Chapter – IV

THEORIES OF FICTION (II)

Narrative Theory: Henry James and Joseph Conrad

The theory of the novel before Flaubert, James and Conrad was generally mimetic in direction and moral in tone; mimesis was the means to morality as an end. It was also concerned only with the moral implications of technique in fiction. One distinguishing feature of narrative theory in English from Fielding to Joseph Conrad has been its stress on the obtrusiveness of the author. In Fielding and Scott, Dickens and Hardy, Thackeray and George Eliot, the author is present everywhere in person to keep us well informed on all the circumstances of action, to explain the characters to us and help us form the right opinion of them, to offer pieces of wisdom and good feeling along with the movement of the story, and finally to point out how, through the failures and successes of the characters, we might form a sane and right philosophy of conduct.

Around the end of the nineteenth century or the start of the twentieth there occurred a great "turn of the novel". The powerful tradition of Victorian fiction – that was moral, realistic, and popular in nature – gave way to a new trend different and more complex – the trend of the “modern” novel. This change did not occur only in Britain; it was part of the global transformation of the arts. In Europe, and more slowly in the United States, the form of the novel was passing through a transition. The change was located not merely in the choice of subjects, but there were innovations in the structure of novels. The novel was seriously taken as an ‘art’ form. It was aspiring to become a far more complex, various, open, and self-conscious form. For life had undergone a radical change. It was “a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope
surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end". And it was the task of the novelist to convey the fresh sense of life. Thus the modern novel, modern consciousness, eschewed all those conventional elements and patterns of Victorian fiction and became free to deal with the strange plotless insubstantiality that was life or reality itself. Virginia Woolf argued that if the writer was free and had the freedom to choose his subjects and if he could base his work upon his feelings, and not upon the conventions, he would produce a characteristic modern novel with

> no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love-interest or catastrophe in the accepted sense, and perhaps not a single button sewn on as the Bond Street tailors would have it.

The novel became more complex when in the hands of Henry James and Joseph Conrad the novel 'encoded' a kind of reality which had not been explored by the Victorian novelists. At the same time, Victorian novelists and critics had already expounded many of the critical principles that appeared in the essays of James and Conrad. In the 1880s and 1890s when James and Conrad published their famous essays on the art of fiction, many of their ideas had found expression in both English and French literature. Pater and Ruskin in England and Flaubert and his followers in France advocated that the creation and appreciation of beauty are in themselves moral acts, that form and matter should be inseparable, that the artist presents not the "mere fact" of the world, but his sense of the world and that his art is great "in proportion to the truth of his presentment of that sense". Moreover, a number of statements made by Pater in the conclusion to *The Renaissance* (1873) are echoed in James and Conrad. Pater defined "experience" as the "impressions of the individual mind". This reminds us of James's definition of experience as "the very atmosphere of the mind". Again Pater's idea of experience as a flux, as a stream of impressions, "unstable, flickering, inconsistent" anticipated Conrad's affirmation of the artist's task: "To snatch in a moment of courage, from the remorseless rush of time, a passing phase of life". That the principles
of economy and selection must be followed in writing fiction, that the value of a book is determined by the quality of the mind of the author, that the novel primarily purports to be a picture of life which binds readers together by an extension of human sympathy and emotional appeal, thereby enabling them to experience the emotions of others – these ideas are elaborately reflected in the essays of George Eliot, as much as they form an essential part of James’s and Conrad’s ideas on fiction. But one hardly finds in the essays of George Eliot, or in the criticism of Dickens or Scott, Thackeray or Trollope, James’ and Conrad’s passionate affirmation of or arduous preoccupation with the validity and importance of aesthetic consciousness and its power.

James was a transitional figure in English fiction and took over the serious task of recreating the art of fiction as a form of critical intelligence. He did so by salvaging it from “the debris of tradition” and by refusing to make it subservient to “the compromises of popularity”. He thought of raising it to “the dignity of moral power which novelists like Balzac, Turgenev, and Flaubert had already won for it in Europe, but which only Hawthorne and George Eliot had reached in the novel of the English – speaking world”. Conrad was a modernist experimentalist. He was unhappy with ready-made ways of telling a story and also with ready-made ways of delineating and interpreting character. No doubt modern psychology and its interpretation of the concept of psyche encouraged writers like James and Conrad to deliberate on and devise new techniques, new procedures, new patterns for proper rendition of human psychology, or of the subjective aspect of experience. In fact, the writers of the period between 1885 and 1925 wanted to make the novel a distinct literary form, as different as possible in structure from the philosophical essay, and the historical chronicle, with which in the beginning it was so closely associated. The new writers, including James, Conrad and Ford Madox Ford, the pioneers in this respect, discarded the older methods and patterns in favour of that diverse and complex narrative form characterized by discontinuity, freakish changefulness, and unpredictability. They felt that a continuous linear action is
too unlike ordinary experience which contains no doubt freakish, accidental interruptions and overleaping of time and circumstance. They postulated that life makes impressions on our senses and thus it can best be rendered by an abrupt shift from one series of events, one group of characters, one centre of consciousness, to another. After George Eliot, James and Conrad were engaged in producing fiction that represented truth to life and experience.

The narrative theories of James and Conrad define and their fiction illustrates, two ways of revealing the inner life of characters in fiction. For them, the novelist’s chief concern is the inner life of a character. Conrad was mainly preoccupied with the moral and psychological aspects of his subjects, and therefore rendered an inner state affected by external actions. Conrad advised a young writer to “treat events only as illustrative of human situations – as the outward sign of inward feelings”. Conrad also affirmed in the preface to Typhoon: “As in most of my writings I insist not on the events but on their effect upon the persons in the tale”. Henry James held the view that the novelist reveals the thoughts and feelings of a character by tracing what passes in the mind of the character. In his prefaces James repeatedly insisted that the centre of a work and the source of its interest is inherent in the consciousness of the central character. Regarding Roderick Hudson James has commented: “The centre of interest ... is in Rowland Mallet’s consciousness, and the drama is the very drama of that consciousness”. As theorists, James and Conrad differed in many ways: James emphasized the consciousness of the character; Conrad’s emphasis was on the essential quality of the situation in which characters are involved. Conrad was intent on capturing the psychological moment of a situation in order to disclose “the stress and passion within the core of each convincing moment”. But their similarities are equally significant. They both rejected what James described as “the everlasting vulgar chapters of accidents, the death rattle and rumble, which rises from the mere surface of things”. They decided to penetrate beyond surfaces to the
underlying truths of a case, whether the focus was centred on the psychological moment of a situation or on the workings of a character’s consciousness.

They also placed questions of conduct at the centre of their novels. For James and Conrad, psychological forces are not to be separated from moral issues. According to them, attitudes and actions determine the value of a character’s knowledge. And the strength and weaknesses of characters are revealed primarily through their relationships with others. In their fiction, the central characters suffer betrayal and disillusionment, bear mental anguish and loss. But then the characters like Strether and Marlow are particularly unique for their capacity to feel and suffer as also to support a standard of conduct, in the actions of men and women in their private relationships or of men at sea. Their unremitting patience and fidelity to certain values make them unique as characters gifted with a fine conscience.

The modernist writers did not suggest a sharp and complete break with the tradition of the Victorian novel. In effect, they reacted against some of its main tendencies – reactions against “Victorian” conventions of narrative and literary morality, authorship and readership. But many of the Victorian conventions and myths continued to exert their influence on modern fiction. Particularly, some distinctive characteristics of Victorian fiction – its omniscient and godlike voice, its weighty realism, its chronological plotting, its presiding moral confidence, its role as the bourgeois epic – leave their indelible marks on “British fiction to this moment”. In general, the modernist writers’ intention was to infuse new life into a form which in the hands of the older writers had been so impoverished, lifeless and uninteresting. Only George Eliot struck a different note in her treatment of form, plot-construction and logical evolution of character in fiction which was later emulated by Henry James.

In fact, the laws conditioning the form of George Eliot’s novels are the same laws that condition those of Henry James and Wells and Conrad and Arnold Bennett. Hers are the first examples in English of the novel in its mature form; in them it structurally comes of age.
The great turn of the English novel constituted "the continuity and discontinuity, the bridge and the chasm, that moved fiction out of Victorianism and into the spirit of the modern". The fact was that at this point of time George Eliot was a British Victorian writer at the close of her career, and James an "exiled modern novelist" who had just begun his career.

**Henry James**

James was a great transitional figure in both the theory and practice of his fiction. For the period itself from 1865 to 1915 which virtually covered the span of his creative activities, represents a transitional period in English fiction. He was the forerunner, model, and source for the Modern novel; he was also responsible for remarkable innovations in fictional technique.

In his theory of fiction James paid close attention to the interdependence of the writer and his cultural context. James believed that "art blooms only where the soil is deep". A denser social structure and a more complex social civilization could encourage the writer, fire his imagination, and the writer's culture not only supplies material to him, but also provides him with an environment. It produces as well the critical reaction to his work that might inspire and sustain him or defeat and destroy him. According to James, Balzac and Turgénev had the advantages of being placed in countries like France and Russia of variegated culture, socially complex and historically complicated. That is why James favoured European cultures more than American culture.

Culture, environment and experience, James held, are intimately bound. He defined the novel as "a personal, a direct impression of life". In James's critical vocabulary two most important words are 'impressions' and 'consciousness'. James stated that consciousness is the storehouse of impressions. Talking of reality in his prefaces, he said that life was all "inclusion and confusion", a "thick jungle" – an endless and multitudinous
stream. Experience was simply a gathering of impressions from various encounters in life, and then they were stored in the consciousness for ordering and examination to be used or reused for creating an idea, or presenting a view of the world.

According to James there can be no planning and no end to the gathering of impressions. The novelist snatches whatever is “floated” into his mind “by the current of life” and whatever his web of consciousness can hold. In his *Notebooks* and Prefaces James repeatedly described the “germs” from which his novels took shape. The “germs” or “seeds” varied widely from simple random anecdotes to occasional encounters with characters, from the vivid impression of a particular house or city to a reported speech or an action that was observed. All these impressions found their way to settle in the deeper levels of consciousness, where some were related, but most not, and all in a state of strange fermentation which would produce something new.

James held that the “house of fiction” had millions of windows, at each of which a novelist would sit and look at the flux and flow of life. And each novelist was committed to discover and report his own ‘reality’ through his window. For James felt that there existed no single reality.

Like the word ‘impression’, the word ‘imagination’ was as vital in James’s critical vocabulary and theory of fiction, but exceeding both in importance was, of course, the word ‘consciousness’. James stated that the process of the imagination was almost mystical. He felt that though the imagination could be generally understood, it could not be explained. It was outside the control of the writer and seemed to have a will and life of its own.

It was required of the artist that he must dive down into “the dim underworld of fiction, the great glazed tank of art, [where] strange silent subjects float”. James suggested that the artist must exploit the unconscious, and for this act he
should make an act of surrender to “the luminous paradise of art”.25 Here lies James’s distinction from his fellow contemporaries.

About the presentation of reality, James wrote that to write a good novel the novelist must “possess the sense of reality”.26 For humanity “is immense, and reality has a myriad forms”. The novelist must write from experience which is limitless and incomplete; it is “the very atmosphere of the mind”.27 To the young aspirant novelist he advised: “Try to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost”.28 He further elaborated that “the air of reality (solidity of specification) seems to me to be the supreme virtue of a novel”29 on which all its other qualities “helplessly and submissively depend”, including the conscious ‘moral purpose’. For the beginning and the end of the novelist’s art was

*to render the look or things, the look that conveys their meaning, to catch the colour, the relief, the expression, the surface, the substance of the human spectacle.*30

Thus the novelist must engage himself in producing “the illusion of life” successfully and in this regard, his task was comparable to that of his fellow artist the painter. But then the novelist cannot be expected to present life in all its entirety and complexity.

“Art is essentially selection, but it is a selection whose main care is to be typical, to be inclusive”.31 This does not imply that the novelist should eschew all that is bad, ugly, and sad, and include and extol only what is good and heavenly, James reminded the young novelist of his “first duty to be as complete as possible – to make as perfect a work. Be generous and delicate and pursue the prize”.32

About the novel’s subject James said the whole human consciousness –

*can do simply everything, and that is its strength and its life. Its plasticity, its elasticity are infinite; there is no colour, no extension it may not take from the nature of its subject or the temper of its craftsman.*33
For the subject, by inference, then James valued freedom and 'elasticity'. James also spoke of another kind of freedom that must be granted to the subject. The author must have that "respect for the liberty of the subject which I should be willing to name as the great sign of the painter of the first order". In brief, subjects live their own lives and the author trying to impose on them any abstractions such as ideas, morals, and philosophy would be in effect violating their freedom and clamping silence on that "truthful hum of the human scene at large".

James rebelled throughout his career against the conventional notions of plot in fiction. He reacted in particular to Walter Besant's comments embodied in his "The Art of Fiction" (April 25, 1884) that fictions live by their "stories" and that there must be "adventure" in them. Here "adventure" generally meant external events or actions. In refuting Besant, James in his "The Art of Fiction" (September, 1884) extended the meaning of "actions" to include "the most subtle and psychological". James was, in fact, pushing the action from the outside to the inside, pointing the direction of the action away from the realm of the physical towards the realm of the psychological.

James was equally against discursiveness and diffusiveness in fiction, and sought for a novel's centre - the internal actions and reactions, musings and meditations or the dramatized consciousness rather than external events constituted the novel's centre. And in his early prefaces (1907-09) James had repeatedly analyzed the centres and actions of his own novels in terms of a character's consciousness. Maisie, Kate Croy and Strether provide such centres of action.

In James's theory of fiction characters occupy a dominant place. And James found his 'centres' most frequently in dramas of consciousness in individual characters. He often found the 'germs' or 'seeds' for his fiction in characters just as his two favourite authors Balzac and Turgénev had done. Asserting the integration of character and plot, James remarked:
Character, in any sense in which we get at it, is action, and action is plot, and any plot which hangs together, even if it pretends to interest us only in the fashion of a Chinese puzzle, plays upon our emotion, our suspense, by means of personal references. We care what happens to people only in proportion as we know what people are.

Creation of character was, for James, infinitely complex like any “rendering.” The artist must pay attention to the portrayal of ‘conditions’ of the creatures “with whom he is concerned”, so that the characters were not “pretended portrayals”, but “complete representation”. These conditions included ‘evocation of the medium, ... distillation of the natural and social air”. As to how the characters were transfigured in the process of art, James wrote: “The original gives hints, but the writer does what he likes with them, and imports new elements into the picture”. This transfiguration was affected by the magic power of imagination. At the same time the characters were rendered highly ‘interesting’

as subjects of fate, the figures, round whom a situation closes, in proportion as, sharing this existence, we feel where fate comes in and just how it gets at them. In the void they are not interesting – and Balzac, like nature herself, abhorred a vacuum.

On the question of form, James saw it as the writer’s shaping of the lump of experience, that disordered fragment of life with which he begins. If the writer has achieved an “organic whole” in his fiction, the form is not visible as something imposed on it from outside like a sheath on the blade, but it permeates and penetrates, and animates the totality. Its presence is felt everywhere, but nowhere seen or separable. Idea and form, “the story and the novel” – were the needle and the thread:

The story and the novel, the idea and the form, are the needle and thread, and I never heard of a guild of tailors who recommended the use of the thread without the needle, or the needle without the thread.

According to James, a novel becomes a work of art when it must possess not only pleasing shapes, proportion, and roundness, but all these qualities need to be brought into an organic whole which gives it perfect form. For a novel is a
“living thing, all one and continuous [where] ... in each of the parts there is something of each of the other parts”. James argued that composition of a novel did not exist “in a series of blocks”, but all the parts were “intimately associated” with each other and contributed in a combined way to that “one general effect of expression”. Consequently, description and dialogue, incident and characterization are not contrary to each other, nor is one independent of the other. Each is illustrative of the other, integrating form and content. The artist should aim at this, and also make his novel highly interesting.

James’s ultimate definition of form is found in a letter to Hugh Walpole (1912); “Strenuous selection and comparison are ... the very essence of art .... Form is substance to that degree that there is absolutely no substance without it. Form alone takes, and holds and preserves, substance – saves it from the welter of helpless verbiage that we swim in as in a sea of tasteless tepid pudding”. Two other terms – economy and waste – are also closely related to James’s view of form. He wrote:

There is life and life, and as waste is only life sacrificed and thereby prevented from ‘counting’, I delight in a deep-breathing economy and an organic form.

Point of view was intrinsic to James’s sense of form in fiction and therefore an important component of James’s narrative structures. James’ concern for point of view was a major contribution to the theory and practice of the English novel. The presentation of point of view in The Ambassadors, for example, was identified by Dorothy Richardson some time before 1910 as “a new way of statement”. This new way of statement referred to Henry James’s device for maintaining a consistent viewpoint or level of awareness through which the reader is given the facts of his story. In handling the narrative of The Ambassadors he stated that “the first person, in the long piece, is a form foredoomed to looseness”. Looseness, he added, “was never much my affair.” The point of view, or this particular method of revelation, is realized through a
kind of "mutual irradiation"⁵⁰ – Strether illuminating Maria, she illuminating him, the two illuminating Waymarsh, and Waymarsh in turn throwing light on the other two. This multiple illumination or unravelling of a situation or a character is no doubt the method of drama, but in a novel it is used with greater subtlety. By this method the characters are made to expose their complexity with the minimal intervention of the author.

It is evident that James's theory of fiction includes a wide range of issues relating to the creation and composition of fiction. It shows his concern for rendering the impressions of life, concern for execution, for creating a dramatised consciousness, for an essential form, and for the need of a point of view, of a reflector or register. He also thought of an extra dimension in fiction – his concern for the 'morality', the 'philosophy', the 'meaning', the theme – as he variously called it. James believed that the very perfection of a work of art would contain a pervasive and unconscious morality. This definitely meant a refutation of Walter Besant's contention that a novel must have a "conscious moral purpose".⁵¹ James insisted that no good novel would come out of 'a superficial mind', for

*the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer. In proportion as that intelligence is fine will the novel, the picture, the statue partake of the substance of beauty and truth.*⁵²

James also added that a novel's purpose is to contain all these elements in perfect order, where the moral meaning gives sense to form, and form in turn contains moral meaning. For there was one point, James affirmed, "at which the moral sense and the artistic sense lie very near together".⁵³

**Joseph Conrad**

In 1914 Henry James contributed two articles to the "Times Literary Supplement" under the title "The Younger Generation". In the first article
(March 19, 1914) James chiefly dealt with H.G. Wells and Arnold Bennett, while in the second (April 2, 1914) he dwelt on Hugh Walpole, Conrad, Edith Wharton, and Compton Mackenzie. The main thrust of his argument was that the younger generation of writers divided themselves into two groups: those who concerned themselves with the presentation of their subject— with selection and form and method, and those who did not. The majority of contemporary novelists belonged to the group represented by Wells and Bennett. Conrad for whom James had mixed praise and admiration seemed to have existed at the opposite extreme from Wells and Bennett. Conrad, for his part, had always remained deferential, and even obsequious to James, and continued to address James as Cher maître. Commenting on Conrad's writing, James said that it is

*an extraordinary exhibition of method by the fact that the method is, we venture to say, without a precedent in any like work. It places Mr. Conrad absolutely alone as a votary of the way to do a thing that shall make it undergo most doing. The way to do it that shall make it undergo least is the line on which we are mostly now used to see prizes carried off, so that the author of Chance gathers up on this showing all sorts of comparative distinction.*

By this 'extraordinary exhibition of method' James implied that Conrad, unlike many of his contemporaries in English fiction, was preoccupied with technique for its own sake, of which he was 'absolutely alone as a votary'. James's approval of Conrad, however, had always been persistently qualified, although the reviewers of Chance ranked Conrad along with Hardy and James as one of the greatest living novelists.

Conrad's area of interest, his strong obsession was with the idea of form and craftsmanship in fiction. He is in line with Flaubert, James, Joyce, and Gide, among his contemporaries, who consciously and seriously worked on innovations in the form and craft of fiction. Of Conrad's major works, Under Western Eyes 'presents his method in archetype'.
In his essay "Technique as Discovery" Mark Schorer stated that "under the immense artistic preoccupation of James and Conrad and Joyce, the form of the novel changed, and with the technical, analogous changes took place in substance, in point of view, in the whole conception of fiction". Schorer defined 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. Conrad also laid emphasis on inclusiveness of materials from as many sources as possible. This means that the novel in his hand had to become the receptacle of a large range of human experience. Conrad conceived of the novel as history, psychology, sociology, fiction, and poetry cast into one structure and informed by the power of the imagination. He also initiated a major breakthrough in the technical aspects of the novel. He unsettled the conventional narrative sequences which had hitherto prevailed in English fiction 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 had significance in relation to its other parts; everything was of importance and nothing could be neglected. To Conrad, the form of the novel was like an edifice in which beauty and solidity were interrelated elements.

James too, before Conrad, developed an extended architectural metaphor in talking about the perfection of his own novel *The Portrait of a Lady* which has a ‘superior roundness’ and is ‘the most proportioned of his productions after *The Ambassadors*’. Here the concept of form is equated with excellence. James also had offered a comprehensive succinct definition of form in his letter to Hugh Walpole in 1912 quoted earlier.
Indeed, at the turn of the nineteenth century Henry James and Conrad, Ford Madox Ford and Stephen Crane – ironically, none of them were English by birth – were wholly devoted to the idea of the novel as an art form. Although they were different in nature and diametrically opposed to one another in terms of literary aims and aesthetic principles, they were united by their dedication to the art of fiction, by their abiding concern with style and form, and by their study of Flaubert and Maupassant. What is more, they liked and valued the society of fellow artists. James stated that

> the best things come, as a general thing, from talents that are members of a group; every man works better when he has companions working in the same line, and yielding the stimulus of suggestion, comparison, emulation.\(^6^8\)

But Henry James discarded labels and refused to subscribe to any doctrines. For Conrad, to be judged by the authority of a school is to show a “weakness of inferior minds” and a sign of intellectual cowardice.\(^6^1\) James, Wells, Conrad and Stephen Crane held free and exhaustive discussions on fiction and its problems of execution. These discussions were fresh, innovative and inspiring. These writers along with James Joyce and Virginia Woolf mainly concentrated on evolving new techniques of form and style by means of which reality in fiction could be plausibly and authentically grasped and presented.

Like James, Conrad saw fiction as an art that demanded of the artist unremitting patience, discipline and sacrifice. Flaubert, before them, imposed upon himself a similar kind of seriousness and dedication required of an artist. Conrad, however, did not find in himself the promise and power of a critic, wrote no essay on the nature of criticism as did James, nor did he postulate his critical principles and methods.

Despite that, his letters, which illuminate his literary development over a period of some thirty-five years, his famous preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus*', and his essays, especially those on James and Maupassant, Turgenev and John
Galsworthy and his essay on "Books" are replete with Conrad’s ideas on fiction and the creative imagination.

Both James and Conrad as novelists looked upon form and substance as inseparable, and thought that the achievement of formal perfection in fiction is a moral as well as artistic obligation; for they made no distinction between moral and aesthetic values in fiction. Their idea of the novel was neither didactic nor narrowly technical. While they both described the novel as "picture" and employed the terms of the painter, they valued at the same time the apprehension of the inwardness of experience in fiction. For James, as for Conrad, the sense of reality in a work of fiction depends not merely on the accurate rendering of surfaces – but upon the power of the artist’s particular vision of the world, upon his

expression of the inner character of things which demands interpretation, and is, so to speak, personal to the interpreter.62

Both writers valued the work of fiction as a "a personal, a direct impression of life"63 – which is the expression of the writer’s mind and history – and needs to be analyzed. James had the conviction that “the deepest quality of the work of art will always be the quality of mind of the producer”.64 Conrad expressed the same view when he asserted that “the novelist stands confessed in his works”65 because “the creator can only express himself in his creation”.66

In spite of remarkable similarities in their treatment of essential problems of narrative art James and Conrad differed in their terminology. James defined the art of the novelist as the art of representation:

The most fundamental and general sign of the novel is its being everywhere an effort at representation – this is the beginning and the end of it.67

Conrad, on the other hand, defined the novelist’s art as the art of self-expression. James also distinguished between “statement” and “representation”. While “statement” means informing the reader of facts,
"representation" means rendering the reality of an experience where reality does not signify a literal copy or a photographic reproduction of what the writer sees. For James, the artist pours his material in the crucible of his imagination and transforms the substance of consciousness into new forms. In his words, art is a "chemical transmutation for the aesthetic, the representational, end".\textsuperscript{68} The artist, as Conrad revealed him in his prefaces and author's notes, is one "for whom self-expression must, by definition, be the principal object, if not the only \textit{raison d'être}, of his existence".\textsuperscript{69} By the term 'self-expression' Conrad does not mean that the novelist must write about himself only or record his own feelings and emotions, his past and present. For Conrad, art is 'self-expression' in that the artist in his mind creates "for himself a world, great or little in which he can honestly believe".\textsuperscript{70} Also underlying Conrad's idea of art as self-expression is the belief that a work of art is created in the writer's mind by the "process of [his] imagination and of [his] intelligence".\textsuperscript{71}

For Conrad, as for James, the novelist expresses what is apart from himself, and not his own intimate, essential states and feelings. The artist immerses himself in life, draws upon the substance there and then transforms it into art with the alchemy of imagination. Conrad also defined art as "a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect".\textsuperscript{72} This assertion springs from Conrad's conviction that the earth, and not the "cold and immutable heaven",\textsuperscript{73} is the source of the novelist's inspiration. In order 'to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe' the artist should do well to acquire certain values: simplicity and fidelity, simplicity in looking directly at the things that he sees and describing them as he sees them, and fidelity in not being led away from his most deeply held convictions, whatever they may happen to be.

\textit{The inherent greatness of the man consists in this, that he will let none of the fascinations that beset a writer working in loneliness turn him away from the straight path, from the vouchsafed vision of a excellence.}\textsuperscript{74}
Conrad further elaborated that Maupassant showed courage and justice in dealing with the facts of life. He looked at life with "an eye of profound pity upon their troubles, deceptions and misery". He looked at them all – and never turned away his head. Conrad admitted being inspired by Maupassant.

But the task Conrad set before the artist is no doubt serious and he would require some preparation for it:

Let him (the artist) mature the strength of his imagination amongst the things of this earth, which it is his business to cherish and know, and refrain from calling down his inspiration ready-made from some heaven of perfection of which he knows nothing.

As Conrad stated, the artist can hope to find the ‘promise of perfection’ for his art in his ‘impartial practice of life’, rather than in the ‘absurd formulas’ urging him to follow this or that ‘particular method of technique or conception’. Conrad defined creation of a work of art as “the pressing out of oneself the substance of one’s work”, whereas James considered the experience of artistic creation in terms of a “luxurious immersion” by which the artist can enjoy “the great extension, great beyond all others, of experience and of consciousness”.

In an early letter to Edward Noble Conrad gave significant suggestions as to how the art of writing fiction should be approached as a descent into himself. A former seaman, Edward Noble was now a writer at the beginning of his career:

Remember that imagination (I wish I had it) should be used to create human souls to disclose human hearts, - and not to create events that are properly speaking accidents only .... you must squeeze out of yourself every sensation, every thought, every image, - mercilessly, without reserve and without remorse : you must search the darkest corners of your heart, the most remote recesses of your brain, - you must search them for the image, for the glamour, for the right expression. And you must do it sincerely, at any cost : you must do it so that at the end of your day’s work you should feel exhausted, emptied of every sensation and every thought ....

Conrad insisted on personally felt experience and on the artist’s sincerity of endeavour in transmuting it into a work of art with the help of imagination, that ‘poetic faculty’. In the letters he frequently spoke of “tearing” or “spinning” or “squeezing” or “dragging” or “hammering” the sentence or the tale or the novel
out of himself. Conrad referred to the mind’s introspective power in images that “represent creation as the exploration of one’s inward darkness”.\textsuperscript{82} Conrad saw himself as a miner who descends into the dark pit of himself to extract his material, whereas James saw the artist as a watcher in the window in the House of Fiction. In response to Garnett’s criticism of \textit{Lord Jim} Conrad admitted his failure to breathe life into “my lump of clay I had been lugging up from the bottom of the pit.”\textsuperscript{83}

Later in his life he presented himself as working “like a coal-miner in his pit quarrying all my English sentences out of a black night”\textsuperscript{84} Conrad also pointed out that it is the artist’s duty and responsibility to descend

\begin{quote}
\textit{within himself, and in that lonely region of stress and strife, if he be deserving and fortunate, he finds the terms of his appeal.}\textsuperscript{85}
\end{quote}

The artist’s task is to hold up unquestioningly “the rescued fragment” of life before all eyes with clarity and in the light of a sincere mood. It is

\begin{quote}
\textit{to show its vibration, its colour, its form; and through its movement, its form, and its colour, reveal the substance of its truth – disclose its inspiring secret: the stress and passion within the core of each convincing moment.}\textsuperscript{86}
\end{quote}

Since the individual’s ‘cry to the artist is “Take me out of myself” meaning really, out of my perishable activity into the light of imperishable consciousness,\textsuperscript{87} the creative art of a writer of fiction, which is “Action in its essence”, may be compared to

\begin{quote}
\textit{rescue work carried out in darkness against cross gusts of wind swaying the action of a great multitude. It is rescue work, this snatching of vanishing phases of turbulence, disguised in fair words, out of the native obscurity into a light where the struggling forms may be seen, seized upon, endowed with the only possible form of permanence in this world of relative values – the permanence of memory.}\textsuperscript{88}
\end{quote}

For Conrad, it is the artist’s individuality that like a “seed in the ground expresses itself, manifests itself, in plant and flower”.\textsuperscript{89} It is true at the same time that some of Conrad’s works, such as \textit{Lord Jim} and \textit{Nostromo}, are based
on the germ of remembered facts and impressions and acknowledged as highly complex creations of the artist's imagination. Indeed, when Conrad denied having an inventive gift, he actually emphasized the importance of accuracy in referring to names, numbers, places, and historical events. All the evidence suggests that Conrad often created a character by combining traits from a real observed person with the features of other persons rescued from memory. 

As for the or presentation of verisimilitude in a particular novel or tale, Conrad saw it as the artist's task to reveal a manifold, enveloping truth. In the preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* the artist "seeks the truth" which remaining below the surface of things is "manifold and one, underlying ... every aspect" of the "visible universe". Conrad, however, did not make explicit the nature of truth he had in mind. What he made clear in the preface is that the truth to be revealed is not one of the laws of nature; nor does this truth signify any kind of transcendent reality of which the material object is a symbol or emanation. He suggested that some essence or reality lies hidden beyond visible surfaces, for which the novelist or his characters needs to look through some veil or mist. He also denied the existence of any kind of unchanging absolute truth and persisted in saying that this truth is relative as men's conceptions of the changing world change and varies from generation to generation. It is also held that much in Conrad's fiction expresses a conception of truth as a "dark, sinister and fugitive shadow with no image" which, according to Conrad, implies that the "underlying truth" is but a void, a primal darkness without form. It is again worth noting that in the first draft of the preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* Conrad looked upon the artist as one revealing not the "inspiring secret" of the "rescued fragment of life" but its "convincing silence". Conrad also spoke of the limited powers of the artist, that

*form is the artist's (and the scientist's) province, that is all we can understand (and interpret or represent) and that we can't tell what is behind.*
It is obvious that the underlying truth referred to in Conrad's most famous preface is 'ungraspable'. What is valid and explicit, in a work of fiction, is then the writer's consciousness of "the visible world" whose "inspiring secret" he seeks to explore. For this express purpose he must be faithful to the truth of his own feelings; he must affirm "scrupulous fidelity to the truth of my own sensations". Conrad had a further problem:

The problem was to make unfamiliar things credible. To do that I had to create for them, to reproduce for them, to envelop them in their proper atmosphere of actuality. This was the hardest task of all and the most important, in view of that conscientious rendering of truth in thought and fact which has been always my aim.

With that aim in mind Conrad spoke in his first novel *Almayer's Folly* (1895) of men and women very remote from our common perception, but still "there is a bond between us and that humanity". The picture of life "of the far-off countries" is presented with "the same elaboration of detail, coloured with the same tints" as in the artist's attempts to represent life here and around him.

For Conrad, "Imagination, not invention, is the supreme master of art as of life". For Conrad, fiction deals with the real, but to apprehend the real involves "An imaginative and exact rendering of authentic memories" that shows "the spirit of piety towards all things human".

And what is a novel if not a conviction of our fellowmen's existence strong enough to take upon itself a form of imagined life clearer than reality and whose accumulated verisimilitude of selected episodes puts to shame the pride of documentary history?

This shows how Conrad valued and relied on authentic imaginative insight into and rendering of 'selected episodes' of human existence that creates for him the verisimilitude or the illusion of life, Conrad disclosed in his fiction, for all its complexities and personal evasiveness, that "uncompromising commitment to the true complexities of human experience".

Conrad, like James, believed in the artist's freedom:
everyone must walk in the light of his own heart's gospel ... That's my creed from beginning to end. That's my view of life, - a view that rejects all formulas, dogmas and principles of other people's making.\textsuperscript{104}

By this rejection of all "formulas, dogmas and principles" Conrad actually asserted that artistic "-isms", like "Realism, Romanticism, Naturalism", can be only "temporary formulas" the conventions of which would soon limit the creative imagination. Indeed, this emphasis on the real, had been one of the assumptions behind Conrad's stress on 'self-expression'.\textsuperscript{105}

Conrad had adopted many devices, structural as well as stylistic, to objectify his own feelings, his own way of seeing aspects of reality. His multiple viewpoints, dislocations of time, 'placing' of narrators like Marlow and the captains of *The Secret Sharer* and *The Shadow-Line*; his 'placing' of overheated, even melodramatic climaxes, devastating ironic juxtapositions and repetitions, violent switches of narrative tempo from a dragging slow motion to high speed; passages of phantasmagoria or dream set against passages of near – realism – these are some of the distinctive features of Conrad's narrative method. Conrad's indirect or oblique narrative method has been helped by his use of a series of time-shifts often considered his greatest triumph, because Conrad has created with this technique

\textit{the illusion of life being lived all at once by a great number of very different people. He does this partly by his technique of passing backward and forward in time, thereby removing from the reader all temptation to thin out events by stringing them on a long chain.}\textsuperscript{106}

Conrad also advocates that all art should appeal emotionally, primarily to the senses – to our senses of pity and beauty, pain and mystery. Art must, as Conrad remarks, in the preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*,
The passage reminds us of Walter Pater who stated in his "The school of Giorgione" (1877) : "All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music". Derived from Schopenhauer, this idea had become an aesthetic commonplace by the 1890s. It was argued that music mainfests that indivisibility of form and content to which the other arts aspire. Conrad has also postulated that the artist should strive for attainment of the "perfect blending of form and substance" through complete devotion and unceasing care for "the shape and ring of sentences", that is, the illusion of life can be recreated only when the presentation of form is perfect. For "the Whole of the truth lies in the presentation".

But "technical perfection" alone would not do, "unless there is some real glow to illumine and warm it from within" – the quality of heart, the quality of mind, which Henry James possessed. James's characters are not lifeless – but 'flesh and blood'. In a letter to John Galsworthy Conrad observed:

> The outlines are so clear, the figures so finished, chiselled, carved and brought out that we exclaim, we, used to the shades of the contemporary fiction, to the more or less malformed shades, – we exclaim, – stone! Not at all, I say flesh and blood, – very perfectly presented, – perhaps with too much perfection of method.

Though Conrad's characters are not as 'carved' or 'chiselled', they are not 'shades' either. Conrad here suggested the way in which "an approach to plasticity, to colour, and the light of magic suggestiveness can be brought to play" in art. Then there is the famous declaration in the Preface to The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' of the author's task and responsibility: "My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel – it is, before all, to make you see." Conrad uses the term "see" ambiguously. It could mean both "visualize" and "comprehend" or "gain insight", and not merely "behold the spectacle". Conrad's objective was quite explicit. It is to arrest each passing moment and then to reproduce it coloured
by the imagination of the artist so that it at once awakens the interest of men:

“To snatch in a moment of courage, from the remorseless rush of time, a passing phase of life is only the beginning of the task”. The ‘rescued fragment’ needs to be presented “before all eyes” with all sincerity so that “its vibration, its colour, its form” are properly held up, and “substance of its truth” is revealed, and “its inspiring secret” explored. Conrad insisted on visualization, on suggestion, on forms, colours, shadows, on the senses as opposed to intellect, or the aesthetic faculty. Art teaches us how to visualize a more vivid and colourful image of reality, and not merely to conceptualize it or utilize it. The artist must create semblances of “the surrounding world of actuality” and articulate its vital form. The artist again must make his appeal through the senses: “All art, therefore, appeals primarily, to the senses, and the artistic aim when expressing itself in written words must appeal through the senses ... to reach the secret spring of responsive emotions”.

Ford Madox Ford commented that Conrad was “seeking most of all a new form for the novel, and a limpidity of expression ...” Both these writers were preoccupied with the art of fiction and strove to attain “an all-unifying fiction”. They persistently exchanged their views on ideas, narration, reportage of conversation, style, language, and the colour and texture of prose. Conrad himself stated in an early letter that imaginative prose work would be in a new form – but “a form for which we are not ripe as yet”. In his Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance Ford Madox Ford presented a projection of Conrad as he, little by little, disclosed himself during many years of close intimacy. This is the way in which Lord Jim, by degrees, appears to Marlow or that every human soul by degrees appears to every other human soul. Ford insisted that life does not narrate, but makes impressions on our minds. Here by narration Ford meant “a sequential account of surface events”. Ford suggested that in order to present a character one “must first get him in with a strong impression and then work backwards and forwards over his past”, indicating the use of time-shifts.
Ford tried to convince Conrad that he was an 'impressionist' and Conrad himself accepted it. In fact Conrad's art betrays his interaction with the French Impressionist School of Painters with which Conrad was thoroughly conversant at the time of its flourishing in France.

Impressionism was a movement in painting, music, and literature whose aim was to force the beholder, listener, or reader to participate in recreating the experience of the artist and whose method was to suggest the 'impression' or effect on the artist rather than to make precise and explicit the objective characteristics of things or events. Initiated in France in the latter half of the nineteenth century by the painters Cezanne, Degas, Manet, Monet, Pissarro and Renoir, the movement took its name from Monet's painting of a sunrise, 'Impression : Sunrise' (1874). The impressionist painters began with the outside world as it appeared to their own subjective perception under particular atmospheric conditions. While both James and Conrad would have shared the Impressionist Painters' principle that a true artist dealt only with accurate sense perception, both novelists noted that the Impressionist painters and writers were deficient in one important respect: they repudiated depth 'analysis' and the probing of hidden human 'mysteries'. Conrad's Preface to The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' is a document on impressionistic art. He insisted that all art "appeals primarily to the senses", and that the appeal of fiction, to be effective, "must be an impression conveyed through the senses". The Nigger of 'Narcissus' is impressionistic, because of the richly visual emphasis, the strongly scenic presentation, and the writer's concentration on the moment-by-moment impact of events upon the observer's senses.

In a letter to Cunninghame Graham Conrad spoke of "mere Crane-like impressionism" by which he seemed to have suggested that "it produced only a momentary and superficial impact". The justification in the use of this term can be found in Stephen Crane's concept of a novel as "a succession of sharply outlined pictures, which pass before the reader as a panorama". In
his *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), Crane observed, the scenes are formed by utilizing Henry Fleming's 'accumulated thoughts' on subjects relating to his experiences in war. The British critics hailed it warmly as a work of experiment—"a new thing, in a new school", while his American supporters admired him "as an exact modern journalist and naturalist"—for his naturalism as already advocated by Emile Zola in his *The Debacle* (1892).

In his book on Conrad Ford recorded his discussions with Conrad about their efforts to create style. As their literary method, they also agreed on "the use of indirect locutions" combined with their attempt to dramatize "the effects of other portions of speech". This seems to have been conceived on the lines of the Jamesian belief that "the object of the novelist is to keep the reader entirely oblivious of the fact that the author exists— even of the fact that he is reading a book".

Conrad was keenly aware of the problems of organisation and progression of movement of a literary work. Ford himself pointed out:

*The writer [Ford] probably knew more about words, but Conrad had certainly an infinitely greater hold over the architectonics of the novel, over the way a story should be built up so that its interest progresses and grows up to the last word.*

In his other book *Thus to Revisit* Ford also dealt with his own and Conrad's idea of a novel, where he laid greater emphasis on the unity of a work of art, as contrasted with the Victorian practice of presenting a sequence of strong situations. Ford further stated that for him and Conrad—

*a Novel was the rendering of an Affair ... the whole novel was to be an exhaustion of aspects, was to proceed to one culmination, to reveal once and for all, in the last sentence, or the penultimate; in the last phrase, or the one before it— the psychological significance of the whole. (Of course, you might have what is called in music your Coda).*

This statement implies that the psychological significance of the whole of a work of art can be achieved, not through a single sentence condensed with
meaning, but through delineation of the relationship of every aspect in it moving progressively to one culmination.

According to Ford, a writer is required to start from a strong impression and work around it by means of a timeshift. This is exactly the way in which Conrad had composed and developed his novels and shorter fiction. For example, in *Almayer’s Folly, Victory, and The End of the Tether* Conrad began the story with a characteristic picture of the protagonist brooding or recapitulating his past, and then worked his way backward to explore the ground for the hero’s present position, and again returned to the present for a brief period, and once again moved backward to a stage in the hero’s earlier history. As soon as all the aspects of the circumstances in which the hero has been initially placed are exhausted, the story picks up its second and more rapid movement full of action for which adequate ground has already been prepared by the earlier stages. The rhythm of events in this part of a novel is defined by Ford as *progression d’effet* : every word must carry the story forward, and as the story progresses it “must be carried forward faster and faster and with more and more intensity”. And the main principle of growth and development for a Conradian novel seems to be that of ‘justification’. Its purpose is to convince the reader and to explain the character’s effect upon his environment. Conrad stated at the outset of his Preface to *The Nigger of the ‘Nascissus’* :

*A work that aspires, however humbly, to the condition of art should carry its justification in every line...*  

Ford had also stressed Conrad’s more radical principles of indirections and temporal dislocations. Ford’s structures, on the contrary, were fairly conservative except for the fact that Ford consistently used the interplay of *leit-motifs* in his fiction in the form of key-words, phrases, and situations which occur in the minds of the characters. Conrad too uses *leit-motifs* and has been
thoroughly aware of this kind of procedure, as is evident in his letter to Ernest Bendz, where he expressed his ‘deliberate purpose’ of writing *Nostromo*:

_Silver is the pivot of the moral and material events, affecting the lives of everybody in the tale .... The word ‘silver’ occurs almost at the very beginning of the story proper, and I took care to introduce it in the very last paragraph, which would perhaps have been better without the phrase which contains that key-word ...._ 

But as Vidan observed, Conrad’s *leit-motifs* are less static and not restricted to the minds of the characters alone. Conrad got the idea from Ford who, however, remained silent on this point. And the “recurring incident (Jim’s jump from the boat, Flora’s suicidal appearance at the cliff’s edge, Mrs. Schomberg’s shawl) [makes] each of its repetitions mark an expanding realization, an advancing penetration, of the event. The event thus becomes deepened in our consciousness and vision”.

Though *leit-motifs* and *progression d’effet* are some basic features of Conrad’s fiction, yet his greater concern had been with the conception of the novel as a whole. This is evident in his letter to Ford.

_Questions of phrasing and such like – _technique_ – may be discussed upon a fragmentary examination ... But phrasing, expression – _technique_ in short – has importance only when the conception of the whole has a significance of its own apart from details that go to make it up – if it (the conception) is imaginative, distinct and has an independent life of its own – as apart from the life of the style._

To his friend Meldrum Conrad wrote:

_Upon the episodes, after all, the effect of reality depends and as to me I depend upon the reader looking back upon my story as a whole._

Making one see, for Conrad, is time-consuming. While “the shape and ring of sentences” would make for a certain kind of seeing, an equally significant kind of seeing is attained only through ‘the reader looking back’ – a looking back which should take in the full impact of details and ironies which are not clear at the time of first reading. Conrad himself had achieved such a “conception of the whole” through arrangement of details in his fiction that can be detected in
his 'unconventional grouping and perspective'. He declared to Richard Curie that his art

*is fluid, depending on grouping (sequence) which shifts, and on the changing lights giving varied effects of perspective.*

His art is 'fluid' in that we are not allowed to settle for any one point of view. Positive actions, colourful people, warm feelings are constantly framed in a vision which seems to negate their existence; the narrative creates different and opposing areas of value, but offers no final solution. The interplay of light and shade has been made one of the major patterns of suggestiveness of Conrad's fiction. Further in a letter to Barrett H. Clark Conrad enunciated "that a work of art is very seldom limited to one exclusive meaning and not necessarily tending to a definite conclusion", thereby suggesting the ambivalent or multivalent nature of his art.

It is pointed out that in his formative years both as a practitioner and a theorist Conrad felt the tremendous impact of Maupassant who was Flaubert's most impressive disciple. In his 1887 essay "The Novel" Maupassant spoke of the serious novelist:

> The skill of his plan will not therefore consist in emotion or charm, in a beguiling opening or a thrilling catastrophe, but in the ingenious grouping of changeless little facts from which the real meaning of the work will emerge ... he must know how to eliminate from the innumerable small daily events all those that do not serve his purpose, and throw into relief in a special way all those that might have remained unnoticed by unobservant onlookers, and which give the book its meaning and value as a whole.\(^{141}\)

Conrad too carefully avoided overt melodrama, even while describing very dramatic events. Instead, he concentrated on elaborating the metaphysical value of small, but significant physical actions and characteristics. The emphasis here is on a novel’s structure, the ingenious grouping of little incidents that reveal the work’s essential meaning, the selection and juxtaposition of episodes.
For Conrad, subjects for his fiction are never ‘revelatory’, but appear to be ‘common property’ lying about in the ground for any man to pick up and handle. But then they are fraught with ‘the potentiality of almost infinite suggestion’. At the same time he repeatedly asserted that he was committed to present in his fiction human life only. He stated that “without mankind, my art, an infinitesimal thing, would not exist”. His work, he said, has a solid basis in reality. It is “not an endless analysis of affected sentiments but in its essence it is action ... nothing but action ... action of human beings that will bleed to a prick, and are moving in a visible world”. He declared this as his creed. But human life represented in his fiction is very complex, mysterious, and full of subtle moral dilemmas and psychological intricacies, and to analyse and understand this adequately poses difficulties. About the nature of human experience Conrad posited some fundamental questions that remain puzzling and inexplicable:

To what extent is man a free agent, and to what extent is he a victim of forces beyond his control? Does life inevitably find us out by placing us in that very situation which most severely tests our values? When society’s restraints are removed and we are thrust back upon our own emotional and spiritual resources, do we frequently prove to be “hollow at the core”? What is the nature of human motive: is selflessness merely a facade for egocentricity? Can isolated man experience and serve human solidarity? Is there anything in which to believe?

Conrad knew the deceptiveness of actions, and its easy answers. He knew too the fundamental dishonesty of the conventional novels that he saw being produced by his contemporaries. The world and the people they dealt with were make-believes in which straightforward action was possible. Conrad, on the other hand, dealt with real people, a real world, real sensations, where any kind of experience was bound to prove paradoxical. His tale or novel hardly conformed to the conventional sad or happy ending.

In Conrad’s fiction man often in conflict with himself faces a world that he dimly understands. If he plays his part well and faithfully, he may win those victories which are finite and fleeting and which this inexorable and
spectacular world grants him. And thereby man may also hold back the
darkness. Even when Conrad presented this world to be exacting and awe-
inspiring to human beings, it is not altogether nihilistic. Conrad asserted that
man plays a moral role in a temporal world, in spite of an ambivalent Universe.

Those who read me know my conviction that the world, the temporal world, rests on a
few very simple ideas; so simple that they must be as old as the hills. It rests notably,
among others, on the idea of Fidelity.146

The suggestion is that the writer must render, with extreme and painstaking
fidelity, the truth of human experience. Again in another sense, in Conrad's
universe it is the man "who fully engages life, commits himself, and discharges
his obligation, who expresses fidelity, who keeps the faith".147 We know that a
central theme in Conrad's fiction is embodied in the betrayal-fidelity polarity.
Conrad also spoke of solidarity as that value which, perhaps more than any
other, fills life with dignity, invests human experience with worth, represents
man at his highest, and acts as a strong defense against the corrosiveness of
isolation.

Thus Conrad sought to explore as the sources of action in his fiction the moral
nature of his characters, the dormant psychic forces and "the expiatory or
recriminative processes of the human conscience".148 Conrad's character often
faces the crisis of moral or spiritual isolation and negation. He is placed in the
grip of certain conditions or circumstances that are challenging and sometimes
horrifying too. The condition of moral isolation is the first of them. Again no
solitary man can live alone; life does not allow him to do so. For he lives in the
company of a ruthless and remorseless watcher, who never sleeps and is
eternally vigilant – the alter ego of his conscience. The Doppele gänger or the
divided self constitutes one important aspect in Conrad's method of
characterization. Heyst, Jim, Flora, Razumov, Decoud, and Mrs. Gould, and
Kurtz – they are all carrying out the drama of their own divided natures. They
are compelled to recognise and objectify their soul's dilemmas as part of their
psychological necessities. This saves them from madness and violence. Again his characters often escape the nihilism of their private worlds of solitude and negation by means of some law of action, love, or the sense of honour, or the obligation of duty, or even the social instinct itself.

Any discussion of the rich pattern of themes in Conrad's short fiction must focus on such masterpieces as *Karain* and *Lagoon* (1898), *Heart of Darkness* (1902), *Youth* (1902), *Typhoon* (1903), *Amy Foster* (1903), *Falk* (1903), *The Secret Sharer* (1912), and *The Shadow-Line* (1917). Here we find themes of isolation and collectivity; of initiation and identification; or fraternity and solidarity; of fidelity and dignity; of self-deception, betrayal, evil and disease; of death and disintegration. These themes are expressed through characters and their self-revelatory multiple points of view. But the nature of the theme conditions the choice of structural and formal elements. Sometimes Conrad followed a narrative mode in which events and incidents selected from life for illumination of characters are developed through linear chronology. He also avoided the proleptic narrative order in favour of the analeptic one: the technique of time-shift, of passing backward and forward in time. This “chronological looping method”\(^ {149} \) emphasises the theme's continuity. Character is illuminated through the fictional juxtaposition of episodes which are not in real life temporally contiguous. The fluidity of Conrad's handling of the time dimension consists in delaying the telling until the thematically and structurally appropriate moment, and then letting it come as a complete surprise. Conrad favoured the visual and intense presentation of background scene and setting, and the subtle reactions of the characters. Conrad either placed his characters in a situation “under stress or strife” on board ship, or plunged him into an encounter with the primitive instincts of greed, lust, and cruelty in dark, tropical forests.

Conrad had adopted several linguistic devices in order to objectively render different aspects of reality. Careful choice of noun, adjective, verb, and adverb
the parts of speech making the sentence – has created that perfect balance and integration of form and content in his fiction. Conrad repeatedly asserted that the artist's task is to discover the words which will express without distortion the emotions generated by the events and characters he presents. So the resources of language and style play a significant role in the revelation of truth. To Hugh Clifford, Conrad advised the utmost care in the use of words lest "the picture, the image of truth abiding in facts, should become distorted – or blurred".¹⁵⁰ For the illusion of life in fiction, Conrad stated, is sustained not by explicitness, but by suggestiveness :¹⁵¹

*Explicitness, my dear fellow, is fatal to the glamour of all artistic work, robbing it of all suggestiveness, destroying all illusion.*¹⁵²

Notes and References


6 W. Pater. The Renaissance, p. 235.


15 Elsa Nettels. *James and Conrad*, p. 79.


**Henry James**


24 H. James. “The Middle years” (1893); in J.E. Miller, p. 85.


27 *ibid*, p. 42.

28 *ibid*, p. 43.

29 *ibid*, p. 43.

30 *ibid*, p. 43.
31 ibid, p. 48.
32 ibid, p. 53.
35 ibid, p. 122.
37 H. James. “Anthony Trollope” (1883); in J.E. Miller, p. 200.
40 H. James. “Hawthorne” (1897); in Miller, p. 204.
43 ibid, p. 44.
44 ibid, p. 44.
46 H. James. Preface to The Tragic Muse (1908), in Miller p. 262.
49 ibid, p. 249.
50 Leon Edel. The Psychological Novel, p. 36.
52 ibid, p. 52.
53 ibid, p. 52.

Joseph Conrad


58 *ibid*, p. 43.


64 *ibid*, Hazell (ed), p. 52.


66 *ibid*, 11: XX (References are indicated by volume and page number).


ibid, p. 60.

ibid, p. 60.


ibid, p. 82.

Elsa Nettels, p. 29.


Elsa Nettels, p. 30.


ibid, pp. 162-63.


ibid, p. 84.


Wright (ed), *op. cit.* p. 160.


95 Letter to Warrington Dawson, June 20, 1913; in Randall, p. 159; quoted in Elsa Nettels, p. 33.
96 Preface to Within the Tides; in Wright (ed), p. 211.
97 ibid, Wright (ed), p. 211.
99 ibid, p. 159.
101 ibid, p. 25.
102 ibid, p. 15.
104 Letter to Edward Noble, November 2, 1895; in Jean-Aubry, I : 184; cited by Nettels, p. 45.
105 Conrad, “Books”. In Wright (ed), p. 82.
107 Wright (ed), p. 162.
111 Preface to The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'; in Wright (ed), p. 162.
112 Preface to The Nigger, in Wright (ed), p. 162.
113 ibid, in Wright (ed), p. 163 (all quotations).
115 Preface to The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'. In Wright (ed), p. 162.
117 Qtd. by Karl, ibid, p. 28.
118 ibid, p. vi.
119 ibid, p. 194.


Qtd. by Ivo Vidan, *ibid.* p. 187.

Ford Madox Ford. *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance*, p. 179. Qtd. by Ivo Vidan, p. 188.

Ford Madox Ford. *Thus to Revisit* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1921), p. 44; cited by Ivo Vidan, p. 188.


Ivo Vidan, *op. cit.* p. 188.


In Wright (ed), p. 160.


140 Letter to Barrett H. Clark, May 4, 1918; in Wright (ed), p. 36.
142 Letter to Edward Garnett, August 8, 1923; in Wright, p. 44.
143 Letter to Richard Curle, July 14, 1923; in Wright, p. 44.
144 Letter to William Blackwood, May 31, 1902; in Wright, p. 28.
147 Robert S. Ryf, *op. cit.* p. 44.
150 Letter to Hugh Clifford, October 9, 1899; in Wright (ed), pp. 20-21.
151 Letter to Mrs. E.L. Sanderson, September, 1910; in Wright (ed), p. 32.