darkness and Other Tales*, pp. xii-xiv.
7 D.R. Schwarz, ed. and intro. *op. cit.*, p. 56.
9 Lawrence Graver, *op. cit.*, p. 75.
11 'Author's Note' (1917) to *Youth / Heart of Darkness / The End of the Tether*, p. vi.
13 D.R. Schwarz, *Conrad: Almayer’s Folly to Under Western Eyes*, p. 52.
16 D.R. Schwarz, *op. cit.*, p. 60.
18 Thomas Moser, *Conrad: Achievement and Decline*, p. 15.
22 Adam Gillon, *op. cit.*, p. 64.
27 W.S. Dowden, *op. cit.*, p. 86.
31  Lawrence Graver, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

**Heart of Darkness**


33  *ibid.*, p. 138.


38  From W.H. Auden’s poem *In Father’s Footsteps*; quoted in Watt, p. 164.


41  Quoted in Watt, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

42  *ibid.*, p. 166.


44  James Guetti, *op. cit.*, p. 76.


46  James Guetti, *op. cit.*, p. 76.


50  *ibid.*, p. 295.


52  James Guetti in C.B. Cox (ed.). *op. cit.*, p. 70.


*ibid.*, p. 67.

Berthoud Jacques: *op. cit.*, p. 45. The devices he referred to were such as “Mythical correspondences (the journey as a quest), literary allusions (the Dantesque grove of death), symbolic oppositions (light/darkness, white/black), anthropomorphism (the forest as “an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention [HOD, p. 48]).”


*ibid.*, p. 40.


Linda Constanzo Cahir, *op. cit.*, pp. 188-89.


Watt, *op. cit.*, p. 180. Watt remarked: "I am indebted to Dave Thorburn, and Marjorie Wynne of the Beinecke Library, for sending me a copy of the holograph”.

Watt, *ibid.*, p. 180; cited from Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, Bk. 3, Ch. 3, p. 158.


76 ibid., p. 218.
77 Watt, op. cit., pp. 194-95.
78 ibid., p. 195.
79 Paine, op. cit., p. 156.
80 Guerard, op. cit., p. 45.
81 Watt, op. cit., p. 229.
82 F.R. Leavis. The Great Tradition, p. 204.
84 Paine, op. cit., p. 194.
85 Watt, op. cit., p. 236.
86 ibid., p. 236.
87 Lawrence Graver. Conrad's Short Fiction, p. 85.
88 Watt, op. cit., p. 169.
89 ibid., p. 169.
90 ibid., p. 173.
91 Quoted in Watt, op. cit., p. 173.
93 ibid., p. 174.
94 Watt, op. cit., p. 175.
95 Watt, op. cit., p. 178.
97 ibid, p. 410.
99 J. McLauchlan, ibid., p. 391.
100 Michael Levenson, “The Value of Facts in the Heart of Darkness”, p. 405 (pp. 391-405); rptd. in Norton Edn. of Heart of Darkness.
Typhoon

Textual references are cited from this edition: The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' / Typhoon / and other stories (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973 rptd.).


102 Lawrence Graver, Conrad's Short Fiction, p. 94.


104 Author's Note to Typhoon and Other Stories, p. 148.


106 Author's Note to Typhoon and Other Stories, p. 147.

107 Adam Gillon, Joseph Conrad, p. 53.

108 Adam Gillon, ibid., p. 53.

109 Adam Gillon, ibid., p. 53.

110 Lawrence Graver, ibid., pp. 95, 96.

111 Lawrence Graver, ibid., p. 97.

112 Lawrence Graver, ibid, p. 98.

113 Lawrence Graver, ibid, p. 97.

114 Lawrence Graver, ibid, p. 97.

115 H.M. Deleski, op. cit., p. 110.

116 Lawrence Graver, op. cit., p. 96.

117 Lawrence Graver, ibid, p. 96.

118 Lawrence Graver, ibid, p. 94.


120 Author's Note, op. cit. p. 147.

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Textual references are cited from the above edition.


122 A.J. Guerard, Conrad the Novelist, p. 18.

Joseph Conrad, Author’s Note to *Typhoon and Other Stories*, p. 148.


D.R. Schwarz, *Conrad’s: From Almayer’s Folly to Under Western Eyes*, p. 96.


Lawrence Graver, *Conrad’s Short Fiction*, p. 103.

D.R. Schwarz, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

D.R. Schwarz, *op. cit.*, p. 95.


Conrad, Author’s Note, *op. cit.*, p. 149.


Tony Tanner, *ibid.*, pp. 27, 28.

Tony Tanner, *ibid.*, p. 29.


Bruss Paul, *ibid.*, p. 139.


Tony Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

D.R. Schwarz, *op. cit.*, p. 98.
147 D.R. Schwarz, *ibid.*, p. 100.
149 Conrad, Author’s Note, *op. cit.*, p. 149.
151 Tony Tanner, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-5.

**Amy Foster**

Textual references are cited from the above edition.

156 Lawrence Graver, *Conrad’s Short Fiction*, p. 105.
158 Lawrence Graver, *op. cit.*, pp. 107, 108.
159 Lawrence Graver, *ibid.*, p. 108.
160 Conrad, Author’s Note, *op. cit.*, under footnote, p. 298.
161 John A. Palmer, *op. cit.*, p. 84.
164 P. Krischner, ed. and intro. *op. cit.*, pp. 21, 22.