Chapter – I

THE CONTEMPORARY LITERARY SCENE : FORMATIVE INFLUENCES ON CONRAD

Conrad’s genius is imaginative and dramatic, but it is also moral in impulse and philosophical in direction, like that of all great narrative artists. His aesthetic temperament and creative genius find most powerful expression in seminal novels like The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’, Lord Jim, Nostromo, The Secret Agent, and Under Western Eyes as also in his short fiction. His range of short fiction includes such remarkable pieces as The Lagoon and Karain: a Memory, Youth and Heart of Darkness, Typhoon and Amy Foster, Falk, The Secret Sharer and The Shadow-Line, and many more. These enfold and encompass his vast and varied experience as a mariner for nearly two decades in different parts of the world, including the remote regions of the African Congo. No wonder then that his creative writings are found on many occasions to be the imaginative transpositions of his personal experience.

Conrad’s personal life was very eventful. It was strange and mysterious for the unpredictable turns and uncharted directions it took since his childhood in Poland with its horrible impressions till the wilful adoption of the most unsteady and insecure profession of a literary artist soon after the death of his maternal uncle Tadeusz Bobrowski. In many spheres it meant for Conrad a hard and uncompromising struggle with predominant hostile forces or circumstances, be it nature or the unreliable human predicament. He confronted the philosophical existential question in his own life as did the protagonists of his novels and shorter fiction. Essentially, Conrad represents a man with contrary states of existence; he called himself ‘homo duplex’ – the double man. Some indications of the range, richness, and dichotomies of Conrad have been suggested by Caedric Watts:
Polish nobleman and British citizen; master mariner and dedicated author, moralist and sceptic; traditionalist and modernist; reserved and fervent; pessimistic and humane .... He can be seen as one of the most paradoxical of literary figures; his art, at its most interesting and intense, constantly aspires to the condition of paradox. We find eloquent warnings against eloquence; linguistic virtuosity and a sense of the inadequacy of language; a commitment to solidarity and a preoccupation with isolation; traditional moral affirmations and radically sceptical insights; philosophical sophistication and a fear that reflection paralyses the will; atheistic assumptions and supernatural implications; romantic enthusiasms and cynical ironies; hostility to revolutionaries yet sympathy for rebels.  

Watts has also suggested that Janus must be presiding over his works – the two-faced god looking in opposite directions at the same time. Such dichotomies were eventually to characterize Conrad’s literary texts.

Following an adventurous and hazardous sea-career for a prolonged period of twenty years Conrad in 1894 left his last ship ‘Adowa’ in London to enter on a voyage even more hazardous than he could possibly dream of at the time. “Alone in the world”, and with the unfinished manuscript of a story that he had been writing for five years in the ports and ships of his travels, he had dared to become a writer in a language foreign to him. That story took shape in Almayer’s Folly, his first book of fiction, which was published in 1895. The novel contains a picture of life which, “there as here, is drawn with the same elaboration of detail, coloured with the same tints”. And the picture of life affirms the author’s fidelity to reality rather than his distortion of it. Conrad states in the Author’s Note to Almayer’s Folly:

> And there is a bond between us and that humanity so far away, I am speaking here of men and women – not of the charming and graceful phantoms that move about in our mud and smoke and are softly luminous with the radiance of all our virtues; that are possessed of all refinements, of all sensibilities, of all wisdom, but, being only phantoms, possess no heart.

The publication of the novel announced the arrival in the literary world of a new talent, possessed of new resources, power and virtuosity, a kind of exoticism and a rich impressionistic style. For a first novel by an unknown author Almayer’s Folly “is indeed an extraordinarily professional piece of writing. It also reveals the contradictory tendencies of the various literary
models which shaped Conrad's initial approach to writing fiction". And the rich colourful exotic which has been rendered in the novel in concrete and predominantly visual terms has led to the comment: "Only a writer of genius ... could write". Another comment is in the same laudatory terms: "... If it is not a work of genius then no work of genius exists on this earth".

In 1895 the year of the publication of *Almayer's Folly* the English literary scene was promising. The glorious days of the great Victorian novelists had long been over. Stevenson had died the previous year, while Thomas Hardy decided to turn away from writing fiction because of the violent attacks on *Jude the Obscure*.

The aesthetic movement had been the main new literary force in the eighties and nineties, but its decline was now being heralded by the sentencing of Oscar Wilde. 'The Yellow Book' had begun in 1894 and was much talked about, but the greatest new power on the literary scene was the "yellow press". The conjunction of these last two phenomena symbolises the growing polarisation of tastes between "highbrow" and "lowlowbrow" which was to be such a marked feature of the reading public in the twentieth century, and which was to have profound effects upon Conrad's writing career.

At this crucial time "the fortunes of English fiction" had come to a low point "and a sense of crisis possessed the survivors in that art. Hardy's retreat was symptomatic of that situation". But before this regression, the Victorian novel had tremendously proliferated, explored a new world of matter and experience, digressed, moralized, and conquered the mind and taste of the reading public. The main trend of development of the novel had been described by Henry James in the eighties:

*Only a short time ago it might have been supposed that the English novel was not what the French call discutable. It had no air of having a theory, a conviction, a consciousness of itself behind it – of being the expression of an artistic faith, the result of choice and comparison. I do not say it was necessarily the worse for that; it would take more courage than I possess to intimate that the form of the novel, as Dickens and Thackeray (for instance) saw it, had any taint of incompleteness. It was, however, naif .... During the period I have alluded to there was a comfortable, good-humoured feeling abroad that a novel was a novel, as a pudding is a pudding, and that this was the end of it. But within a year or two, for some reason or other, there*
Here Henry James reserves his comment on the novels of Dickens and Thackeray. But he is quite explicit in a review of George Eliot's *Middlemarch* where he contrasts the popular English novel as “a mere chain of episodes, broken into accidental lengths and unconscious of the influence of a plan” with the gradual development of the novel into “an organized, moulded, balanced composition, gratifying the reader with a sense of design and construction”.

When Conrad began to write the novel “appears to exhaust its larger force and energy and to arrive at an impasse of demoralization” – the kind of crises which an art inevitably confronts “every quarter-century or so”. This is not particularly surprising for the novel which is “so treacherously empirical in its conditions, so insecure in tradition, so much the vehicle and the victim of specialized and limiting principles”. Conrad also was aware of the state of the English novel at that time. His critical attitude has been expressed in his essay, “A Glance at Two Books”. It was written in 1904, but was published in 1925, after Conrad's death. The essay begins ‘revealingly’:

> The national English novelist seldom regards his work – the exercise of his Art – as an achievement of active life by which he will produce certain definite effects upon the emotions of his readers, but simply as an instinctive, often unreasoned, outpourings of his own emotions. He does not go about building up his book with a precise intention and a steady mind. It never occurs to him that a book is a deed, that the writing of it is an enterprise as much the conquest of a colony. He has no such clear conception of his craft.

Conrad's opinion comes closest to Henry James's view. But at the turn of the century the ferment of a new spirit was in the air. A new growth in curiosity and experimentation was able to remove the impasse and to replenish fiction with force and energy in its avid search for renovation and a reviving discipline, although the artistic authority of many gifted talents had either disappeared or considerably dwindled. As Henry James postulates,
“Discussion, suggestion, formulation, these things are fertilizing when they are frank and sincere”.

Art lives upon discussion, upon experiment, upon curiosity, upon variety of attempt, upon the exchange of views and the comparison of stand-points; and there is a presumption that those times when no one has anything particularly to say about it, and has no reason to give for practice or preference, though they may be times of honour, are not times of development – are times, possibly, even, a little of dullness.¹³

Here James is actually acknowledging the contribution of Walter Besant who “has set an excellent example in saving what he thinks, for his part, about the way in which fiction should be written ...”¹⁴ James’s conviction is that the frank attitude and sincerity of temperament creates the atmosphere urgently needed for germination, growth, and development in techniques of innovation. The English novel during this period was poised for tremendous promotion. The great claims for the novel had already been enormously advanced in France and elsewhere in Europe and their influence began to be felt by the English novelists. A corresponding change was perceptible in the English literary scene:

Kipling burst upon the scene with the lore of Empire and Orient. George Moore advanced the claims of French naturalism. Wells offered the zest of the scientific fable and a new social comedy. French and Russian masters appeared in multiplying translations. Stephen Crane ... presently came from America to contribute his accurate eye and phrase to story-telling. Another American, Henry James, was continuing his labours, not only by carrying the art of fiction to constantly greater refinements and insights, but by defending their necessity in his critical writings. Ford Madox Hueffer mingled the foreign sympathies of Germany and Pre-Raphaelism in his promising talent.¹⁵

It is amazing how much of the genuine talent of the decade came from outside England – Stephen Crane, Henry James and Ford Madox Hueffer [Ford]. Almost all of these men of letters became aware that new arenas of thought and subject-matter came to the foreground, needing to be explored and expressed, but not through the conventional or traditional method of representation. Experimentation, innovations and discipline in form and technique were deemed essential for effective communication of such themes and subject
matter. It was the moment of curiosity, novelty, exoticism; but it was the moment of aestheticism too; of form, style, and the *mot juste*. Aestheticism, which had been a major literary force in the ‘last phase’ of the nineteenth century, is defined as

*a movement, a cult, a mode of sensibility (a way of looking at and feeling about things) in the 19th C. Fundamentally, it entailed the point of view that art is self-sufficient and need serve no other purpose than its own ends. In other words, art is an end in itself and need not be (or should not be) didactic, politically committed, propagandist, moral – or anything else but itself; and it should not be judged by any non-aesthetic criteria (e.g. whether or not it is useful).*

In England aestheticism was the result of French influence and native ideas. Theophile Gautier’s Preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1835) is often quoted as one of the earliest examples of a new aesthetic point of view. Thereafter, Edgar Allan Poe and Baudelaire and later Flaubert and Mallarmé virtually launched aestheticism as a cult. Their combined influence produced a sweeping effect on the English authors. The Aesthetes, representing only a small sophisticated minority, seemed to be courageous innovators. This minority group comprised Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde, Swinburne and Whistler the painter, and the poets of the 1890s, especially Dowson, Lionel Johnson and Symons. The major implication of the new aesthetic stand-point was that art had no reference to life, and therefore had nothing to do with morality, Poe, for instance, had condemned the ‘heresy of didacticism’. Later Swinburne advocated the art for art’s sake theory. This attitude of autonomy in art obviously ran counter to the prevalent belief in art’s moral qualities as held by Matthew Arnold, Ruskin, George Eliot. Like George Eliot who strongly articulated in her fiction the moral and social function of the artist, Ruskin supported the strong moral tone of Victorian art, and believed in a medieval world — mainly of their own making — in which culture was serious, satisfying, and unified. But the artists of the eighteen nineties had hardly any belief, and little interest, in such a world or such a culture.
In painting, Whistler had come to be preferred to Rossetti (‘literary’ paintings giving place to ‘musical’ ones); in poetry, Swinburne to Morris; and in prose, Pater to Ruskin.

For the pre-Raphaelites, influenced by Ruskin, the creation of beauty had been a duty owed to society; for the Aesthetes, influenced by Pater, it was a duty owed to oneself. An idealized Renaissance supplanted an idealized Middle Ages as a source of inspiration, individualism was arrayed against conformism, sensibility against morality — or, at most alongside morality.17

Aestheticism was a genuine search for beauty and a realization that the beautiful has an independent value. Pater became the chief source of Aesthetic theory — and to a certain extent of its style. He advocated the theory that success in life consisted in maintaining an ecstasy of the cultivated senses.

As a champion of this movement the impact of the personality of Whistler the painter was no less significant, An intimate friend of Rossetti and other Pre-Raphaelites, he did not share their enthusiasm for the revival of medieval culture. His philosophy of ‘art for art’s sake’ was radically opposed to the aesthetics of Morris and the Arts and Craft movement. Whistler spurned realism and claimed for painting a more absolute independence from the exigencies of nature. He also suggested the association of painting with music, which was underlined by his deliberate choice of musical terms for the title of his works: harmony, symphony, nocturne, variation, arrangement, and so forth. Whistler’s art has been moulded by the French literary tradition, which he then brought to England.

It is not only in painting that the French influence was apparent. It was equally felt on English poetry and fiction. Flaubert and Stendhal had a major impact on English novelists in the nineteenth century and after. French Parnassianism and Symbolism too exerted a seminal influence on English poetry. There was only one vital thing missing in English writing, that is, “the tragic vision, tenacious endurances, and the fathoming probity that seemed at the moment to belong to Eastern and Slavic Europe.”18 Turgenev, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky were good examples of this. Conrad entered the scene at this ‘crucial and strategic’
moment with his *Almayer's Folly* that contains a fine combination of rich exotic material, colourful details, fine impressionistic touches, heightened emotion, and poignant pathos conveyed in an equally colourful and vibrant language. Men who seriously thought about literature and serious writing took cognizance of the fact that a new talent had arrived with new experience and a novel method to communicate it.

**The Publishing Scene**

Conrad produced a considerable corpus of shorter fiction which in fact holds a central and significant position in his literary achievement. Conrad wrote forty-three works of fiction, of which thirty-one are short, ranging from stories of a few pages to novellas of twenty-five thousand to fifty thousand words. His short fiction was usually published, after appearing in periodicals, in collection of three to six stories of related themes. It is remarkable that Conrad as a writer preferred not to distinguish between short fiction and novels, referring to both forms as 'stories'. Nor did he use the terms 'long short story' or 'novella' as distinguished from novel. That he did not insist on generic boundaries may be attributed to the organic evolution of many of his works. For example, *Lord Jim* and *Nostromo* each started as a short story, then became a 'long short story', and eventually ended up in becoming a 'long story' or 'novel'. His temperament has found the shorter fiction form more congenial – an ideal form for setting characters in an atmosphere attuned to the enactment of the moral drama. And he was mainly preoccupied with the exploration of this moral drama.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century Britain was overtaken by sweeping developments on the political, social, and intellectual fronts. These trends left their indelible marks on both the form and the content of British fiction during the period 1880 to 1914. With the deaths of George Eliot and Anthony Trollope
in 1880 and 1882, British letters lost the last great practitioners of the Victorian "realistic three-decker novel". Shorter novels were already becoming common by 1880. With Mudie's and W.H. Smith's circulating libraries declaring in 1894 that they would no longer purchase "three-decker" novels, the "old three-volume format" disappeared almost completely. With novels becoming shorter, short fiction too was considerably reduced in length. William F. Naufftus's comments:

...British short fiction throughout most of the nineteenth century was dominated by what Wendell Harris has called the "sophisticated tale": a rather loosely structured shorter version of the three-decker novel. Such short fiction - Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843) is the best known today - has ... "a kind of richness of character, situation or narrative style possible only in more leisurely story telling"; George Meredith, Henry James, and Thomas Hardy all carrying this form into the late nineteenth century, but the modern short story, with its tight structure and characteristic unity of effect, became dominant in Britain during these years [1880-1914].

R.L. Stevenson's *A Lodging for the Night* (1877) is believed to be the first short fiction in print. Rudyard Kipling began his career as a short story writer with *Plain Tales* in 1887, and his stories are generally much shorter than Stevenson's. In 1891 Arthur Conan Doyle's extremely popular *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* began to be serialized in the "Strand". Henry James had already produced *Daisy Miller* (1879) and some of the finest shorter fiction or the "nouvelle" form as he called it. *The Pupil* was first printed in 'Longman's Magazine' in 1891. *The Turn of the Screw* was first published in 'Collier's Weekly' in 1898 and *The Beast in the Jungle* was first published in James's book of tales *The Better Sort* in 1903. These three novellas are worth mentioning because they are among James's finest in their treatment of some of his radical subjects. They also illustrate important developments in his narrative technique. In 1893 H.G. Wells declared in an essay on "The Future of Literature" in the 'Pall Mall Gazette' that the future demanded "a spray of short stories instead of a Niagara of narrative, in which respect Mr. Rudyard Kipling is in advance of his age".
The expansion of short fiction is related to significant political and social events and intellectual achievements in the nineteenth century that radically changed English society. Three main trends made an impact on the fiction of this period: the political and social reforms largely sponsored by the Liberal Party; the New Imperialism primarily championed by the Conservatives; and the advance of science and technology combined with the emergence of the forces of secularism and materialism and their wide-spread popularity among the common people.

With the advance of technology and new inventions in science there were amazing improvements in instruments of printing and publication. The appearance of the web press outdated the old machines and ushered in a new epoch with its capacity to print from a continuous roll of paper. This was in the sixties. The press output by the end of the century was virtually astronomical. Photography and photoengraving were to revolutionize illustration in an unprecedented manner, thus surpassing the art of wood-engraving which was the prevalent mode of illustration at that time.

The phenomenal rise of the reading public in the second half of the nineteenth century had been concomitant with the process of industrialization of British society. Historically, during the period from 1830 to 1852 a series of Reform Bills were passed by the British Parliament. Promulgation of these bills virtually brought the controlling power to the middle class and to the more prosperous artisans.

Because of repeated reforms enacted by Parliament new professions like engineering, architecture, or accounting came into prominence in the mid-century. The Elementary Education Act of 1870 put a good school within the reach of every child. This was the foundation of the national system of education. These various reforms produced a large new class of readers who were literate but neither prosperous, nor erudite, nor bookish. They generally
wanted their reading to be inexpensive, intellectually accessible to those with a modest education, and capable of completion in relatively short spans of time.

An increased reading public obviously created demands for more literature and the mechanized press was ready to supply it. Radical changes in transport systems equally contributed to moulding reading habits of the English working classes. Men had to travel to work and travelling required light reading, and this reading was often tailored to the length of a journey. Along with a medley of new items and other information, short stories and shorter fiction or novellas began to be serialized or printed whole in mass-circulation magazines to meet the demands of the working classes as well as of the serious readers who wanted to have fictional narratives with certain aesthetic appeal. For shorter fiction could be easily read and enjoyed within a brief span of time and during short breaks from work. The range and variety of themes and subject matters in shorter fiction was also extended. For the authors were doubtless exposed to the cross-currents of complex and hectic political and social changes occurring in Britain and her imperialist missions overseas at that crucial moment:

The same reformist zeal that animated the Liberal Party produced a large body of fiction dealing with the ills of society. The New Imperialism of the Conservatives was similarly reflected in the large number of stories celebrating, or at least set in, the expanding empire. Science and secularism inspired both the positive literary tribute of science fiction and a negative reaction most obviously seen in the enormous popularity of ghost stories.21

Thus we learn from historians that the market for short stories was 'enormous and insatiable' at the turn of the century. The periodicals and magazines rather than collections in book form controlled the market. An astonishing number and variety of periodicals emerged and were soliciting stories. Conrad was writing his shorter fiction at that time and was eager to see them in print. Publishing short fiction was also economically viable. Since the late 1880s the British magazines had begun to pay well for short fiction and the sale of a story was consequently related to a writer's survival. As we know from his friends and publishers,22 Conrad's case was often desperate with his ever increasing
debt. His earnest and sincere efforts at writing short fiction can be explained in terms of his pressing need for money. Another important reason was that a writer could earn money in proportion to time spent at the desk. For example, *An Outpost of Progress*, written in July 1896 in less than three weeks, could get Conrad 50 pounds which was equivalent to the money received for the copyright of *An Outcast of the Islands*, completed in one year. For *Karain*, published in one instalment, he received 40 pounds, while for *Lord Jim* he obtained 300 pounds, though it was completed in 14 instalments. Through J.B. Pinker, his literary agent, Conrad received 100 pounds on the serial rights for the *Typhoon* manuscript. 23

Conrad’s Shorter Fiction

In choosing to write shorter fiction Conrad was only following in the footsteps of the great European masters in the nineteenth century – Flaubert, Maupassant, Daudet, Anatole France and Turgenev who had already generously contributed to the proliferation and enrichment of this form. Though these celebrated artists exerted their influence from outside England, Conrad enjoyed the rare privilege of close acquaintance with them since the 1870s. His father Apollo Korzeniowski, himself a romantic poet and dramatist in Poland, introduced Conrad as a boy to French literature in original and English literature in his own translation. In England Thomas Hardy, Henry James, R.L. Stevenson, and Rudyard Kipling – all the practising artists in short fiction – affected Conrad and gave him impetus and guidance. Conrad also praised the short sketches of Marguerite Poradowska, that showed him ‘the master’s hand’. For the short ‘scenes’ represented a clearer, and more direct sense of her artistic individuality than her novels. Marguerite Poradowska, Conrad’s cousin by marriage with Aleksander Poradowski, a cousin of Conrad’s maternal grandmother, was by birth a French woman (nee Gachet) who became an authoress, and the confidante and chief correspondent of
Conrad in the early 1890s. Conrad referred to her as an aunt, but this was a purely honorary title. So that the positive influence of Madame Poradowska in Conrad’s choice of this genre cannot be ruled out altogether.

Essentially a novelist and teller of short stories, Conrad, in many ways, is a representative modern man and artist. An exile, a drifter, a marginal man until well into his thirties, Conrad was forced to assume different guises. He thus exemplifies many aspects of the modern sensibility. In probing exile, dislocation of time and place, language disorientation, and shifting loyalties, Conrad showed us a man desperately struggling for existence, even when precariously poised. Later as a writer of fiction Conrad explored new territories: irrationality, abnormality, nightmare at a time when Freud instructed generations with his theory of the unconscious. Conrad even returned from this primitive world not with solutions but with ways of understanding that savage Congo and abominable heart of darkness that dwells under the most simple and amazing exteriors.

Conrad’s is a most personal art, woven out of his intimate memories and transmuted by his artistic conscience and endeavour into the final product of a short story or novel. Yet the extraordinary care Conrad took to stand aside from his fictional material, to place the “objective” narrator between himself as a novelist and the core of the story to be told, indicated his ardent desire to conceal his true self, or perhaps to disguise it beyond recognition in the folds of his fictional mantle. “It may be my sea training acting upon a natural disposition,” Conrad wrote, “but the fact is that I have a positive horror of losing even for one moving moment that full possession of myself which is the first condition of good service.” Conrad learned that full possession of himself in his years of service with the merchant marine, and he had carried his notion of good service to his later life.

“Edward Garnett...told me,” writes Gerard Jean-Aubry, “that Conrad once said to him: ‘Before the Congo, I was a mere animal,’ meaning that for the first
fifteen years at sea he had lived almost without being aware of it, carried along by the ardour of his temperament in response to an almost unconscious desire for adventure, without ever analysing the reasons for his or other people’s actions. The illness he contracted in the Congo, by immobilizing him, cutting down his physical activity, and keeping him shut up for long months, forced him to look into himself, to think over the experiences of which his life was so extraordinarily full—though he was still only thirty-three”.

Jean-Aubry thought that the adventure in the Congo made Conrad turn from the sea to the vocation of writing. Instead of romance Conrad discovered the horror of the jungle and its savage laws, the utter degradation of man isolated in the wilderness. The rapacious immorality of the Belgian explorers and traders filled him with disgust. He began to question the existence of any purpose in life which he found full of ‘unextinguishable’ regrets. The journey into the heart of the Congo, which had once inflamed his childish imagination, turned out to be a grey, sombre struggle for survival—a most unexciting contest which offered neither glory nor victory. He reflected on his shattered hopes and the somewhat poor consolation that one must live when one has had the misfortune to be born. He began to be aware of a certain duality in himself. The romantic sailor had turned into a lonely thinker with a passion for introspection. His concern was now with his own fate and that of humanity, with the meaning of failure and success, fidelity and faithlessness.

A reading boy, and a creative reader at that, Conrad wondered, “I don’t know what would have become of me if I had not been a reading boy….I suppose that in a futile, childish way I would have gone crazy. But I was a reading boy…I read! What did I not read!” Notwithstanding Conrad’s persistent early reading that energized him immensely, from his father Conrad received his literary talent and his artistic imagination; and from his mother, a certain spiritual uneasiness and a tendency to constant worry, and from both an exalted view of fidelity to a cause. Endowed with a rich imagination, young Conrad
reacted to the oppressive atmosphere of his household, and later to the conditions of exile by a silent withdrawal into himself and into the imaginary world of fictional heroes.

Shakespeare's influence upon Conrad was profound; for many of his stories and novels have Shakespearean figures; men like Hamlet, destroyed by their sensibility and inability to act, or like Macbeth, driven to evil and corruption by ambition. The tremendous appeal of the Renaissance era, the sheer vitality of Shakespearean tragedy, and the pessimism of his great tragedies along with their quality of compassion must have fascinated young Conrad. Lord Jim carries a tattered edition of Shakespeare on his journeys. Kurtz and the captain-narrator of The Shadow-Line also resemble Shakespearean characters.

Equally well acquainted with Walter Scott, Byron, Dickens, Thackeray and Trollope, Conrad singles out Dickens's Bleak House as

...a work of the master for which I have such an admiration, or rather such an intense and unreasoning affection, dating from the days of my childhood, that its very weaknesses are more precious to me than the strength of other men's work. I have read it innumerable times, both in Polish and in English. I have read it only the other day. . . .

Apollo Korzeniowski translated Dickens's Hard Times and its antiutilitarian ideas must have appealed to Conrad the romantic exile. Apollo, among others, had also translated Shakespeare's The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Much Ado About Nothing, As You Like It, A Comedy of Errors, and Othello—the books which Conrad read voraciously.

Conrad's debt to Flaubert was considerable. In 1892 Conrad wrote to Mme Poradowska that he had reread Madame Bovary "with respectful admiration". He added: "There you have a man with enough imagination for two realists. There are few authors so creative as he. One never questions for a moment either his characters or his episodes; one would doubt rather his own existence". Ford Madox Ford also wrote: "Our chief masters in style were
Flaubert and Maupassant; Flaubert in the greater degree, Maupassant in the less". Conrad's French translator H. -D. Davray, after his meeting with Conrad, reported: "He cited passages with a sureness that showed an intimate knowledge of the great writer [Flaubert]".

In his chief works Flaubert introduces a central character isolated in an exalting or tormenting dream. In *Madame Bovary* between Emma and her husband Charles Bovary there remains the same bitterness of wills at cross-purposes that is detected between Almayer and Nina, Willems and Joanna, the Goulds, and the Verlocs. Flaubert analysed the content of the romantic reverie, translating feelings into their exact equivalents in visual images, and thus showed his deftness in presenting the workings of consciousness. This "dramatic presentation of a 'mental event'" is the method Conrad seems to have followed for his own heroes: Willems, seeing himself as Hudig's future partner; Jim, imaging himself cutting away masts in a hurricane; Razumov, seeing himself as a celebrated old professor. And their aspiration remains an illusion - an impossibility. This exasperation with the vanity of all desires lies at the heart of the Conradian concept of evil, just as Kurtz sums up his experiences in the Congo on his death-bed: "The horror! the horror!"

Flaubert's frequent use of the hermit 'motif' in his fiction, particularly in *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, where St. Anthony is a hermit beset by visions of unlimited wealth, power, cruelty, and knowledge, must have appealed to Conrad who also sometimes saw himself as a literary hermit. In solitude, however, Anthony struggles to maintain his faith against them. This solitary figure of Anthony clinging to a simple faith against the array of allurements, no doubt, impresses Conrad. For Conrad viewed his maritime career in terms like these: "...for twenty years I lived like a hermit with my passion!" Heyst earns the epithet of hermit in the South Seas; Marlow describes Captain Anthony as "a hermit withdrawn from a wicked world", living a life of solitude and desire. Jim is told that "in the old days people who went on like this were on the way
of becoming hermits in a wilderness" (Lord Jim, p.231). Kurtz might be seen as a hermit who has yielded to every temptation.

To Maupassant Conrad’s debt was profounder still, and his acquaintance with Maupassant had been intimate and sincere. Apart from a similarity of vision between himself and Maupassant, Conrad turned to Maupassant, Flaubert’s great pupil, for finer analysis of feelings and thoughts, for the depiction of a vast range of humanity, and for his subtle, explicit comment on human nature. In 1894 Conrad wrote to Mme Poradowska: “I am afraid I am too much under the influence of Maupassant”. In 1898 Conrad had praised Bel-Ami as an “amazing masterpiece”, and in 1899 he wrote to Mrs Bontine: “I share your opinion of Maupassant. The man is a great artist, who sees the essential in everything”. Jocelyn Baines has stated that Maupassant’s influence on Conrad shows “most clearly” in the prefaces to The Nigger of the “Narcissus”, and A Personal Record, and that Conrad served “no more than an apprenticeship” to Maupassant. Zdzislaw Najder has pointed out that Maupassant’s influence, “although undoubtedly strong and consciously absorbed by Conrad, was in fact doubly limited; it concerned mainly matters of literary technique, and affected almost exclusively his early and still immature books”.

With Maupassant Conrad had not only an agreement about literary technique, but a shared conception of life and human nature, especially with reference to his treatment of sexual love and man’s attitude to death. Maupassant’s influence on Conrad’s idea of sexual love may be found by comparing Victory with Fort comme la mort. Since Victory is Conrad’s last important novel, it is hardly tenable that Maupassant’s influence was limited to Conrad’s “still immature books”.

Conrad’s deepest artistic preoccupation with mortality was possibly derived from his reflections on death in Maupassant’s Bel-Ami which impressed him at the start of his career. The Nigger of the “Narcissus” describes the demoralising effect on a ship’s crew of the heightened awareness of awaiting death; and the planetary metaphors in the story imply that human revolt in
general is a revolt against the idea of death. Maupassant’s treatment of Charles Forestier’s death in *Bel-Ami* also contributes heavily to James Wait’s character and death in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*. In fact, many physical details of Wait’s death come from *Bel-Ami*.

To H.D. Davray Conrad wrote in 1903 about his being “saturated with Maupassant”, adding that “I have been astonished by the Maupassantesque touch that can be given to English prose”. Ford Madox Ford also provides a plausible account of his and Conrad’s literary methods: “We remembered short, staccato passages of Maupassant: invented short staccato passages in his spirit and then translated them into English”. Though it is hard to pinpoint how much Conrad learnt from Maupassant, it is possible that Conrad may have adopted Maupassant’s device of the use of a ‘prologue’—a conversation, discourse, or dramatic incident—of which the full relevance becomes clear “as the story progresses, adding resonance and depth to the narrative”. Conrad’s ‘prologues’ in *Heart of Darkness*, *Amy Foster*, and *Falk* may owe something to one of Maupassant’s favourite story-telling devices. But Maupassant’s lasting influence on Conrad was hardly limited to matters of literary technique. Conrad’s idea of mankind, “where every individual wishes to assert his power, woman by sentiment, man by achievement of some sort—mostly base” approximates to that of Maupassant: “Man, endowed with physical force, uses it in violence. Woman, gifted with charm, rules by the caress”.

Conrad’s idea of “second-self” and its development in his fiction was possibly drawn from Maupassant who had dramatised the instinctive, as appeared to the thinking being, effectively in *Pierre et Jean*. Here he expostulated “physiological problem of the Impression produced by a fact” as a formula for creating situation. This idea of “second-self” is given its most dramatic development in Maupassant’s short fiction *Le Horla*. The narrator reflects on his unconsciously living
that mysteriously double life which makes us wonder if there are two beings in us, or if a being from without, unknowable and invisible, at times when our soul is drowsy, animates our captive body, which obeys that other being as it obeys ourselves, more than ourselves.47

No doubt, this "second-self" concept fascinated Conrad. Conrad devoted particular study—"thought, method, and everything"48— to Maupassant's short masterpiece, Pierre et Jean. Before that in 1890, on his voyage to the Congo, Conrad wrote to Mme Poradowska:

Happily there is another I who roams over Europe, who is at this moment with you, who will go before you to Poland. Another I who moves from one place to another with great case, who can even be in two places at once. Don't laugh! I really believe this has occurred; I am quite serious.49

Far from being criminal, the second self is always the instinctive, emotional, and suffering one. Although in The Secret Sharer Conrad has fully exploited the image of second self, it was, however, common in Conrad's early fiction. Almayer and Willems both have momentary illusions of a second self.50 Jim, says Marlow, "was not speaking to me, he was only speaking before me, in a dispute with an invisible personality, an antagonistic and inseparable partner of his existence—another possessor of his soul".51

It is evident that Maupassant's thoughts and ideas, various verbal echoes, and use, of similar images and diction appear in Conrad's fiction. Like Maupassant, Anatole France too influenced Conrad's thought and style; particularly in The Secret Agent Conrad's ironic tone seems to owe something to France and his works Crainquebille and Histoire comique. France's analysis of colonialism, savage and exploitative in nature, as it is contained in Les Opinions de M. Jérôme Coignard (1893), may have helped Conrad to interpret his own experience in the Congo and to transmute it in his fiction.

Conrad's insistence on instinctive action rather than on pure reason and intelligence had its precedence in Anatole France. Marlow compares Jim with "that good, stupid kind... that is not disturbed by the vagaries of intelligence,"
depending instead on "the instinct of courage". Martin Decoud, confounded and overwhelmed with the burden of intelligence, commits suicide. Jukes is paralysed by intelligence and fails to respond to the crisis call, whereas Captain MacWhirr’s instinct of courage and justice helps him successfully accomplish his maritime responsibilities.

Advocating "Ignorance as the necessary condition of existence", Anatole France asserted that "The feelings that make it [life] sweet, or at least tolerable to us, are born of a lie and fed on illusions". Conrad uses similar language in *Victory*: "For every age is fed on illusions, lest men should renounce life early and the human races come to an end". Marlow applies the principle by stating to the Intended that Kurtz died with her name on his lips, and thus helped the lady stay in her own beautiful world. Like France, Conrad too affirmed his faith in imagination. France remarks: "It is imagination, with its lies, that sows all beauty and all virtue in the world. Through it alone are we great". Conrad expressed the same belief in *A Personal Record*: "Only in men’s imagination does every truth find an effective and undeniable existence. Imagination, not invention, is the supreme master of art as of life". Conrad the artist emerged from this rich and varied background enriched by multifarious influences and experiences. And abandoning the risky sea career Conrad embarked on a still more perilous literary career, when in 1894 he wrapped the manuscript of *Almayer’s Folly* in two pieces of cardboard and some brown paper, enclosed twelve penny stamps in case of rejection, and sent it to the publishing house of T. Fisher Unwin. On the advice of two of his 'readers' — W.H. Chesson and Edward Garnett — T. Fisher Unwin accepted *Almayer’s Folly* for publication.

The generally accepted view is that Conrad’s basic conception of the novel was not English. Nor was it derived from Polish sources, if only because the novel developed rather late in Poland, compared to poetry and drama. For Conrad the model novelists “were French, and, in particular, Flaubert and Maupassant”. Flaubert, among the French authors, demanded that a great writer must have
extreme literary dedication and should be ready to sacrifice all other concerns for the sake of literature and for construing "his fictional worlds laboriously, phrase by phrase, with intense concentration and concern for le-mot juste". Conrad’s attitudes to art include a sense of Flaubertian dedication. Conrad states in the opening paragraph of his autobiographical account *A Personal Record*:

*Books may be written in all sorts of places. Verbal inspiration may enter the berth of a mariner on broad a ship frozen fast in a river in the middle of a town; and since saints are supposed to look benignantly on humble believers, I indulge in the pleasant fancy that the shade of Flaubert ... might have hovered with amused interest over the decks of a 2,000 ton steamer called the 'Adowa', on board of which, gripped by the inclement winter alongside a quay in Rouen, the tenth chapter of *Almayer's Folly* was begun.*

The scene is realistic, placed in Rouen, but above the scene hovers Art – "the shade of Flaubert", "a sort of literary, saint – like hermit" – a reflection which was morally and spiritually edifying for Conrad.

Moreover, Flaubert, Turgenev and Henry James had imposed a new discipline on the art of the novel, making of it a finer instrument of expression and sensibility, seeking to bring to it the "quality of mind" which James required as the ultimate test of literature. James shared many of Conrad’s artistic concerns and with him challenged late-Victorian techniques in both short fiction and the novel. Ford Madox Ford, their close associate, also played a key role in their experiments with technical innovations. Henry James was especially delighted with the *nouvelle* form that had already gained popular currency in the literary world.

... Among forms, moreover, we had had, on the dimensional ground – for length and breadth – our ideal, the beautiful and blest *nouvelle*; the generous, the enlightened hour for which appeared thus at last to shine. It was under the star of the *nouvelle* that, in other languages, a hundred interesting and charming results ... had been, all economically, arrived at .... It had been the blank misery of our Anglo-Saxon sense of such matters to organise, as might be said, the general indifference to this fine type of composition. In that dull view a "short story" was a "short story", and that was the end of it. Shades and differences, varieties and styles, the value above all of the idea happily developed, languished, to extinction, under the hard-and-fast rule of the
Henry James held this *nouvelle* form in high esteem for the opportunity it offered to treat and develop "the complicated thing", while maintaining the strictest economy and control. He was fully aware of the genre and defined it as a "picture" consisting of "richly summarised and foreshortened effects"; a "fine type of composition" permitting "shades and differences, varieties and styles, the value above all of the idea happily developed"; its "main merit and sign is the effort to do the complicated thing with a strong brevity and lucidity — to arrive, on behalf of the multiplicity, at a certain science of control".61

Although Conrad never used the term *nouvelle*, he showed his preference for this form. While registering his predilection for this particular form of '30,000 words or so', Conrad guides the reader into his technique or method of writing. "This kind of story will be told in many episodes, and will be comprehended by the reader retrospectively — not as a continually, unfolding action but completed and entire, the way stories live on memory."62

F.M. Ford's negative view that Conrad is "not a novelist but a writer of novellas, fails to do justice to Conrad's creative genius which has produced great novels like *Lord Jim*, *Nostromo*, *The Secret Agent*, and *Under Western Eyes*. But Conrad's major works of shorter fiction such as *Typhoon*, *Heart of Darkness*, *The Secret Sharer*, and *The Shadow-Line* are equally brilliant and outstanding in thematic content, narrative technique and symbolic suggestion. In spite of their notable variations in length, they were written in accordance with the permitted length of thirty to forty thousand words — "the form I like best".

Of all Conrad's stories and novels only *The Lagoon*, an early work of some 6,000 words, was written in strict conformity to the guidelines on length as set by the publisher. Through Edward Garnett's personal influence Conrad
received an official notice from the ‘Cornhill’ which drew his attention to the magazine’s guidelines regarding the length of a contribution. It states that

... if you ever write short stories or sketches we should be most happy to give them our most sympathetic consideration. With regard to serials, we are unfortunately already ‘booked’ up to 1899, but shorter contributions will always be acceptable. As a general rule 6000 or 8000 words represents the maximum length for such contributions, but in exceptional cases we can sometimes publish a story of 12000 words in two instalments.63

The letter further assured Conrad that judged by “the remarkable brilliance and power of your published work ... it is very unlikely he [The Editor] should decline anything you sent him.64 The ‘Cornhill’, however, rejected The Idiots, when it was sent to them, on the plea that “the editors wanted a more typical work and one that was closer to their original estimate of 6000 words”.65 Finally the story was published in the ‘Savoy’ in which Conrad was not initially interested, as it “was one of the liveliest of the short-lived decadent magazines published at the end of the century”.66 He explained to Fisher Unwin:

I must live. I don’t care much where I appear since the acceptance of such stories is not based on their intrinsic worth. But in that case there is no particular gratification in being accepted here rather than there.67

Conrad’s embarrassment is self-evident. For he wished to publish his stories in magazines with a rising and respectable reputation. ‘Blackwood’s’ exactly enjoyed this kind of popularity and reputation and it eventually provided Conrad a much-needed outlet for his work. Conrad’s association with William Blackwood began with the publication in November 1897 of Karain : A Memory in the ‘Blackwood’s Magazine’ – Conrad’s first publication in that prestigious magazine. In a May 25, 1899 letter to Algernon Methuen Conrad said that ‘Blackwood’s’ “is the only periodical always open to me – and is the only one for which I really care to work”.68 Given Blackwood’s ingrained sense of traditional values and his conservative literary tastes, Blackwood’s acceptance and publication of Heart of Darkness and Lord Jim, first in serial,
then in book form, were courageous acts, seen from the perspective of 1899-1900. For both these works dealt with new materials and preached new artistic intentions, which differed from Blackwood's usual way of selection of matter. In this relationship between Conrad and Blackwood David Meldrum — 'Blackwood's' London literary agent and a true friend to Conrad — supported Conrad and encouraged Blackwood to handle Conrad carefully and to advance him the money requested. In June 1902 Conrad finished his relationship with such a 'congenial home'.

Conrad's third completed story The Lagoon was, however, published in the 'Cornhill', while An Outpost of Progress — these two stories were composed in strict deference to the specific qualities and length — was published in the 'Cosmopolis'. When they complained of the length of An Outpost of Progress, Conrad was exasperated and told a friend:

'It is too long for one number, they say. I told the unspeakable idiots that the thing halved would be as ineffective as a dead scorpion. There will be a part without sting — and the part with the sting, — and being separated they will be both harmless and disgusting.'

Conrad's annoyance was, however, mitigated with a prospect of higher pay. For Conrad was passing through a critical phase of economic hardship. And publishing stories was definitely a way of resolving this acute crisis. In fact Conrad's need for money was always far greater than his selling value to the magazine. At this critical juncture William Blackwood who was a very cooperative and sympathetic man towards authors came to Conrad's rescue by providing him good money for his contributions, regular loans and patronage. Blackwood was also generous enough to grant advances to him even for the material yet to be written. Conrad also felt secure under the continued patronage of the 'Maga'. For by subscribing his shorter fiction to the 'Maga' he could get 'his money, his art, and appreciation as well'. 'Blackwood's' took care to maintain high quality and imposed certain restrictions, to which Conrad
zealously conformed. This magazine also showed exemplary tolerance towards Conrad’s “slow writing pace”.71

Conrad’s works of shorter fiction are few in number. His finest stories are more than 10,000 words long, because of his complex themes. Conrad never tried to glorify the moment or to exploit the ironies of coincidence and circumstance. He was mainly preoccupied with the psychological states of his characters, their moral and spiritual dilemmas as well as their concern with the ideal value of things. Thus his fiction treats of characters chosen from a realistic background, and contains melodramatic situations with the characters at their centre. His work, Conrad himself says,

"is not an endless analysis of affected sentiments but in its essence it is action (strange as this affirmation may sound at the present time) nothing but action — action observed, felt and interpreted with an absolute truth to my sensations (which are the basis of art in literature) — action of human beings that will bleed to a prick, and are moving in a visible world."72

Here “action observed, felt and interpreted with an absolute truth to my sensations” means “reliance in his work upon memory, upon the life he has lived and also upon the temperament that has lived it and been shaped by it”.73

The titles and subtitles of Conrad’s novels and shorter fiction show that he used the term ‘tale’ repeatedly. This is not without significance. The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’ is “A Tale of the Sea”; Lord Jim and Chance are both “Tales”; Nostromo “A Tale of the Seaboard”; The Secret Agent “A Simple Tale”; Victory “An I-sland Tale”. Among the shorter fiction the term exists either as a collective book-title such as Tales of Unrest and Tales of Hearsay or as a subtitle for example, Within the Tides and ‘Twixt Land and Sea are both “Tales”. There is again a story which is simply called A Tale. The term “tale” was not defined by the length of the story. A novel like Lord Jim has been described as a “Tale”, while the short story entitled A Tale is only 6500 words long. The Lagoon, another short story included in the book Tales of Unrest is about six
thousand words in length. But his tales have one thing in common which is plainly “the quality of being told”.

Conrad had from the beginning a strong sense of the exactions of the art of writing. In this respect it was probably Gustave Flaubert who exerted the greatest influence on Conrad. Indeed, short fiction of intermediate length – or the “modern novella” as it was called for greater convenience – came of age during the nineteenth century in Germany, France, America, and finally in England. A persistent search for determining its generic criteria drew out a respectable body of critical approaches of conflicting kind and nature. Historically the “modern novella” derived from nineteenth century German, French, and Anglo-American short fiction. German prose narrative of this period was dominated by the novelle, and almost every prose writer of significance expressed himself in this form. In the French tradition the realist novels of Stendhal, Balzac, Flaubert, Zola, Maupassant, and others claimed the greatest share of artistic attention, but at the same time there developed an increasing concern with shorter fiction forms, because of the demands of newspapers and magazine publishers for brief, exciting stories. This led to the extension and convergence of the conte or short story and nouvelle traditions. The increasing public popularity of short narratives also led to a proliferation of such works in England and America during the course of the century, most notably with Edgar Allan Poe, Stephen Crane, Herman Melville, Henry James, and Joseph Conrad, though the novel remained the dominant form of literary expression in prose. The most prevalent forms of modern short fiction within the German, French, and Anglo-American literary traditions – the novelle, nouvelle and conte, and the short story – evolved in the course of the nineteenth century and served as background or source for the modern novella. This nineteenth century literary phenomenon was also attributed to Boccaccio’s Decamerone written five centuries earlier.
Conrad was well acquainted with contemporary writers and their works, both English and European. He had incorporated in his fiction some of their ideas, themes, and technique in representation. But Conrad was opposed to any kind of mechanistic fiction — to write fiction in strict obedience to certain form or pattern planned or thought out beforehand.

In his shorter fiction Conrad's concern was with the moral drama of humankind, which claims intricate treatment. "My thought is always multiple", he once told Garnett. He felt that some distance or detachment from the incidents and events of the story was necessary in order to render it more plausible and realistic. So he employed the device of an actor-narrator and developed it as one of his several strategic and technical improvements. He used this method more effectively in his shorter fiction.

According to Conrad, the short form offered to the writer certain aesthetic opportunities. It has the ability to 'show forth' the characteristic elements of a writer's style: "It takes a small-scale narrative (short story) to show the master's hand". Short fiction also provides the unique scope for the reader's sense of uninterrupted communion with the author and his work. Memory functions more strikingly in reading a shorter work than a novel so far as quantity and duration are concerned. We can remember more easily the details in short fiction than that in a novel. And each detail, fresh and vivid in mind, helps in the understanding of the story, by demanding our concentration. That is why Conrad was opposed to serialization of short fiction on the plea that any break in publication would seriously jeopardise the integrity of the modern short story as an art form.

Conrad's shorter fiction has yet another significance in the larger pattern of his writings, as they constitute part of an important alternating rhythm. It is interesting to note that Conrad wrote shorter fiction alternately between his novels, or when he was in the later stages of writing one, or was unable to make progress, as with The Rescue and Chance. Sometimes Conrad admitted
that he did so for the sake of emotional relief. For example, he took up writing *Typhoon* as 'a fresh start' after the 'nightmare' of finishing *Lord Jim*. His effort to create *The Secret Sharer* when he was already engaged in writing *Under Western Eyes* dispelled his gloom and gave him confidence. Again while writing *Victory*, he began *The Planter of Malata* on "sudden impulse" which would encourage him to "go back to the novel with a better heart". Fraser comments: "the shorter form tended to concentrate his ideas in a way that was essential to the making of his art".

**Theory of Fiction**

In the history of the novel the tradition of realistic representation reaches a turning point with Henry James and his fellow literary impressionists Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Ford. These three writers challenge the conventions of realism. Their narrative experiments challenge our sense of reality and lead us on to a way of discovery into the mysteries of how we create and construe meaning. So James, Conrad and Ford initiate the self-consciousness of modern fiction about signs and interpretation; they instil into us the wide-spread awareness that we live in a world of signs and our understanding of reality depends on how we interpret these signs. These three novelists bring about a change in the novel’s direction by attaching importance to the experience of bewilderment. James states that “if we were never bewildered there would never be a story to tell about us.” To be bewildered, according to Johnson’s definition, is to be “lost in pathless places, at a loss for one’s way”, “confound [ed] for want of a plain road”. For James, Conrad, and Ford the experience of bewilderment undermines our capacity for confidence in the conventional “roads” that make up “reality”. This discloses that the “real” is not there in an ordered and stable form which our judgment can simply explore and establish with clarity, but is rather a ‘collection of constructs’ – or paths. We are required to understand these constructs through interpretations in the light of our
personal assumptions and expectations. As impressionists they wonder whether reality is a unified whole or a collection of conflicting interpretations that elude any perceptible solution to the moral and spiritual dilemmas in life.

James's novels of bewilderment show his fascination with the creative powers of consciousness. He therefore adopts the habit of telling his stories through "registers" or "reflectors". They change and develop their points of view as they face the dilemmas in their attempts to fit elements together in a consistent whole. Ford's bafflement suggests that experience is inherently in a flux. As Ford explains, he and Conrad

> saw that life did not narrate, but made impressions on our brains. We in turn, if we wished to produce on you an effect of life, must not narrate but render impressions.\(^82\)

Ford's most successful novels such as *The Good Soldier, No More Parades* and *A Man Could Stand Up* dramatize the gap between confused, unreflective understanding and reflective interpretation that seeks to compose impressions into a clear, coherent narrative pattern. Conrad's works ask whether "belief in a few simple notions" such as duty and fidelity can withstand the challenge of skepticism and hold back the darkness of nihilism. Conrad's Marlow in this regard is the great metaphysical questioner.

The Jamesian impression "takes to itself the faintest hints of life, it converts the very pulses of the air into revelations" and "guess[es] the unseen from the seen".\(^83\) James's concern with reality and its representation in fiction involves a question which is central to his aesthetic principles. Is the real monistic or pluralistic? That James abandons monism and acknowledges pluralism is evident from his statement that "the measure of reality is very difficult to fix .... Humanity is immense, and reality has a myriad forms".\(^84\) That it is multiple and not single, and accordingly interpretation may be varied and tend in many directions – these assumptions about reality make James a novelist of both the nineteenth century and the twentieth. His faith in the real places him as a
member in the great tradition of verisimilitude in the novel. At the same time he challenges the traditional assumptions of mimesis and questions that stability, and uniformity of ‘reality’.

Conrad similarly oscillates between monism and pluralism, but he is more sceptical than James about the powers of belief as an instrument of interpretation – “the ability of belief to compose parts into wholes and to project hidden sides”.\(^{85}\) Conrad’s novel *Lord Jim* affirms the autonomy of the real and then again throws the real into question. Marlow’s reflections on Jim show his efforts to comprehend Jim as also his bafflement in this regard: “I wanted to know – and to this day I don’t know, I can only guess”.\(^{86}\) Marlow further complains that his glimpses of Jim remain fragmentary and disconnected and hinder the Jamesian composition of parts into a whole. Marlow admits that “bits of vivid and vanishing detail” fed “one’s curiosity without satisfying it; they were no good for purposes of orientation. Upon the whole he [Jim] was misleading”.\(^{87}\) Thus Marlow can acquire enough details about Jim but cannot fit them into a consistent pattern necessary for lucid comprehension. Marlow turns to other characters in the novel for necessary help in deciding what to believe about Jim. The result of his consultation with others has been a veritable conflict of interpretations which make Jim more enigmatic. As they are finally irreconcilable, they frustrate Marlow’s attempt to develop a coherent, comprehensive view of Jim. Thomas C. Moser has observed: “the truth about Jim must be the sum of many perceptions”.\(^{88}\)

Thus Conrad’s oscillation between monism and pluralism is self evident. Conrad’s assumption about the paradoxical nature of truth is also implicit in his preface to *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’*. Here Conrad describes art’s goal as the conquest of the accidental and the inessential in life through the discovery of the necessary and the absolute. Conrad calls truth “manifold and one”. Again his long list of plurals – such as ‘forms’, ‘colours’, ‘shadows’, ‘aspects’ *et al* – affirms the world’s inherent multiplicity of meanings.
Ford Madox Ford also shares the view of James and Conrad and asserts that a novelist should give “the impression, not the corrected chronicle” because life does not present itself to us as a “rounded, annotated record”. Ford continues to say, “you must render : never report”. Ford’s preference for “impression” over “narration” seeks to emphasize the way the world presents itself to us, ambiguously and obscurely, through a haze of associations, before the reflective experience orders, clarifies, and synthesizes them into a perfect and consistent pattern, and only then an explicit interpretation is reached. Thomas Moser remarks: “For Ford ... the impressionistic method serves not to render the external world but to dramatize a mind in a state of dislocation”.

Ford’s fiction *The Good Soldier* is ambiguous. The distinction between “impression” and “narration” is conspicuous in its structure. Dowell’s narration moves backward and forward in a rambling manner in an effort to grasp at the meanings but ultimately it remains ambiguous. Dowell often despairs of his ability to translate his impressions into self-conscious understanding. “I don’t know; I don’t know”, he laments/near the beginning; it is all a darkness”. This echoes Ford’s expostulation in his essay on “Impressionism”:

*Impressionism exists to render those queer effects of real life that are like so many views seen through bright glass - through glass so bright that whilst you perceive through it a landscape or a backyard, you are aware that, on its surface, it reflects a face of a person behind you. For the whole of life is really like that; we are almost always in one place with out minds somewhere quite other.*

Conrad the artist very consciously devised his fictional structure to communicate his impressions of life. In Conrad’s fiction the term structure means not only the relationship of the parts to each other but also the selection of the parts and the emphasis given to them; here structure includes his use of the personal narrator and the illustrative episodes as well as his violation of conventional chronology, and these three devices are all indirect methods. The narrator acts as a barrier or screen between the reader and the action. Conrad presents the illustrative episode in a manner which apparently sounds
irrelevant, and only the reader is left to see the connections. By disruption of chronology Conrad does not take the reader into the middle of things. He usually takes him to a point after the fact, then before the fact, then around and around the fact—an artistic evasiveness that provides added perception to his work. By a process of imagination Conrad reverses the chronological order by *hysteron proteron*, a figurative device whereby the later is recounted before the earlier as in the Lingard Saga. The final stage of the Lingard Saga is presented in *Almayer's Folly*, a younger Lingard is depicted in *An Outcast of the Islands*, and still a younger Lingard is revealed in the ultimate *The Rescue*. Conrad sees that the hysteron-proteron device heightens irony and ambiguity, and might imply scepticism about the rational order in events. This obliquity in approach may be linked with his personal life style and his career that swerved from decades of voyages across far oceans to that of a challenging British novelist after years in France.

Modern concepts of form are linked with modern literature, which is again largely the product of the modern world, of modern man who changes with radical changes in society. As T.S.Eliot says: "any radical change in poetic form is likely to be a symptom of some very much deeper change in society and in the individual". The novelist, like the poet, is conscious of his society, because every change in it affects him. But ironically, the modern man, like the modern world, is not totally new. The old problems of man and his world are still further complicated by contemporary problems. These problems are situations towards which the writer adopts an attitude which determines his strategies of interpretation. Conversely, it is the situation which creates the writer, and which creates his attitude. From the experience come the technique and the content, and from their tension emerges a synthesis, which is the final form.

It is imperative to point out that form is not merely technique or skill, but the total shape of the finished work. Further, content also is in form. It is the
experience of the writer—experience as a writer and as a social being—which produces both content and technique, which he finally synthesizes to produce form. In fact, it is not the content, which manifests itself into a form, but the aesthetic experience.

It is evident that Conrad with Henry James, Ford Madox Ford, and James Joyce, was breaking away from the traditional narrative technique in English fiction. His persistent attempt in his fiction is to present 'the history of fine consciences' of people; the interiorization of characters is an important milestone that Conrad's major fiction offers, a subtle device of looking within which culminates in the stream-of-consciousness technique of Virginia Woolf, James Joyce and others. And Conrad's shorter fiction, like his great novels, explicate and expostulate a rich variety of themes.

Summing-up

Conrad as a novelist appeared on the English literary scene at a crucial time when English fiction was passing through a critical phase. The great novelists like George Eliot and Anthony Trollope had died. Embittered by harsh criticism, Hardy had turned from fiction and concentrated on poetry. The Aesthetic movement under the leadership of Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde proved a major literary force at the turn of the century, vindicating the theory of art for art's sake, and not for morality's sake. Steeped in French painting and culture, Whistler the painter brought to England a new emphasis on the organizational aspect and tonal interrelationships in painting rather than on its representational content. Henry James had already added new dimensions to fiction by emphasizing 'consciousness' and 'impression' as significant constituent ingredients in presenting life in fiction. His preoccupation with form and structure in fiction was essentially derived from the French masters of the craft such as Flaubert, the Goncourt Brothers, Balzac, Zola, and the Russian Turgenev. With some of them he held regular intellectual discussion about the
present state of the art of fiction. This contributed to the enrichment of fictional art in England. Stephen Crane from America and Ford Madox Ford with a rich German heritage and cultural background were deeply engaged in evolving a new concept and theory of fiction that virtually challenged the conventional prevalent mode of narration in Victorian fiction. Indirect narration was preferred to omniscient presentation.

The publication of *Almayer's Folly* by Conrad in 1895 announced the arrival of a new talent which was basically moulded and shaped by the French masters and their classic models. The influence of Flaubert, Maupassant, Dudet and Turgenev was unquestionable. But Conrad soon outgrew the legacy of his masters and mentors and established his individuality as a writer. He showed his originality of conception and execution in fiction to which *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus', Lord Jim, The Secret Agent, Under Western Eyes, Victory* and *Chance* bear ample testimony. His experimentations in innovative techniques in fiction followed his intellectual discussions with Ford. These were on the lines being pursued by Henry James.

Notwithstanding his eminence as a great novelist, Conrad was irresistibly drawn to shorter fiction or novella which was a popular form of fiction in the nineteenth century. A good many writers of fame and recognition in England, America, and in the continent had tried their hands at this genre. Conrad too produced a considerable corpus of shorter fiction and some of them are exquisitely brilliant in form and theme, comparable with his best novels. Conrad especially favoured the shorter fiction of thirty to forty thousand words in length. His conviction was that it showed the master's hand in treatment of theme and shades and nuances in style, and expressed a clear and more direct sense of artistic individuality. In this form he could treat the most complicated matter or issues with lucidity, brevity, and with a certain amount of control. It was a finer instrument of expression and sensibility to which Conrad, with
Henry James before him, brought the ‘quality of mind’ – the ultimate test of literature.

Apart from the aesthetic reasons which inspired many writers like Conrad to choose shorter fiction as a form of expression, other seminal and powerful forces – political, social, and intellectual – were directly responsible for the prolific growth of this form in England. Of them, one was the phenomenal rise of the reading public as a result of several benevolent and reformatory Acts passed by the British Parliament, particularly the Education Bill of 1870. Another was the sudden increase in the production of magazines and periodicals virtually to meet the craze of the reading public for short fiction and other information. A third cause lay in the enormous intellectual advancement, especially the radical development in science and technology. Invention of new machines and their improved models revolutionized printing technology which was ostensibly related to the brisk market in magazines, periodicals and newspapers. Publishers solicited short fiction – for the days of the three-decker novels were at an end with the death of George Eliot in 1880 – and offered lucrative payment on publication of contributions. It is small wonder if Conrad in the throes of acute financial crises should respond to the appeals of publishers and contribute short fiction to various magazines. Conrad’s intermittent writing of short fiction sometimes brought emotional relief to his mind stricken with turmoil and depression after the prolonged strain of writing novels.

The short fiction of Conrad, like his great novels, is distinguished for its concentration and integration of form and content. Indeed, his stories contain an added meaning which is centrally located in a well-knit form or structure. This gives shape to the rich variety of themes embedded in the stories.

In his essay “Technique as Discovery” Mark Schorer has stated that “Under the immense artistic preoccupation of James and Conrad and Joyce, the form of the
Conrad's experiments with form in fiction are remarkable. He has laid emphasis on inclusion of materials from as many sources as possible. This means that the novel in his hand had to become the receptacle of a large vision of human experience. Conrad conceived of the novel in broader perspective so that subject matters as diverse as history, psychology, sociology, fiction and poetry were accommodated in it and the power of the imagination remained dominant as a vital constituent element.

Mark Schorer in the same essay defines technique as "any selection, structure, or distortion, any form of rhythm imposed upon the world of action; by means of which ... our apprehension of the world of action is enriched or renewed. In this sense, everything is technique which is not the lump of experience itself." Conrad, like Flaubert and Henry James before him, recognised that a concern with prose fiction meant a concern with form. He unsettled the conventional narrative sequences which had hitherto prevailed in the English novel and broke it up into small scenes each of which would function like an image, as in poetry. He also insisted that each part in a novel has significance in relation to its other parts; everything is of importance and nothing can be neglected. To Conrad, the form of the novel is like an edifice in which beauty and solidity are inter-related elements.

The central argument of my thesis is that Conrad also produced a considerable body of short fiction which alone could have made his work memorable in world literature, even if he had not written his great novels. Their value lies in their aesthetic excellence, and the perfect integration of form and content. To attribute these singular merits to Conrad's short fiction is not to suggest that his novels are deficient in these elements. For novels like The Nigger of the 'Narcissus', Lord Jim, Nostromo, The Secret Agent and Under Western Eyes are masterpieces by any standard and are possibly more enriched and
embellished by their conspicuous treatment of form and content, by their wide embracing vision, elevated tone, utmost verisimilitude. But Conrad's genius and creative temperament were also admirably suited to the composition of short fiction. I intend to closely examine nine major works of short fiction for their unique fusion and integration of form and content. While Conrad had brilliantly executed this fusion, he contrived to maintain in his fiction a perfect economy and intensity, concentration and unity of effect. The works considered are *The Lagoon* and *Karain: a Memory; Youth* and *Heart of Darkness; Typhoon, Falk, Amy Foster, The Secret Sharer* and *The Shadow-Line.*

I hope to apply certain criteria to analyse the form and content in Conrad's shorter fiction. These criteria are: themes, characterization, narrative pattern, use of location, and use of stylistic devices. On close study it is seen that in Conrad's shorter fiction a rich pattern of themes is brought out 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. In some of his fiction Conrad follows a linear narrative method, and in some others an indirect oblique narrative technique by introducing a series of time-shifts. He presents his characters through multiple points of view. Environments in his novels and shorter fiction are living and dynamic and interact with the characters in such a way as to lead them to victory or disaster. In this way a moral dilemma is enacted against the backdrop of nature or the cosmos. Conrad's language and style are also a medium for his meaning and a necessary means to integrate form and themes in his shorter fiction. For he adopted many devices, both structural and stylistic, in order to render objectively the different aspects of reality.

Indeed, these complex themes in Conrad's shorter fiction can only be brought out with the help of his innovative narrative technique. In *Heart of Darkness,* for example, Conrad's prime objective is to highlight Kurtz's moral struggle.
This novella can be read as a commentary on the division of human personality under the pressures of the double claims of an ideal and its abstract principles, and its practical application. Kurtz and Marlow are such characters who symbolise the two categories of human beings. In Chapter VI it will be shown how Conrad follows the method of multiple points of view to present Kurtz’s moral struggle effectively.

Notes and References


6 Cited by Ian Watt, ibid, p. 42.

7 Ian Watt, ibid, p. 42.


13 H. James, “The Art of Fiction” (1884), op. cit, p. 36.

14 H. James, “The Art of Fiction” (1884), p. 36.
Conrad's pressing necessity for money was well-known. Throughout his life he spent money prodigally, due in part to maintaining the status of a "gentleman" before the native English to whom he obviously appeared a foreigner. Moreover, he behaved over money as though his loving and critical uncle Tadeusz Bobrowski was still there, ready to rescue him in his distress and grief. Consequently, the years 1894 to 1896 — between the death of Tadeusz and the marriage of Jessie George — were the most insecure of Conrad's life.

As for the sale of his stories, he showed indifference as to where they appeared as long as he received payment. His need to secure high payment made his early stories appear in magazines less respectable to him: 'The Savoy' and 'Cosmopolis', for example. He, however, found respectability only with 'The Cornhill' and, of course, 'Blackwood's'. His desperate economic conditions are often reflected in his letters.

i) His letter to Fisher Unwin, dated 22 July 1896:

"But I must live. I don't care where I appear since the acceptance of such stories is not based upon their artistic worth .... If you knew the wear and tear of my writing you would understand my desire for some return. I writhe in doubt over every line .... I perspire in incertitude over every word" [Quoted in F.R. Karl. *Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), p. 378].

ii) Letter to Mrs. Sanders, dated 9 September, 1900.

"Sometimes I fancy I am breaking up mentally. I have been much worried this year. First illness; afterwards the death of poor Stephen Crane upset me horribly delaying my work, and all the time "Maga's" next number hanging over my head. Yet I've written 1,20,000 words in ten months. ... I finished in July and felt limp done up, dazed, like a man waking up from a nightmare" [ibid, p. 502].

*Conrad was then facing a near financial diaster. Blackwood sent £100 to relieve Conrad of this predicament. In this letter he thanked Mr Blackwood, and expressed his grief.*

iii) Letter to Pinker, dated, 6 January 1902:
"Meantime I am nearly going mad with worry. You may imagine I am hard
pushed if I come to you again without a scrap of Ms. But you must do the best
you can for me — and if you can not or are disinclined to make a further advance
pray tell me so at once (by return of post to the Pent) and I'll see what I can do
with B'wood. ..." [ibid, p. 524-5]

23 Gail Fraser, "The short Fiction", The Cambridge Companion of Joseph Conrad,


26 Conrad, A Personal Record : A Familiar Preface, p. xix; cited by Adam Gillon,

27 Gerard Jean- Aubry, The Sea Dreamer, trans. Helen Sebba ( Garden City, N. Y.,
1957), p. 175.

28 A. Gillon, op.cit. pp.16-17.

29 Conrad, Notes on Life and Letters, " Poland Revisited" ( London: J. M. Dent and
Sons, 1921), p.168.


31 Conrad's Letters to Madame Poradowska, p 44; cited by Paul Kirschner, Conrad :
The Psychologist as Artist, 1968, p. 184.

32 Ford Madox Ford, Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance (London,1924),
p.195.

33 H.–D Davray, Mercure de France, Paris Jul. 1899, p.266; cited by Paul
Kirschner, ibid. p.184, n1.

pp 185-6.


36 Conrad's Letters to Madame Poradowska, op. cit. p.84.

37 Letters from Conrad, p.130; cited by Kirschner, p. 192.


40 Zdzislaw Najder, Conrad's Polish Background: Letters to and from Polish

41 Lettres francaises pp.51-2; cited in Kirschner, p.192.

42 Ford, A Personal Remembrance, p.195.


46 Cited by Paul Kirschner, p.208.


48 Conrad to Mme Poradowska, 29 Oct. or 5 Nov., 1894; *Letters to Mme Poradowska*, p.84.

49 *ibid.*, p.11.


64 *ibid*, pp. 17-8.

65 Graver, *Conrad’s Short Fiction*, p. 18.
66 Graver, *ibid*, p. 16.
71 Lawrence Graver, *op cit* pp. 23, 24.
74 Samuel Hynes, “The Art of Telling : An Introduction to Conrad’s Tales”, p. xi.
79 Gail Fraser, “The Short Fiction”, p. 27.
84 H. James, “The Art of Fiction”, *ibid*, p. 42.


96 Mark Schorer, “Technique as Discovery”; in F.R. Karl, *ibid*, p. 43.