INTRODUCTION

Jozef Teodor Konrad Nalecz korzeniowski was born to Polish parents at Berdichev in the Russian Ukraine on December 3, 1857, when Poland was under the suzerainty of Czarist Russia. It is interesting to note that Konrad, the name by which Conrad's father referred to him, which anglicized as Joseph Conrad was to serve as the novelist's pseudonym, was a patriotically-chosen Christian name. "It brings to mind the hero of Mickiewicz's drama Dziady (Forefather's Eve, 1832), who, awakening to a mystical sense of his power to free Poland from Moscovite tyranny, declares that his old private self, Gustavus, is dead: 'Hic natus est conradus' - 'Here Conrad is born'. To commemorate his son's baptism, his father Apollo Korzeniowski composed a poem which is dated 'in the 85th year of Russian tyranny' and ends thus:

My child, my son - tell yourself that you are without land, without love, without homeland, without humanity so long as Poland, our Mother, is enslaved.

After the Polish insurrection against the Czarist regime had been ruthlessly crushed in 1863, Apollo, Joseph Conrad's father, considered a Polish patriot, was taken prisoner and exiled. His mother (along with young Joseph) elected to share the exile. She was treated with extreme barbarity and she died in 1865. His father, broken both in body and spirit, returned to Cracow in 1868 and died the following year. He
had been a poet and dramatist of a sort and had translated some works of Hugo, de Vigny and Shakespeare. Consequently, Joseph Conrad was obliged to seek his fortune abroad and, much against the wishes of his uncle-guardian, he took on the profession of a sailor. During his seamanship, his voyages took him to distant outposts of European Empires - to Congo, to the Dutch East Indies, Malaya, Singapore etc. Thus he had a wide and varied personal experience of life in distant lands. He became a British master-mariner in 1886, and on August 19, the same year he was naturalized as a British subject. He published his first novel *Almayer's Folly* in London in 1895. As M.C. Bradbrook puts it, "he was a Pole of the land-owning class, who became a Marseilles gun-runner at twenty, an English master-mariner at twenty-nine, and one of the great English novelists at thirty-eight".

Indeed, Joseph Conrad is justly regarded as a fore-runner of modern novelists in English. Like Henry James and André Gide, he introduced innovations in the fictional technique. His narrative technique is characterized by a skilful break-in-time sequence and to achieve objectivity of presentation, he uses a narrator who provides commentary on the action, not unlike that of a Greek chorus. His Polish background reinforced by a chequered career on the sea, equipped him with a multiple perspective and an ironic vision of life. His wide and varied experience of the human situation as it obtained in the closing half of the nineteenth and the
beginning of the twentieth century, makes Conrad the most incisive, mature and subtle analyzer of human character. F.R. Leavis in The Great Tradition places Conrad "among the very greatest novelists in the language".

In most of his novels, Conrad explores man's vulnerability and corruptibility. Because of his multiple experience of human kind in distant lands, Conrad could comprehend the lonesomeness which afflicted the lives of Europeans in these far-flung places, cut off from the standard norms and values of civilized life in the West. His lonely life on the sea made him develop an introvertive and disinterested outlook. As a result, he achieved great success in rendering the influence of isolation on the individual characters in the physical, moral as well as spiritual sense. The geographic settings, circumstantial background and the milieu of the novels and short stories are derived factually and historically from the distant regions and untrodden areas of the world, till then least known to the reading public in Europe and in America. The sense of isolated and strange setting not only pervades the atmosphere in his novels but also is made functional in augmenting the progress of the action in fulfilling a structural need.

Whereas alienation is regarded by the contemporary writers (especially with existentialist leanings) with approbation and considered the first step forward to achieve individual identity, Conrad looks upon isolation as a malady
of the soul brought about by one's own illusions and romantic ideals. The theme of isolation enables Conrad to explore the deeper recesses of human psyche, because in this state an individual is faced with the evil, of which he remains unaware, lurking in him. In many of his stories, the ship takes its crew away from the mainland, away from the direct touch of the mainstream of civilized existence of Europe, and gives them freedom from the environmental and social inhibitions and controls; a freedom from the standard norms and values of civilized life. The protagonists of his novels are carried across the seas, which intensifies the impression not only of their being physically isolated but also of being beyond the trammels and jurisdictions of the conventional and legal rules of the West. In this condition of isolation, they are faced with the dark elemental forces basic to human nature - beastial in their propensities. Conrad views isolation as arising from one's own egoism or egotism which cuts an individual off from others. This leads to estrangement which is not only physical but moral as well as spiritual. The isolated individual becomes impatient with his past, restless in the present and uncertain of the future.

Conrad prizes old-time values as 'honour', 'human solidarity', and 'sense of duty'. Conradian heroes become miserable prisoners of their own egoism/egotism. Consequently, they are completely isolated from the rest of mankind. They suffer from the unwholesome effect of a solitary manner of
life which is demoralizing and works like a poison. When they feel that there is no moral, emotional, conventional or tacit bond with others, their suffering becomes more agonizing, more excruciating. Thus self-locked, these characters enter an anti-life condition abhorred by nature as well as dreaded by its victim. Life would permit their isolation for such time as it takes the self to know itself and 'recognize' the condition necessary for reintegration with the community of mankind. Be it Jim or Kurtz or Charles Gould or Nostromo or Razumov or Heyst, each one of them suffers the rigours of lonesomeness, because all of them are impelled by egoistic or egotistic impulses which presage a retrogressive movement from light to darkness, from the normal to the perverse, from the corporate life in the community to downfall and death in solitude.

Conrad's paradoxical presentation of characters stems from his deep-rooted scepticism which accounts for his being called "a Janiform writer". Morally and politically, psychologically and philosophically, Conrad turns out to be a probing and challenging writer who questioned the conventional optimistic attitudes of romantic writers in the nineteenth century, yet he made a moral affirmation of the time-old virtues of 'honour', sea man's code of duty and loyalty and above all the idea of fidelity. "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", wrote Conrad in A Personal Record. Since he stands at the intersection of the late Victorian and the early modernist cultural phases, Conrad, despite his scepticism, is impelled to reflect that perhaps the central choice in life lies between passive rationality (the Hamlet-like) and irrational activity (the Quixotic). Because of this self-contradictory scepticism manifested in the presentation of his major characters, Albert Guerard has offered a useful list of some of the main paradoxes or duplicities that we encounter in Conrad's works:

A declared fear of the corrosive and faith-destroying intellect - doubled by a profound and ironic scepticism;
A declared belief that ethical matters are simple - doubled by an extraordinary sense of ethical complexities;....
A declared distrust of generous idealism - doubled by a strong idealism....;
A declared commitment to authoritarian sea-tradition - doubled by a pronounced individualism....;
A declared and extreme political conservatism, at once aristocratic and pragmatist - doubled by great sympathy for the poor and disinherited of the earth....;
A declared fidelity to law as above the individual - doubled by a strong sense of fidelity to the individual....;
Briefly: a deep commitment to order in society and in the self - doubled by incorrigible sympathy for the outlaw, whether existing in society or the self.7

Conrad's scepticism reflects itself in his technique. He does not believe, as Flaubert thought, that a writer acts like a Creator, so that he presents God's eye-view of his subjects. Instead, like Aldous Huxley recommends, he
takes the 'traveller's eye-view', collecting information from different sources, signifying that no single view can be accepted as final. His narrative technique enables Conrad to present his characters from a multiple point of view which makes it possible for him to comprehend the complexity and contradictions in individual life. He does not offer easy solutions to the most complicated problems of human existence and the contradictions and complexities involved in a particular situation. "Life is a greater riddle than some of us think it to be", says Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*. Elsewhere, Conrad observes, "True wisdom is not certain of anything in this world of contradictions". Conrad was profoundly sceptical: the moral atmosphere of his art is harsh and he sees little hope of the individual's reconciling his fate with the fate of his community or his forsaking his illusions even when they are clearly at odds with reality. "Conrad's books are wonderfully varied, but self-delusion and betrayal is the steady center, the necessary obsession, from which the variations extend themselves".

Another factor which contributes to uncertainty in comprehending truth about life is the impossibility of absolute communication. This leads to isolation of the individual in the Conradian world. As he puts it in *Lord Jim*, "it is when we try to grapple with another man's intimate need that we perceive how incomprehensible, wavering, and misty are the beings that share with us the sight of the stars and the
warmth of the sun". And most people do not even try to comprehend the feelings of others. The elderly narrator in Under Western Eyes, trying to console young Natalia Haldin after he had brought the news of her brother's arrest, "could get hold of nothing but some commonplace phrases, those futile phrases that give the measure of our impotence before each other's trials". That is why, Conrad lays so much stress on the loneliness and isolation of the sensitive individual who finds it difficult to grapple with reality not only about others but about himself.

No wonder that in Conrad, though the values and the code he affirms are public, the drama is private and it acquires a moral aspect. The drama lies not in social or public evaluation of characters, but in the individual's own private self-indictment. The protagonist is tried by himself and in his own secret little court of conscience. Conrad manipulates the conflict in such a way that the situation suggests both isolation and moral imprisonment.

The self-centredness of the Conradian protagonists is a part of their heroic will which separates them from others; they believe that by virtue of their own ideals and values, they are superior to the common run of characters. In Conrad, characters without egocentric and secret ideals of their own are 'safe', but they are animals, good animals certainly. Devotion to duty or to the code of 'honour' saves the good,
uninteresting characters who observe the standard rules of conduct; they exist but do not reveal. But the sensitive egoist who works for and by his own private ideal of conduct is, as Conrad puts it, "disdained by destiny". Going beyond the accepted norms of society and the standard conduct of life isolates these egocentric characters from others. Kurtz is an extreme example of withdrawal from the world of regular lawful habits and social conventions. Similarly, Razumov's making triangles and squares is suggestive of a desperate human attempt at creating an independent world out of the overwhelming chaos that threatens to submerge him. However, heroism in Conrad is interconnected with shame and self-reproach. When the isolato is put to the test and trial, he experiences the break-up of his personality and his inflated self shrivels like a sensitive plant. In this hour of self-analysis, the isolato gets a glimpse of the truth, but only a glimpse, about his true self. He has to come to grips with his 'double', what in Jungian psychology is called his own 'shadow'. For instance, Brown in Lord Jim makes the self-illusioned, heroic Jim realize the presence of Brown within himself. Heyst has a glimpse of truth about himself when he realizes the falsity of his long-cherished philosophy of detachment but only after Lena has sacrificed herself to save him. On his return from the expedition to save the silver of the San Tome mine, Nostromo flits along the shore like a shadow pursued by the furies. Conrad's villains perform the psychological and
dramatic function of the double. Like Brown in Lord Jim, the plain Mr. Jones of Victory impels Heyst identify a weakness in his own character. It is a tribute to Conrad's craftsmanship that he has a subtle, suggestive manner of indicating the fatal flaws of his heroes; inside the steel armour, there is a vulnerable plague spot. That is, on a symbolic plane; the villains demonstrate conclusively that evil is immanent.

This has a direct bearing on Conrad's ironic vision which does not admit of the traditional victorian or eighteenth century hope of man's capacity to redeem himself. The one recurring implication of his vision is that man's fate is inevitably to be solitary and any attempt to break out of the prison of the self into the real communion with others is doomed to failure:

A curious corollary of this is that the only true communion one can achieve is the unwilled and startling communion with those whom we would like to think our opposites, as when Marlow achieves his shattering communion with Kurtz in Heart of Darkness or the Captain in The Secret Sharer finds his strange identity with the murderer whom he has sheltered.  

To grow up, to become mature is to reach a point of recognition. But in Conrad, it arrives too late, as in a tragedy.

Unlike Forster and Lawrence, Conrad is unable to believe in the efficacy of love in dissolving one's illusions. Far from bringing characters together or regenerating them, love
introduces serious complications and brings, in its wake, new burdens and oppression. This is because his protagonists are basically egoistic and hence, prisoners of their own self-deluded self. Maybe, Conrad had read Schopenhauer in his young age; and what the philosopher says about human egoism is applicable, inter alia to Conrad's isolato-protagonists. As Schopenhauer puts it:

"No sharper contrast can be imagined than that between the profound and exclusive attention which every person devotes to his own self, and the indifference with which, as a rule, all other people regard that self, - an indifference precisely like that with which he in turn looks upon them."

In other words, the individual's estrangement from society and consequent drifting through trials and tribulations is the end-result of his imprisonment within his 'will'. All attempts of such an individual to seek release from this entrapment within his egoism prove futile. Likewise, Conrad is sceptical about man's capacity to work for and achieve release from his confinement from the egocentric circle. Most of Conrad's protagonists are miserable prisoners of their own egoistic will and illusory dreams and ideals. Even when they commit suicide (like Heyst) or make confessions (like Razumov), they reveal only their confinement, and not freedom. The egoistic 'will' leads to both isolation and moral degeneration.

However, at the level of ideas, Conrad veered round to the view that love, earnest and intense, could be a solvent
to the malady with which isolatoes in his novels are afflicted. In *Nostromo*, for example, Monygham is inspired by a passionate feeling of admiration and love for Emillia Gould, which helps restore his balance, so that he renders commendable service to the community. Similarly in *Victory*, Conrad offers love as the only solution for the self-imposed isolation of Heyst. But since love story falls outside the Conradian canon of fictional art, his presentation of love theme in *Victory* seems contrived and does not carry conviction. As many critics have pointed out, there is the element of melodrama and schematised contrivance towards the end of the novel. It is only after the sacrificial death of Lena that Heyst receives the shock of recognition.

The most significant point to note is that the social side of isolation and the psychological come together in his fiction to form a complex exploration of one of the abiding and essential themes in the life of man - his isolation. As his protagonists wade through experience, they unknowingly struggle for social roots, and they also struggle for self-knowledge and self-recognition. The struggles, which begin separately, become one, and give his novels the frame he perpetually laboured to find to clarify and perfect. As Leo Gurko aptly puts it, "Conrad became a great specialist in the paralysis of will, the inability to release oneself into action and hence into life, and the whole contiguous region of moral inertia and sloth." Virtually, all his protagonists
are foreigners and exiles. Kurtz is a Belgian in Africa; Jim and Marlow are Englishmen in the Malayan Archipelago. Almayer and Stein are Dutchmen in the far East; Razumov is a Russian in Geneva; Nostromo, an Italian, is in South America; and Heyst, a Swede, is in the Pacific. The fact of their being outsiders aggravates the difficulties under which they labour.

In *Heart of Darkness* Kurtz brings with him to Africa the apparatus of liberal attitudes peculiar to Western Europe; but the Africans have a different set of attitudes and the conflict between them subjects him to pressures that in the end transform him into a different man, neither the original Belgian nor simply a white man gone native. Kurtz's journey through the heart of Congo assumes a symbolic dimension; it becomes a journey of exploration of his own inner jungle. In fact, all of Conrad's protagonists who are foreigners in far off countries, discover ultimately that they are foreigners to themselves as well. A master craftsman as Conrad is, he projects the shock of this discovery, "and uses the external exile as a symbol or as an analogue to the internal one".  

Paul L. Wiley makes an apt and acute observation when he says that Conrad made use of an objective method in "finding visual or dramatic equivalents for states of inner experience or for ideas embodied in his tales". Certainly
Conrad by employing the objective correlatives for the inner states of his major isolato-protagonists presents them with a psychological penetration unparalleled by any other novelist of his time. He did not hesitate to bring psychological issues within the scope of his method. In fact, he relies upon visual procedures so as to enable him to project even the most subtle, moral and psychological matters through dramatic and concrete situations. Characters like Lord Jim, Charles Gould, Axel Heyst are portrayed with such masterly craftsmanship that they reveal "insights into peculiarities of modern temperament that seem beyond the powers of most of his contemporaries in the English novel with the exception of Henry James." 20

Like Conrad's ideas, his method of narration is too complex to be dealt with briefly, but it will be in order, if we outline certain general characteristics of his fictional technique. Perhaps the most obvious of them lies in the structural pattern of his novels. Each one of his novels suggests a pattern of life: most of his isolato-protagonists who are impelled either by the illusory ideals or egocentric notions about themselves live outside the implied pattern. As a result, the dramatic tension is generated in the conflict between society and the isolatoes. The exploration of these characters' journey through the trials and tribulations of life makes it possible for Conrad to achieve psychological insights into human nature and character. In order to
achieve objectivity, Conrad as narrator avoids commenting on his own reactions to the events, the situation or the action of his characters. Often enough, he employs another character such as Marlow who is an experienced seaman, well versed in the affairs of men and of the world, narrate the story. So when Marlow offers opinions or speculates about the thoughts or motives of other characters, the reader does not feel that he is being manipulated by the author. Marlow is inside the story, and not outside it. Or Conrad presents the story through the old English Professor in *Under Western Eyes*. This implies that the comments and opinions expressed by the professor are those of a western intellectual sizing up the Czarist Russia and the revolutionaries who were up in ferment against the established tyranny of the ruler. These opinions are not necessarily those of the author. In *Nostromo* no narrator is specified; we hear different parts of the story from different sources, though Conrad assumes the Marlow-like mask to tell the tale by communicating multiple viewpoints about the happenings in Costaguana.

Another device that Conrad uses is that of time-shift. In his novels he does not work with the chronological time scheme; instead, he constantly shuttles back into the past and towards the present and then into the future in an attempt to present time as a Bergsonian concept, that is, time as a streaming continuum. Closely linked to this new view of time is the new view of consciousness which includes not
only the consciousness of everything an individual has ever experienced but also everything that the race has ever experienced. Conrad who must have been influenced by this view of time and consciousness offers to communicate to the reader "The simultaneity of different levels of consciousness". Through the use of this technique Conrad succeeds in presenting the whole truth about his protagonist by probing into his past through presenting the full texture of his conduct and action and consciousness in the present. Thus, concern with the individual's conduct and consciousness, "its multiplicity and ability to store up the whole of the individual's past history which is always relevant and always in operation in one way or another, leads to emphasis on the individual's loneliness". In this, he proved to be forerunner of modern novelists in English. This fictional device forces the reader's mind to go through the same process it would if he were actually involved in the experience. For example, in trying to make sense of Lord Jim's life, the narrator moves back and forth, one episode reminding him of another, until the whole seemingly random and chaotic pattern is drawn together into a logical web.

Related to the time-shift technique is the cinematic device. This method allows the reader to move about, to look at things from a distance or close-up or super-imposed on one another. He is not forced to see things from a fixed distance as in a theatre or as in novels written previously. Thus as the writer Edward Crankshaw points out, on the first
pages of *Nostromo*, we look at the Gulf from the town and at the mountains from the Gulf; we walk through the streets noting faces in the crowd; we are carried for a moment by some reminder into the past; we stop to examine the surrounding details. We assimilate the wealth of information, skilfully planned by the author to lead to a full comprehension of the whole structure of the novel. In fact *Nostromo* is, technically considered, the most complex and the 'modern' of his novels. Themes "recur in defiance of chronology; chronological narrative is broken or abandoned; points of view are complex and shifting; there are changes of focus".  

Conrad with the insightful understanding of the motives that make "a man cling to life and find it worth keeping in spite of all the evidence of its futility", analyses the illusory self-esteem of *Nostromo*. Such illusory passions may range from the sheer animal instinct of self-preservation found in _Falk_ to the practical idealism of _Charles Gould_, to the long-cherished conviction of the righteousness of detachment of _Heyst_. It is the ironic spirit in him and the sense of poetic fitness that makes Conrad encompass the ruin of his heroes as often as not through the excess of those very qualities that give them life. In short, Conrad is one of those great novelists who with their new insightful visions and technical experiments enlarged the bounds of the art of fiction. He emphasized the need for making every detail, every happening, every fluctua-
tion of sentence rhythm, every choice of image and word, however minor, essential to the meaning of the whole. For example, in Heart of Darkness there is the crucial interplay of words and phrases dealing with white and black, light and darkness, good and evil, pairings in which one antithetical term seems to turn into its opposite, thereby underlining the central paradox of two distinct modes of human existence that corrupt each other upon contact. In the words of Conrad himself, the art of fiction writing "must strenuously aspire to the plasticity of sculpture, to the colour of painting, and to the magic suggestiveness of music—which is the art of arts".25

In Lord Jim his first major novel, Conrad is set to explore the nature of man, the amazing range of his potentialities, and the endless inner and outer threats which he is condemned to confront. Jim, distinguished by a romantic imagination and possessed of a glamorous 'dream', flees from the ugly 'facts' of human existence (Conrad considers ideals as antithetical to facts); he is essentially a dreamer. In a crisis, his conduct belies his ideal aspirations, so that he is presented by the author as a victim of self-delusion. When the test comes, he betrays his ideals and suffers a fall. As a result, lonesomeness is his punishment. By deserting the pilgrim ship Patna (carrying eight hundred Arab passengers on board) he fails miserably to live up to the sea-man's code of honour. Like other members of the crew, he jumps into the sea to seek a personal escape. As
Conrad views it, this constitutes a jump into an "everlasting deep hole". His deserting the ship symbolically suggests that Jim isolates himself from the community of mankind. In betraying others, he not only negates the seaman's code and the virtue of fidelity but (what is worse) he also betrays himself. What accentuates Jim's isolation is his inability to realize that he has lost his 'honour'; he is more concerned, as Marlow rightly observes, with his 'reputation' his self-conceited opinion about himself; and his motives persist through the initial court trial till the end. His tormented sensitiveness ostracizes him from others because it appears to him that the world does not understand him. He feels himself alone even in the midst of a crowd. He is thus isolated both physically and morally. As Conrad puts it, he is "like a prisoner alone in his cell or like a wayfarer lost in a wilderness... he doubted whether he would ever again speak out as long as he lived". Marlow reiterates the grim fact of Jim's extreme spiritual isolation - "he had no place where he could... where he could withdraw... be alone with his loneliness".

The lonesome Jim readily accepts Stein's suggestion to go to Patusan, where he imagines he would fulfill his dream of heroic responsibility and fidelity to man. But in fact, his flight to Patusan signifies a flight away from the civilized society of the West with its standard norms and values. And in Patusan he seems to redeem himself by bringing
order and prosperity to Patusan, so that the natives, out of gratitude, call him 'Tuan Jim'. But the irony of fate overtakes him when the sea-pirate Brown appears on the scene. Jim with his usual idealism lets Brown and his black guards free. They murder Dain Warris, the son of Doramin, the chief of the native community. Consequently, Jim loses the confidence and the respect of the natives. Once again he finds himself 'alone' because of his own illusions about his noble ideals. Despite the importunistic entreaties of Jewel (the native beauty who loved him intensely), his deep-rooted egoism urges him to offer himself as sacrifice at the hands of Doramin. And Conrad ironically observes, "he had beheld the face of that opportunity which, like an Eastern bride, had come veiled to his side.... He goes away from a living woman to celebrate his pitiless wedding with a shadowy ideal of conduct".  

This is Conrad's artistic way of suggesting how deep-seated illusions about one's ideals generated by one's bloated sense of egoism leads to one's isolation (physical, moral and spiritual) and ultimately brings about one's tragic fall and ruin.

The theme of isolation receives a masterly treatment at the hands of Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*. In this novel the author shows how isolation of an individual from his moorings in a civilized society has a degenerating effect if he is placed in the midst of a primitive society with tribal customs
and strange, weird rituals. In spite of his noble ideals and intellectual gifts, he loses control over his civilized self and becomes a prey to the primeval forces lying hidden within him. In state of isolation from the fixed norms and values of civilized existence the individual, without his knowing it, has to counteract the primitive man lurking within him. If he fails to counter-balance the primitive instinctual forces within him, he is fated to meet his moral and spiritual degeneration and possibly his self-destruction. Each and every individual, however civilized or gifted he may be, carries within him all the bestial potential which lies buried deep in the inmost recesses of the unconscious. In this remarkably written short novel, Conrad explores the wide and varied ranges of the protagonist's inner jungle.

In *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz is physically isolated by virtue of his mission on being placed by the Belgian company at the interior station in Africa far away from the civilized European community in the West. A man of many gifts, Kurtz is possessed of high sounding ideals and cherishes the illusion of being a 'torch-bearer' of civilization to the dark continent. On his arrival in Congo, Kurtz's mission of an ivory agent makes him morally, emotionally and intellectually isolated from everything around him including the natives who serve him in collecting and amassing ivory. However, as Marlow penetrates deeper into the jungle, he discovers how Kurtz has been corrupted by the barbarism of wilderness.
By a master stroke of irony Conrad shows us how this Faustian genius, instead of conquering, has surrendered himself to the savage customs he most hated. It is a tribute to Conrad's artistic excellence and insightful envisioning, that going into the jungle of the dark continent implies the shocking recognition of the truth that the darkness and the evil associated with the African jungle, lie within us. Kurtz had come to the African jungle with the idea of civilizing the natives, but the contact with the primitive natives, with the dense vegetation and bushy thickets has awakened the evil hidden in the impenetrable darkness of his heart. He gains lordship over the blacks; he becomes a megalomaniac. He assumes the role of God suggesting, he has entered a state of self-deception. Marlow puts it ironically, "everything belonged to him - but that was a trifle. The thing was to know what he belonged to, how many powers of darkness claimed him for their own".30

While leading an isolated existence, Kurtz feels liberated from the healthy influence of human and moral values of civilized society in the west. He uses bizarre and cruel methods to obtain ivory from negroes; he throws all canons and norms of civilization to the wind. He considers himself beyond the pale of the good and evil. In psychological terms, Kurtz releases his Id from the checks and restraints of his European ego, when he allows his forgotten brutal instincts to revive and stir the monstrous passions. He kills some of
the natives without the least compunction if they disobey, he becomes dehumanized. He decorated the poles of the fence around his house with their skulls. With the masterly craftsmanship, Conrad adds Kurtz's note in the marginalia of his report to the company back home, "Exterminate all the brutes" - indicating how isolation from the standards of civilized existence has degenerated him completely. Kurtz even delights in taking part in the inhuman ritualistic orgies of the natives. And as he struggles with death towards the end of the novel, Kurtz cries in a whisper at some image, at some vision - "a cry that was not more than a breath" - "The horror! The horror!". This cry signifies a judgement on himself, that is, on the darkness within. The jungle of the dark continent is not without him, but within him. In the words of R.A. Gekoski "this darkness, in its symbolic sense, is not only overwhelmingly powerful, but virtually unknowable, because it almost never manifests itself in unmediated experience". Because of his isolation Kurtz becomes hollow at the core by virtue of his lack of moral identity.

In most of Conrad's major novels, the protagonists' isolation is inter-related with their egoism (or egotism). Their isolation is not caused by Fate (as in Hardy's novels) but by their own misconceived ideals and passions which ignore all issues relating to 'good and evil'. *Nostromo*, more than any other novel of Conrad, shows how isolation
results from an individual's blind pursuit of 'material interests'. Every character who counts in the novel is affected by the magnetic power of the San Tomé mine. The silver mine becomes the symbol of inhuman society. Although most of the major characters profess to be concerned about the welfare of the whole nation in the development of economic infrastructure by constructing railways and exploiting the mineral resources, yet in the process each one of them, ironically enough, is cut off from the community because of his involvement directly or indirectly with the lure of the silver. The silver shadow falls between one man and another. It ignites the lust for money and comfort, even at the risk of losing one's integrity and conscience, as it were, to Mephistopheles. In his mad desire to possess silver entrusted to his care, he severs himself from the people who had held him in deep affection. Nostromo, who had power over the workers, suddenly realizes that he has lost his place in the scheme of things, his mysterious power over the people. There is both irony and ambiguity in the portrayal of his character by Conrad. The ambiguity lies in the fact that what links him most firmly to the people is the position of power that he enjoys among the workers. And ironically too, until he becomes enslaved by the silver, he has always been really his own man, belonging to no one, aloof and casually generous. In the end he belongs only to the treasure.

Not unlike Jim, Nostromo all through his dealings with the Cargadores, was concerned mainly with image-building.
He was interested in rising in their estimation; and subsequently, when he passionately clings to the treasure, he undergoes corruption of his moral being, not only does he become spiritually a loner but also morally hollow. He abandons Decoud to his fate. As he acknowledges later: "he wondered how Decoud had died. But he knew the part he had played himself. First a woman, then a man abandoned each in their last extremity, for the sake of this accursed treasure. It was paid for by a soul lost and by a vanished life". As Conrad views it, the passion for silver signifies spiritual emptiness leading to Nostromo's isolation from all the vital forces of life. He betrays Linda Viola and also her sister. The way death is meted out to him is justified in the sense that his betrayal of love affair with the Viola girls serves as an objective correlative of his spiritual non-being. One of the book's most incisive ironies comes through in Giorgio's words: "Like a thief he came, and like a thief he fell".

Similarly, Decoud who had maintained his link with the public through his newspaper and other political activities inflicts the burden of isolation on himself by consenting to escort the treasure along with Nostromo. The sailing at night closes his relationship with Costaguana, literally detaches him from the people and spiritually throws him into a state of utter loneliness. Left to himself, his lonesome existence on the island becomes agonizingly intolerable for him. Conrad using his artistic skill shows how ravaging is
the effect of lonesomeness, of separateness from the community. of man because, unable to bear the rigours of his solitude. Decoud commits suicide. "Spatial emptiness around Decoud in his solitude externalizes his inner emptiness". 36

Likewise, the idealist Charles Gould imagines himself (like Kurtz) to be an emissary of light in a land of darkness. He imagines that the power the San Tomé mine will give him, will be used by him to bring law and order and security to Costaguana - an undeveloped country in Latin America. However, Conrad’s ironic treatment of Gould is brought home to us when we realize that actually he is motivated more by his egoistic pursuit of power over the country’s administration and politics than by his altruism. He uses doubtful methods to enhance his power and control over the administration from the vantage point of Englishman’s superiority. He imagines that the ends justify the means. To him the mine means silver, he does not think of the mine in terms of the people who work there and who live in three villages around the mine. He becomes blindly absorbed in the silver and in gaining personal power over the fate of the country. The mask of public benefactor falls off and Gould appears in the true light of a foreign exploiter. He becomes obsessed with the mine, so that he has no time left even for his wife who suffers from an acute lack of communication. She feels utterly lonely. They have no child, which indicates that their relationship is sterile. His extreme egoism/egotism cuts him off from the masses of people for whose
benefit he imagined he was exploiting the silver mine. His wife knows that her husband, though he is always courteous, even kind, is devoted to a different ideal and lives in a different world. His lonesomeness acts as a corrupting influence on him. It is utterly subversive of the principles in the name of which he had begun working at the mine. His moral nihilism cuts him off from the people and as a result, he loses the real treasure of life, that is peace of mind and his integrity. He returns, as it were, in Conrad's words, to 'primal nothingness'.

Only Monygham overcomes his state of self-exile because of his act of betrayal in the past. This is because he develops an intense passion of selfless love for Millia Gould who, despite the neglect of her husband Charles, engages herself in social service of one sort or another. His unselfish love without any expectation of response from the leading lady of the town helps him step out of his desperation, so that he occupies himself in rendering as much medical aid, as is possible, to the people of Costaguana. Perhaps, this is Conrad's way of suggesting that love, unselfish love, is the one sure means of overcoming one's isolation from the community.

In *Under Western Eyes*, Conrad deals with the theme of isolation of the self from a different angle; he looks at the self from the viewpoint of the community. Razumov, as his name suggests, is a man of reason. (It is derived from the Russian root
word Razum, which means mind or intellect). He does not wish to be a part of revolutionary movement in Czarist Russia of his time. He wants to keep himself aloof from the political drama and the conflicting historical forces operating in Russia. In his aloofness he is self-contained, and has no higher ambition than winning scholarly honours and attaining a respectable position in the official hierarchy. In the words of Zabel, "he is the man designed by nature or circumstance to live not by the law of his kind but by self-law". That is, he wants to live a life of egoistic self-regard. However, as Conrad shows, he suffers from the unwholesome effect of a solitary manner of life which is demoralizing and works like a poison.

Even at the university, Razumov is detached from his neighbours and classfellows. Lack of family ties and affection has resulted in a psychological state which makes for physical isolation. As Conrad puts it, "he was as lonely in the world as a man swimming in the deep sea... There were no Razumovs belonging to him anywhere. His closest parentage was defined in the statement that he was a Russian". In other words, the origin of his loneliness lies in the fact that he lacks roots and that he has nothing to fall back upon but himself.

It is a masterly stroke of Conradian irony when Haldin suddenly appears in his study; the every day life for which
he shows utter disregard should seek him out, put him on a rack, and try and test him. He is taken by surprise by Haldin's disclosure that the latter has murdered state minister and thus involves Razumov, much against his will, in the Russian political revolutionary turmoil. Haldin's presence in his room alters the even tenor of his life and faces him with the dilemma of a moral choice. It is a choice between fidelity to his own ambitions on the one hand (which means loyalty to the state) and fidelity to a fellow human being who happens to be his friend on the other. Razumov fails the test. He is more concerned about his self-interest than the life of a human being who reposes abiding trust in him, than the freedom his people from the despotic regime - freedom from poverty and deprivation.

In choosing to betray Haldin to the Czarist police chief for purely selfish reason and by agreeing to become a secret agent, Razumov alienates himself from the people both in the university and the Russian polity. And like Jim, he refuses to admit his guilt. Nonethesame, he loses his inward peace forever. By denying the bond of fellowship between him and Haldin, Razumov condemns himself to the wretched life of his self-exile. By denying the bond of humanity, he lands himself in a state of utter isolation.

He compounds his act of betrayal by becoming a police spy in the service of the Russian secret agency. He goes to Switzerland to report on the activities of the Russian
anarchists living there - Haldin's sister Natalia living among them. His love for Natalia brings about a radical transformation in his mental make up, so that he becomes conscious of the moral lapse which he has committed by betraying a trusting friend to the Czarist police. At last he confesses to Natalia that in giving Victor Haldin up, "it was myself, after all, whom I have betrayed most basely." However, he still feels superior to the revolutionaries so that he refuses to join hands with them. He is still concerned with his personal 'ethics' in the politics of his time. Very much like Jim, he makes bold to face the revolutionaries, to make his confession of his betrayal of Haldin; it is a gesture on his part of expiating for his guilt. He is given a hard blow by Necator which deafens him. His deafness recalls his 'deafness' to Haldin's appeal for help. This is Nature's revenge. However, though crippled, he is able to regain trust in the community of others. As Conrad views it, the self-knowledge that Razumov has attained through his passionate love for Natalia, signifies his moral and spiritual redemption. In Conrad love becomes instrumental in releasing man from the prison of egoism and the emptiness caused by non-involvement with fellow human beings.

In *Victory* Conrad underscores Axel Heyst's isolation owing to his scepticism which precludes his participation in the life of others and leads to his inability to act. In this, he is not unlike Decoud. Having been deeply influenced
by the philosophical views of his misanthropic father, Heyst justifies his life of seclusion on the island of Samburan. He truly believes that action and involvement in the world and its affairs would disturb the peaceful and serene life on the island. His intellectualized indifference to life and community turns him into a shadow figure. His scepticism breeds in him the mortal fear of the hazards of life implicit in action; he sees the power of blind destiny behind them. Conrad skilfully manipulates the geographical setting which graphically offsets his philosophical bias in favour of isolation. Such physical separation, suggests Conrad, is the most potent self-imposed excommunication from the human community: "he was out of everybody's way, as if he were perched on the highest peak of the Himalayas". Even the habit of profound reflection he considers to be "the most pernicious of all the habits formed by the civilized man". He becomes his own enemy, because such egoistic conviction forces him into an attitude of negation which results in his tragic ending. Conrad's irony exposes the absurdities and perils of a theory of detachment with a reference to a special situation and unusual characters. This is suggestive of the central truth in Conrad, "that actions are to be trusted more than words".

However, the life-force within him impels Heyst, much against his judgement, to rescue Lena, another isolated victim of circumstance, from the company of the musicians' band. He
elopes with her, indicating the flowering of an intimate love relationship between Heyst and the forlorn girl in Samburan. But even when they live together and Lena begins loving him intensely, Heyst is still hesitant to reciprocate her love, because he still thinks that he was wrong to allow himself to be hooked like a 'silly fish' into the world of "action". While Lena sits at his side, Heyst imagines his father telling him, from one of his books, that "Of the stratagems of life the most cruel is the consolation of love." Only when she sacrifices herself to rescue him from the evil assault by Jones, that Heyst receives a shock of recognition, that the denial of love on his part has not only led to the death of the most loving girl but also that it has turned his own life into a barren wasteland. And as an act of redemption he sets the house on fire burning himself as well as Lena. Perhaps this is Conrad's way of suggesting that love is the one solvent for the malady of isolation.
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25 Ibid., p.216.

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31 Ibid., p.87.
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39 Ibid., p.361.
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43 Victory, p.174.
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