Conrad is generally regarded as a writer of ambivalence, of double vision. Quite appropriately he describes himself as a 'homo duplex'. His works defy any categorisation. The traditional method of putting him under any rubrics, to regard him as a writer of romances and stirring tales of adventures at sea has long been discarded. It has been pointed out in the foregoing chapters that in Conrad's major works there is no conclusive resolution of meanings. In the so-called political novels, this tentativeness is markedly evident. They may prove to be both unequivocal assaults on imperialism as well as a projection of an idealistic impulse to it.

Conrad perceived the world dualistically and gave voice to the interaction of antagonistic forces. Conradian universe eschews obvious political and
cultural alternatives. It accepts the validity of irreconcilable attitudes. It is this extraordinarily complex and modern sensibility that I have tried to project through the analysis of the cultural and political dimensions of his major novels. His major novels are essentially battlegrounds for contending forces. These forces are not only metaphysical but also, and sometimes predominantly, political and cultural. In the course of discussion it has been shown how people belonging to different cultures and societies clashed with each other. Conrad's attitude of ambivalence is evident in his depiction of these societies and cultures. His aloofness and his lack of commitment to any particular cultural and political ideology create a tension in which facts are held up for observation and scrutiny. Conrad deliberately frustrates any attempt to arrive at unequivocal conclusions. One is not always sure where his sympathies lie.

In Almayer's Folly Conrad depicts a native society which is that of Borneo and which is still in a primitive state. The advent of the Europeans create a slight tremor in the social fabric and its reverberations assume some significance. Almayer who is Dutch marries a native woman but cannot develop even an
imperfect understanding with her. Their daughter Nina, a half-caste, is haunted by an acute identity crisis. The conflict in the novel boils down to a relatively simple antithesis of black and white. Neither the European nor the native society could give Nina any moorings or a sense of belonging. Almayer's pretensions to a superior culture sound hollow and do not stand him in stead. His gradual but steady deterioration from indolence to opium to imbecility serves as an adequate commentary on the fate of those who turn a blind eye to the conflicting demands that are required to be taken into account when people of different cultures and persuasions meet and mingle and interact with each other. In fact, Almayer's colonial upbringing is at the root of his gross confusion of his values. Nina's tensions symbolise the traumatic disorientation of half-caste children in colonial societies. Towards the conclusion of the novel we are told that she has given birth to a child and there is universal rejoicings in the kingdom of Bali. Obviously Nina is happy. The native society has accepted and integrated her in a way which the European society could never have done.

The same racial antithesis and confusion of values
are at work in *An Outcast of the Islands* as well. Socially and culturally, Willems and Aissa are as widely different as the 'civilised' Europe and the 'primitive' East. They have nothing in common except an irresistible passion for each other. Willems is hopelessly attracted to Aissa but does not know what he can do with such a strange creature. The communication gap between them is so wide that one's most natural feelings and actions seem irrational and repulsive to the other. Mutual fascination and frantic possessiveness last only for a short period at the end of which both of them fall violently apart. Willems tries to get away from Aissa and all that is associated with her; but he cannot. When his former wife appears on the scene, the final die is cast and Aissa, perilously on the edge of mental equilibrium, shots Willems dead. There is also deep mistrust between the Europeans and the natives. The establishment of a meaningful rapport between them is always hindered by the enormous gulf created by unknown cultures and civilisations.

The native community in *Heart of Darkness* is more primitive than in *Almayer's Folly*. Nature, as depicted in this work is, as it were, primordial. Marlow's journey seemed to him to be a journey to the
beginning of things, 'when vegetation rioted and the big trees were kings'. Here there is no attempt at communication between individuals and not much of social interaction. The Europeans in Heart of Darkness have no other business except to loot and plunder. Inspite of their professed commitment to social development and cultural enlightenment, there were scenes of devastation everywhere. The Europeans alienated the natives from their deep communal bonds and made them rootless. The natives are presented, except in two or three rare cases, as mere automatons, as some tools necessary for the furtherance of the machinery of European exploitation. The worship of Kurtz, the hollow man, by the natives is indicative of the enormous gulf between their level of civilisation and culture and his. It is due to the essential Conradian ambivalence that Kurtz appears to be both an emissary of science and progress and a colossal degenerate. Kurtz's fault lies in his accepting for himself of a standard that denies human limitations and abandoning the discipline, the responsibilities and requirements of the civilisation he came from. In carrying the imperial exploitation to its furthest extreme, Kurtz demonstrates the absurdity of responsibilities and
restraints which imperialism, political or economic, proclaims as a matter of policy.

Heart of Darkness and An Outpost of Progress records a complex of intellectual attitudes and responses to the colonial experience. The scathing irony permeating through both the works questions the notion of benevolent imperialism. Marlow was carried away by Kurtz's magniloquence, but the call to the universal holocaust makes his hair stand on end and illuminates the whole imperial situation in a flash. In the same way the merits of the Europeans and their ostensible benevolence are severely qualified on all occasions.

Conrad composed Nostromo on almost an epic scale. It is different from the earlier works in its greater canvas, its multitude of characters and in its view of an economic and historical determinism. Its treatment of both public and private life is perspicuous. It records the intrusion of capitalism and industrialism in a predominantly underdeveloped society and dramatises the inevitable conflict between tradition and technology, deep communal bonds in a rural culture and the uniformity and anonymity of industrial-urban proletarian life. Conrad's achievement lies in the
fact that he could anticipate with amazing accuracy the notion of economic imperialism and the consequent human exploitation it would entail. 'Material interests' which is Conrad's term for economic imperialism lie at the centre of the novel dominating the lives of almost all the central characters. It serves as a convenient peg around which Conrad weaves a complex pattern of human folly, greed and erosion of decent values. In the final analysis, Nostromo is about the advent of industry and democracy in a country inadequately prepared for it. Political regimes in Costaguana change with astonishing rapidity. It could have as many as four governments in six years. This entails shifting of loyalties by politicians and military generals, all in the name of liberty and democracy, though in fact for personal power and wealth. The native culture was in a fluid state and could not develop any mature or comprehensive political sense and appreciation of national problems around which debates and discussions could take place. The result is a brand of politics brazenly opportunistic and short-sighted.

Mrs. Gould is saddened by the vision of a Costaguana stripped of its native culture and tradition.
She wants to preserve the 'beautiful and picturesque things' in it, but does not know how to resolve the conflict between tradition and technology. Both she and Chales reopened the mine with the assumption that material progress is the first pre-requisite of an equitable social order. Conrad subjects this nineteenth century myth to searching scrutiny in *Nostromo* through a powerful analysis of the dynamics of power and politics in Costaguana. By the end of the novel the myth is totally exploded. We, along with the Goulds, discover that there is no peace and no rest in the development of material interests because they have their own laws which are amoral and inhuman.

*The Secret Agent* marks Conrad's excursion into unknown terrains — a departure from his usual world of adventures at sea and cultural and political conflict in underdeveloped societies. The world of *The Secret Agent* is one of terrorism, anarchism, secret espionage and doublecross. Verloc, the secret agent, is a man of uncertain foreign extraction and dubious antecedents. Though he has been in London for eleven years in the pay-roll of a foreign power, Verloc is, in fact, a double agent. He is simultaneously in the confidence of the anarchists and a police informer.
The foreign embassy pays him regularly and yet he is paid and protected by the London police. Ideologically, Verloc is committed to neither side. He is a double agent because he has discovered that he can make a comfortable living for himself and his family by playing the two contending parties against each other -- fostering radical activities while generating reactionary fears.

Verloc's cohorts are a bunch of ineffectual anarchists---Alexander Ossipon, Karl Yundt and the Professor. They have widely divergent views. The only bond that binds them is that all of them, except the Professor, are lazy and parasitic depending on the conventions and normality of ordinary social life they condemn. Conrad's portrayal of the anarchists as futile and hollow people reinforces the impression of futility and impotence of anarchism as a movement. However, The Secret Agent is a searching scrutiny of the fissures not only in political sphere, but in the social and domestic spheres as well. Conrad depicts London as another heart of darkness with its shabbiness, vulgarity and flagrant social injustice. He lambasts the bourgeois pretension to civilisation and culture through the characters of Vladimir, Winnie, Stevie and
Mrs. Neale. The politico-cultural vision projected in the novel is essentially bleak and despairing. This is due to the fact that not a single character shows any real concern for social justice or any sincere commitment to any ideology.

*Under Western Eyes* remains by far Conrad's most significant achievement. It is distinguished by a maturity and mellowness in Conrad's thinking on revolutionary politics, the cultural conditioning of Russia and other related matters. Conrad's proposed object in the novel is to present not so much the political state as the psychology of Russia. Razumov is the symbol of isolation and suffering that was inevitable in the Tsaarist atmosphere of pre-revolutionary Russia. He wants to end his alienation and integrate himself to the Russian society by distinguishing himself as a Professor and by a studied avoidance of political movements that were raging against the Tsardom. But Razumov's isolation is intruded upon by the uninvited confidence shown in him by Haldin, the assassin of Mr. de P. Though Razumov betrays Haldin, he is hopelessly implicated and cannot shake himself free. The police as well as the revolutionists want to exploit him against each other and Razumov, by sheer force of circumstances,
becomes a double agent. Predictably, Razumov is unable to fulfil any of his assumed roles and rendered a cripple by the grotesque brutality of Nikita, the dreaded revolutionary, for his frank and courageous confession. The revolutionists in the novel possess a certain depth and complexity. The portrait of Tekla and Sophia Antonovna have been drawn by Conrad with remarkable delicacy and political insight.

In many of his preoccupations, Conrad was ahead of his times. In his critical awareness of the fissures in the nineteenth century ethos, he anticipated many twentieth century preoccupations. That is why while there is mounting impatience with many of his contemporary writers today, Conrad reveals an evergrowing relevance. Modern readers discover with pleasant surprise a great deal in him that is significant in the present state of humanity. Modern writers, for instance, George Orwell, Arthur Koestler, Milan Kundera, Graham Greene, V.S.Naipaul etc., have recognised their debt to Conrad. The new areas of enquiry in Conrad may be — a study of his handling of English language and an exploration of his expatriate sensibility with reference to some of the expatriate writers of today.

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