CONCLUSION

The theme of isolation is relational to Conrad's vision of life as an artist. The vision with which he treats his characters in the novels under study, is ironical and stems from his deep rooted scepticism. Without attempting psychological analysis of individual characters in his novels (like Dostoevsky does in his), Conrad lays bare the inmost springs of action, and thereby exposes that part of human nature which is hidden behind the mask of the ego, and makes his appeal to the more basic qualities of humanity. Conrad bases much of his appeal on archetypal patterns or motifs. One such motif is: the journey away from the habitual and the familiar world, which symbolically suggests a journey of self-discovery. A second such motif is the initiation in which the particular character must undergo a series of ordeals while passing from ignorance and immaturity to social and spiritual awareness. Most of the protagonists and important characters in his novels are men who nourish illusions about themselves; they have seemingly noble ideals to which they attach excessive importance and even feel gloriously vain about it. Conrad exposes their vain illusions and their naive belief in their own superiority (which precludes their association with others on an equal footing). These characters who deny themselves their own humanity in living out of active association with society are aptly
described by a critic as isolatoes. Most of these characters are betrayed by circumstances, their bloated egos or their own short-sightedness into isolation from rest of mankind and, inevitably, into the dissipation of their lives and spirits. The chief dramatic tension is generated in the conflict between society and the isolato who is, at the same time, enmeshed in an inner tug-of-war.

Jim, Kurtz, Gould, Nostromo and Heyst are all possessed of high sounding ideals which, when put to the test, prove illusory. But all of them consider themselves to be superior to the common people and therefore follow their lonely path in hot pursuit of a 'fixed' idea. Jim, for instance, makes too much of his professed cult of 'honour'. But when the test comes, he fails miserably to live up to his ideal. Instead of taking a firm stand as enjoined by a sailor's code of honour, he jumps aboard the Patna - into 'an everlasting deep hole' (as Conrad puts it). Kurtz who goes to Congo with the missionary zeal of a torch-bearer of civilization suffers a steep 'fall' when confronted with the darkness of jungle. The baseness of his motives is summed up by Conrad in his (Kurtz's peremptory recommendation marginalized in his report: "Exterminate all the brutes".1 Conrad uses the masterly stroke of irony to expose the evil embedded in Kurtz's nature. Kurtz himself realizes the 'horror' of it, but it is too late. Gould likewise,
cherishes his ideal of bringing order, prosperity and progress to Costaguana by successfully operating the San Tome' mine. But the irony of situation lies in the fact of his absolute alienation because of his overpowering desire to accumulate wealth. His lust for silver estranges him not only from others but from his own wife, Emilie Gould. Similarly, Nostromo is betrayed by his sudden love of silver into an isolato, cut off from public esteem and participation in the life of the community. Heyst who idealizes detachment from the world and its affairs and has nothing but contempt for those who are engaged in the diurnal routine existence, becomes a loner and lives the life of a stranger on the island of Samburan. His life-long dissociation from others deprives him of even the natural instinct to love.

Not only does Conrad expose the evil-potential in man but he also makes us see that there are forces hidden in the unconscious, of which we are not even dimly aware, that make individual ideals and plans ridiculous or pitiful. Most of the isolatoes in his novels have their peculiar ego problems. When confronted by facts of human existence, they fail miserably and meet a tragic end. The realization dawns on them but too late. Probably this is the artist's way to suggest that fidelity to the life of community is a must; no man should assume to be an island unto himself. For, Conrad opposes to the isolatoes and the experimenters such
types as the dogged, old sailor in *The Nigger of Narcissus*, Singleton and the native steersman of the *Patna* or of the *Nan-Shan*, who come through by doing what they must. It is a tribute to Conrad's novelistic craft that he ironically manipulates the illusory ideals to be tragic flaws in his major protagonists' character. For instance, Razumov in *Under Western Eyes*, for all the loftiness of his motives, is a deliberate loner, because his 'loftiness' is egocentric. This eggs him on to betray Haldin to the Czarist police; that is, he gives precedence to his petty personal ambition to the claims of humanity.

One could multiply such examples endlessly, for they provide the gears that move the stories. However, it is generally in the point of view from which the stories are told and in the handling of sequence of events that Conrad makes the machinery function successfully. A retrospective survey of the novels we have appraised under study establishes that for all their variety, they rest on a common assumption: "That the real is to be found not in the sphere of the inner or private, but in that of outer, in the public". That is why Berthoud considers Conrad to be modern because he believes that it is during the last hundred years that the "shift from a Christian, or an idealist, or even a Romantic concern with individual experience to a behaviourist, or structuralist, or marxist emphasis on its determinants"
has taken place. Conrad, therefore, places emphasis on reality being social or public and not merely personal or subjective. He is concerned more with what a character does than with what he professes; the character's performance when put through an ordeal is more important than his declared intentions. In Lord Jim, individual regret or attempt at reformation, however sincere, cannot obliterate the facts or the consequences of one's action. In Heart of Darkness, even a single step beyond the obligations of civilization exposes one to the danger of falling into the 'horror' of the atavistic self. In Nostromo, the sole test of a moral or political project is its objective consequences. In Under Western Eyes, individual thought itself is dependent for its intelligibility on received notions and institutions. The test of what a man really is cannot be what he thinks he is, but what he does - not his individual consciousness but his public role. Hence Conrad's almost obsessive interest in the phenomenon of self-deception: "His scepticism of almost all self-descriptions, his doubts as to a man's own view of his relationship to himself, or to society, or to the universe, place him in the forefront of twentieth-century deflators of a naively self-confident nineteenth-century individualism".

But Conrad is not merely a philosopher or a sociologist to whom the social alone is real; he is an artist for whom felt experience is the very substance of his craft. However
valid the view may be that the outer reality of facts is the sole testing ground of truth, it must recognize that the sensitive individual, when faced with the intractable problems of human existence, becomes subject to a condition of irremedible solitude, leaving it "marooned upon a tiny island in the middle of a sea of... facts". So Conrad sounds a contemporary note in the sense that he not only affirms the modern doctrine of public reality, but he also registers the subjective anguish of the individual concerned who fails to grapple with facts. "The stronger Conrad's commitment to the 'outer', the more unyielding (is) his affirmation of the 'inner'."  

In fact, all of Conrad's major novels are a creation of moral imagination; that is why, he involves the protagonist-loners in self-contradictions which defy resolution. It identifies the primitive and irrational forces as well as the inborn strength and rational forces in its being. An indepth perception of the self reveals the truth that being is subject to contradictory drives caused by opposite within existence itself. Conrad's affirmation of the inner world is, therefore, inherently paradoxical. If his novels make a tragic point, it is that man seems capable of discovering the reality of his own values only through their defeat or contradictions, as it happens, especially, in the case of Kurtz and Razumov. The polarities of existence are very discreet, but they open the eyes of the protagonist either
to the imminent doom or to the necessity of shifting the focus of interests from the self to the other.

Conrad's novels are creative works which constitute a contribution not towards mere knowledge but towards truth, to truth hidden in men, in things, in life, in nature - to the truth only exceptional man can see, and not every exceptional man can present. Viewed from a moral perspective, his novels demand that individual man be responsive to the problems of good and evil, that he should not only be lover and advocate of 'the good, the true and the beautiful', but should also know the real inwardness of things. Conrad avowed the imperative need to cultivate the virtues of seeking truth, one's own humanity and fidelity to the community of man. These moral values inform Conrad's attitude both towards his own work and towards his fellow man:

My work shall not be an utter failure because it has the solid basis of a definite intention - first; and next because 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 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.

This is my creed. Time will show.

Being a sceptic, Conrad emphasizes the limitations of man, which stand in his way of discovering the truth about himself and therefore incapable of redeeming himself. In
the novels under study, most of the protagonist-isolates suffer from a myopic vision, occasioned by their egoism or egotism or their fixation with an illusory ideal. All their finer qualities and inherent strength are warped by the inner division between their conscious and sub-conscious intentions. The result is spiritual isolation. Their isolation is self-imposed because they are incapable of fidelity to anything outside themselves. For instance, Jim, too much obsessed as he is with image building, rejects even the importunistic pleas of Jewel who is intensely in love with him, and goes straight to his doom. His denial of love indicates his lack of fidelity to the other and his ignorance of self-knowledge. Similarly Decoud's suicide in the loneliness of the island points to "one of Conrad's greatest studies in the pathological effects of isolation for a civilized mentality lacking in self-knowledge". Likewise, Gould, shut off behind a wall of silver, is sterile like the silver itself as he sacrifices love to 'material interests'. The flaw in Gould's character lies in his pinning his faith in 'material interests'. This results in his spiritual isolation. In fact, in *Nostromo* over confidence in one's egoism/egotism and the neglect of personal bonds leads to individualism rendered fanatical.

In Conradian universe, the isolation of the self leads an individual to excessive ego-centricism, when the self
closes its dialogue with others and becomes pre-occupied with materializing its own cherished illusions and desires.

Conrad finds this phase of the isolation to be the golden opportunity and the most potential laboratory-condition for probing its enigmatic as well as innermost recesses.

Tony Tanner aptly observes:

Conrad is interested in those crucial moments when we are utterly "alone with ourselves", when to all intents and purposes nothing matters, when all the guidance must come from within, when all the lights have gone out.... And it is exactly 'then' that Conrad wants to know how a man behaves, how a man should behave, how he can find sanctions and supports to resist the insidious gravitational pull towards the base, beetle-like, irresistible argument that "nothing matters".

And to make the drama of the isolated self most fascinating, most convincing, most distinct as well as most revelatory, Conrad fittingly situates it either on the snips or in the unfamiliar lands. Deeply involved as he is in the drama of consciousness, his work explores the multitudinous possibilities in the self and evaluates its moral responses. While exposing the abundantly complex and equally rewarding pilgrimage of the self, Conrad emerges as an original artist in innovating the technique of narration as well as an accomplished and well-founded commentator on human nature. While he recognizes the moral perplexities, ambiguities, and contradictions harboured in the sanctuary of the self, he finds the instincts of good and evil existing simultaneously.
In spite of the claim of many critics that Conrad is a pessimist and offers but a bleak vision of human life, Conrad believes in the possibility that the human beings can realize the evil within them and therefore be capable of redeeming themselves. He discloses in a letter that he does not think "mankind intrinsically bad", and, therefore, he "always approaches (his) task in the spirit of love for mankind". In fact, each novel has a steady moral centre. There is an incremental repetition of a moral purpose that liberates the idea of the 'inborn strength' in the being.

Although Conrad shows the possible brutal consequences that a self can reach when the code of community is violated, and moral, human and spiritual values are disregarded or denied, one route of escape for the isolate from his constractive grip of ego-centrism is via love. By appropriating the love ethic, some of his characters enter into a new experience in which the other gains importance over the self. Love in Conrad is an instrument of redemption; it makes one arrive at maturity through a sense of responsibility and knowledge of life-giving forces. Love can enable one to face and overcome the evil of darkness. As Conrad sees it, love enables the protagonists to reach a new perspective of life by learning to co-relate themselves with others in a sensible and committed relationship. For example, Monygham is rescued from despair by his intense,
one-sided love for Emilia Gould, so that he regains his balance and gets busy in doing his routine duties. He also affirms the necessity of moral values if true harmony in society is to be established. Likewise, Emilia Gould, though she suffers aloneness because of her husband's neglect, maintains her composure and equipoise because she devotes herself to social service work. Similarly, Razumov undergoes conversion under the impactful influence of Natalia's love for him. It leads to his redemption when he makes a clear confession to Haldin's sister and the other revolutionaries. In Victory Lena's passionate adoration of Heyst makes a perceptible dent in Heyst's cloak of isolationist indifference. Ultimately he realizes that Lena made the supreme sacrifice of her life because of her deep-seated love for him. Realizing his error, he immolates himself along with Lena by setting the house on fire. Though the scheme of the novel (Victory) seems contrived and love theme is given melodramatic treatment, Conrad's intention is clearly evidenced. That is, he holds out love as a galvanizing agent prompting the recovery of the lost self and thus leading to one's redemption.

In the end, we can say that Conrad's protagonist-isolato who is in search of meaning and self-definition, arrives through a process of experiential suffering and reflection at the mature realization that fidelity and
solidarity, love and fellow feeling, are the forces capable of counterbalancing the lurking scepticism, meaninglessness, and sterility. The ideals and values which prove elusive for his protagonists are the ones which Conrad always affirmed and what the modern world needs so badly. These ideals and values are suggested as desirable ends, though not always realizable by men who like his protagonist isolates are egocentric and cut themselves aloof from the life of the community.
REFERENCES

1 Heart of Darkness, p.87.


3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., p.188.


9 Tony Tanner, "Butterflies and Beetles - Conrad's Two Truths" in Twentieth Century Interpretations of Lord Jim, p.65.
