Joseph Conrad:

A Study in Existential Vision

R. J. DAS

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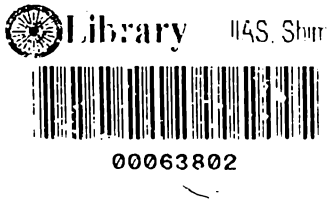
Associated Publishing House
New Delhi

Associated Publishing House
New Market, Karol Bagh, New Delhi-110005



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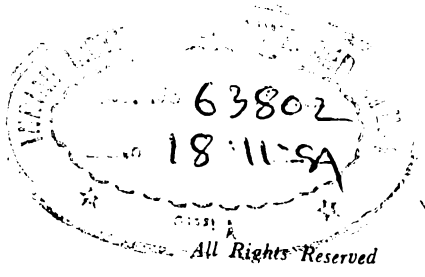

PRINTED IN INDIA
PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY R.K. PAUL FOR
ASSOCIATED PUBLISHING HOUSE, NEW DELHI.

Acknowledgments

I take this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. O.P. Mathur, Professor and Head of the Department of English, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, without whose inspiration, encouragement and guidance this study could never have been made. I am greatly obliged to him for his many acts of kindness and also for his scholarly suggestions. I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. A.P. O'Brien and Dr. T.N. Singh, formerly Professors and Heads of the Department of English, Banaras Hindu University, for having inspired me to take up research. I am thankful to Dr. Pratap Singh, Reader in English, Gorakhpur University, for the encouragement and suggestions he gave me. My thanks are also due to Shri Hari Shanker Lal, the Principal of my College, who gave me all the facilities I needed.

The present work was accepted for the award of the Ph.D. degree of Banaras Hindu University. I am grateful to the University for having permitted its publication.

GORAKHPUR R.J. DAS

Contents

Introduction

LITERARY criticism on Joseph Conrad has been primarily concerned with his experiments in fictional technique, and his vision of life has not received the attention it deserves. He has often been called a romantic writer of tales of adventure, an exotic and imaginative sea-novelist, and also a realist. Ernest A. Baker, after discussing Conrad's 'romantic-realism', has felt tempted to "view him as the natural sequel to the Stevensonians,"[1] his fiction being "in method a sort of nautical yarning, developed into a fine art of sensuous impressionism and psychological elucidation."[2] On the basis of Conrad's 'moral concern' F.R. Leavis regards Conrad to be "among the very greatest novelists in the language—or any language,"[3] and places him in the 'great tradition' of English fiction. Even Joseph Warren Beach in his full-length study of the twentieth century novel has confined himself to a discussion of Conrad's impressionistic technique.[4] In his later book on the English literature of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries also, Beach has ignored Conrad's vision of life and regards him as one of the most compelling "exploiters of the exotic picturesque"[5] concerned with the "romantic nature" of "idealism."[6] It is, however, significant that A.C. Ward, referring to Conrad's 'romantic-realism' has raised him a little above the "romanticism of the common type."[7]

An attempt was made by WM. Wallace Bancroft to systematize Conrad's philosophy of life, but he too confined his study to the "Kantian notion of the Moral law," and "ethical idealism" or "idealistic perfectionism."[8] This work is so unrevealing that it was later dismissed by Herbert J. Muller who went to the extent of stating that Conrad's "vision of life is plainly not, strictly speaking, a philosophy."[9] But Muller suggests that Conrad's "fictions were like himself invincibly romantic, he was yet not a shallow romantic seeking in fantasy an escape from the commonplace."[10] Muller's reactions are striking and seem to suggest a different kind of romanticism in Conrad, but he too concludes with a discussion of Conrad's pessimism. Thus the thematic approach to the works of Conrad has largely consisted of stamping certain labels on him, which in course of time are considered to be inadequate. Conrad also regarded himself to be a 'free' writer,[11] and so naturally expressed his dissatisfaction

with such labels stamped on him. He emphatically declared in one of his letters to Sir Sidney Colvin, "I may say that I have not been very well understood. I have been called a writer of the sea, of the tropics, a descriptive writer, a romantic writer—and also a realist."[12]

Conrad was very right. He had not been very well understood. Only in recent years some attention has been paid to his vision of life. Morton Dauwen Zabel, for instance, observes that the "drama of alienation and spiritual recognition"[13] in Conrad "appears in the characteristic novels of Mann, Gide, and Kafka, in Robinson's poems, in Joyce and Hemingway,"[14] which is further "carried to lengths of symbolic extension in *Death in Venice*, *The Trial*, *Nightwood*, and ultimately in *Finnegans Wake*."[15] Zabel adds : "One of its latest appearances is in the novels of the French existentialists, who have given tragedy a new dimension in the irrationality or absurdity of the universe."[16] In this context, discussing Razumov, the hero of *Under Western Eyes*, Zabel draws a parallel between him and the other existential heroes of fiction:

"Razumov is what the Conradian heroin variably is: a solitary. He is the man designed by nature or circumstance to live not by the law of his kind but by self-law. Like Willems, Kurtz, Tuan Jim, Nostromo, Decoud, and Heyst, he is Conrad's version of the man—descendant of the self-willed heroes of Balzac, Stendhal, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, and Melville, and brother to those of Mann or Gide—who chooses or is compelled to live a life of egoistic self-regard or compulsive self-assertion: the existence *pour-soi* or the fate of estrangement and isolation."[17]

A. J. Guerard is another critic who shows awareness of the existential dimensions of Conrad's vision of life. He links Conrad's *Amy Foster* with such works as Kafka's *America*, and *The Trial* and Camus's *The Stranger*.[18] Moreover, his remark that Conrad's *The Return* "would appear to be a story of Gidean affirmation of life,"[19] clearly suggests Conrad's similarity with modern existential writers. Another modern critic, Frederick R. Karl, describing Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory* as an 'existential' novel, makes a comparative study of Greene's Priest and Conrad's Jim in the context of the theme of isolation.[20] Jim is further compared with Sammy Mountjoy, the existential hero of William Golding's *Free Fall*. During the course of his discussions of various other novelists like Dennis, Gerald Hanley, Samuel Beckett and John Wain, Karl has placed Joseph Conrad in the line of the French existentialists, though without explicitly mentioning that Conrad's vision is existential. A few interesting suggestions have been made in *The Tragic*

Vision (1960) by Krieger Murray who has treated Jim, Kurtz and Heyst as tragic visionaries. But this study has been made in the context of Kierkegaardian Christian existentialism, while Conrad's attitude to life is secular, perhaps even at places atheistic. The criticism advanced by Edward W. Said in *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* (1966) is certainly an admirable study of Conrad's personal letters through which he emerges as an existentialist in his life. But the approach is mainly autobiographical, and it remains to be seen how Conrad's own existential experiences are faithfully yet unconsciously expressed in his works.

Discussing Conrad's contribution to English fiction, Elizabeth Drew writes:

"Conrad brought a new vision into English fiction, and if, as many people think, the sense of human isolation and the search for individual identity is the most characteristic feature of the serious twentieth century novel, the fact that *Lord Jim* was published in 1900 makes it a symbol of the new trend."[21]

Mention may also be made of a few recent critical writings. Christopher Cooper makes it explicit that if there is at all any moral scheme in Conrad's fiction it is a "private moral scheme."[22] Commenting on the modern appeal of Conrad's themes, W.W. Robson writes:

"His interest in violence and conflict, in isolation and guilt, link him with Malraux and Koestler and Silone, with Hemingway and Sartre, rather than with his English contemporaries."[23]

E.K. Hay's article entitled 'Conrad between Sartre and Socrates'[24] also suggests new directions for a study of Conrad's possible affiliation with the existentialists.

In this thesis an attempt has been made to explore Joseph Conrad's existential vision of life at which critics have hinted but which few have attempted to analyse in detail. The present study is based on Conrad's novels, tales, letters and other miscellaneous writings, but its focus is only on those of his major works which embody his existential vision and in which he has tried to delineate the human predicament. A list of the editions of these works which I have used (the uniform edition of Conrad's works not being available to me) is given in the bibliography.

Notes and References

1. Ernest A. Baker, *The History of the English Novel*, Vol. X (New York, Barnes and Nobles, Inc., 1960 reprint), p. 11.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
3. F.R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (Penguin Books, 1962), p. 248.
4. Joseph Warren Beach, *The Twentieth Century Novel* (Ludhiana, Lyall Book Depot, 1965), pp. 337-65.
5. Joseph Warren Beach, *English Literature af the Nineteenth and the Early Twentieth Centuries* (N.Y., Collier Books, 1966), p. 233.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 247.
7. A.C. Ward, *Twentieth Century English Literature* (London, E.L.B.S. and Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1965), p. 49.
8. W.M. Wallace Bancroft, *Joseph Conrad: His Philosophy of Life* (Boston, Massachusetts, The Stratford Company, 1933), p. 3.
9. Herbert J. Muller, *Modern Fiction: A Study of Values* (N.Y., McGraw-Hill Book Company, First Paperback edition: the year of publication not mentioned), p. 248. 10. *Ibid.*, p. 245.
11. Conrad was always conscious of his self-creating individuality and described himself as a 'free' writer, as is evident from his letter to Barrett Clark written on May 4, 1917: "Some critics have found fault with me for not being constantly myself . . . *I am no slave to prejudices and formulas, and I shall never be.* My attitude to subjects and expressions, the angles of vision, my methods of composition will, within limits, be always changing —not because I am unstable or unprincipled but because *I am free* or perhaps it may be more exact to say, because I am always trying for *freedom*—within my limits," G. Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad, *Life and Letters*, Vol. II (New York, Doubleday Page & Co., 1927), p. 204 (*Italics* mine).
12. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
13. Morton Dauwen Zabel, *Craft and Character in Modern Fiction* (London, Victor Gollanez Ltd., 1957), pp. 158-59.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 159. 15. *Ibid.* 16. *Ibid.*
17. Morton Dauwen Zabel, "Introduction to Under Western Eyes", *Conrad: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Marvin Mudrick (Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 133.

18. Albert J. Guerard, *Conrad the Novelist* (London, O.U.P., 1958), p. 50.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
20. Frederick R. Karl, *A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel* (London, Thames and Hudson, I964), p. 98.
21. Elizabeth Drew, *The Novel: A Modern Guide to Fifteen English Masterpieces* (New York, Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1963), p. 156.
22. Christopher Cooper, *Conrad and the Human Dilemma* (London, Chatto & Windus, 1970), p. 16.
23. W.W. Robson, *Modern English Literature* (London, O.U.P., 1970), p. 30.
24. Eloise Knapp Hay, "Conrad Between Sartre and Socrates", *Modern Language Quarterly*, Vol. 34, March 1973, No. 1.

CHAPTER I

The Existential Vision

EXISTENTIALISM is a recent philosophical movement dealing with man's disillusionment and despair. It flourished on the Continent especially after World War II. Since then certain existential themes have penetrated beyond the philosophic world to a wide circle of novel-readers and play-goers. It is true that existentialist thinkers and writers like Jean-Paul Sartre (*b.* 1905) and Albert Camus (1913-60) attracted the attention of serious students of philosophy and literature, because they offered new ways of life and thought to the world which was almost torn into pieces by the chaotic conditions generated by the two world wars. Once again man was made to realize his immense potentialities of greatness and power midst the chaos and confusion of a hostile universe. Despite the fact that now existentialism is often considered to be a systematic school of philosophy supposedly originating in the philosophical and literary writings of Sartre, it was more an attitude to life, a vision, or what Kaufmann calls a "timeless sensibility that can be discerned here and there in the past."[1] While it is a modern philosophical movement, its roots can be traced in the works of the philosophers and literary writers of the past. The basic idea behind existentialism is that man conceives himself to be uniquely individual, an autonomous agent transcending his environment, and a subjective creator committed to a personal perception of reality. Such a man is a contingent force and an intensely personal participant in the world about him. This idea was expressed from time to time through different revolts against traditional philosophy.

Socrates (469-399 B.C.) was perhaps the first philosopher who opposed the metaphysical flight of Greek philosophy and emphasized that philosophy should deal with human life and its problems. His clarion call 'know thyself' throbs with existentialist sentiments. St. Augustine showed his concern with the "where, when, how"[2] in man's life and realized the gradually diminishing claim for the power of reason to solve human problems. In his autobiography *The Confessions*, St. Augustine describes the limitations of his capacities as a human being and the fleeting nature of his achievements. The Epicurean doctrine that reason is a practical instrument to find out

adequate means of happiness has a hollow ring for St. Augustine because this sort of happiness is temporary. St. Augustine too counsels man to know himself, that is, to recognize that man is an imperfect, dependent creature seeking the perfection of the eternal. This kind of self-knowing constitutes the basis of existentialism. Pascal (1623-1662) shares the Augustinian appraisal of the human situation and asks man to know himself: "know then, proud man, what a paradox you are to yourself."[3] He further discovers:

"What a chimera then is man! What a novelty! What a monster, what a chaos, what a contradiction, what a prodigy!"[4]

Man is described as a 'frail reed' to whom the hostile universe remains incomprehensible, who fails to establish any meaningful connection with "the infinite immensity of spaces."[5] The idea of 'space' between man and the universe finds an elaborate treatment in the hands of Sartre and grows into the concept of 'nothingness' or existential void. But, according to Pascal, man 'infinitely transcends man' and asserts his existence for 'essence' in life, and, when the desire is left unfulfilled, he is condemned to a lonely life of terror and anguish.

George W.F. Hegel's position is perhaps the most paradoxical: though he makes unlimited claims for reason, his concept of 'alienation' or 'estrangement' is a direct contribution to contemporary existentialism. In his *Philosophy of Mind*, Hegel uses the word "experience"[6] to discuss the conscious process of alienation. The existentialists would, perhaps, accept Hegel's view of the cognitive origin of 'alienation' but deny his claim that reason is capable of uniting that which it has separated. According to them, reason is an instrument of analysis and hence it cannot be used as an instrument to effect synthesis or reconciliation. Notwithstanding their criticism of Hegel and his followers, the existentialists agree with him on the point that the immediate data of man's experience are chaotic. Thus the point of agreement is that reason is powerless to deal with data. In sharp contrast, the existentialists claim that the unifying function of reason is limited, productive of appearance rather than of reality and that reason applied to the world of immediate experience is an insidious mechanism of escape from reality.

These roots nourished by the above philosophers grew up into the existentialist 'tree' and Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) constituted its trunk while writers like Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Jaspers, Marcel, Sartre, Camus and others who followed him emerged as its various branches. In its early phase, the under-

lying idea behind this philosophy was that the essence common to all preceded the individual existence, since man formed a part of the universe. Existentialism was then a kind of philosophical idealism. But with Kierkegaard it became a powerful revolt against reason, rationality, positivism and the traditional ways in which early philosophers depicted man. Kierkegaard observes that the uniqueness of man is threatened by the metaphysical systems in which man's nature is irrevocably fixed. Man is shown in pre-established relationships to the cosmos. Philosophers of such systems were bitterly attacked by Kierkegaard and his followers, because man was offered the narcotic of self-delusion that inhibited him from gaining self-knowledge. Realizing man's dignity and uniqueness Kierkegaard launches a crusade to make man renounce his identification with State, society, church, and the most insidious of all, speculative metaphysical systems. Thus he brings about a revolutionary change in the very basic concept of existentialism and puts forward an entirely different kind of philosophy, the first principle of which is that man's existence is supreme and precedes his essence, if any. He discovers reality in self : "subjectivity is truth, subjectivity is reality."[7] Basing his philosophy on the subjectivity of human existence, Kierkegaard stresses and glorifies the individuals' 'act of choice' and 'will', raising both to the moral level. He also attempts to make every individual aware of his primal subjectivity, so that he may live authentically because he bears the sole responsibility for his decisions. While taking some decision, an individual finds himself at cross-roads. At such a moment of 'crisis', he should exercise his 'will' in all sincerity. The result of the 'act of choice' is not so important as the use of the subjective 'will' itself. Therefore, the most important point in the philosophy of Kierkegaard is the 'freedom of choice' or 'free choice'. In *Either/Or* Kierkegaard shows that an individual must make either the aesthetic choice, by which he chooses finite things for himself, or the ethical choice, by which he gives himself to God.

Kierkegaard, the Christian existentialist, recommends to man the way to be authentic and to achieve genuine personal existence which involves him in nothing less than a leap across a bottemless chasm. Man acquires self-knowledge through an awareness of the conditions around him. But self-knowledge is possible only when he has an 'intensified awareness' of an encounter with God. Man starts from 'doubt' which characterizes the early (aesthetic) stage of his life. In the ultimate stage of religious life he realizes 'faith' in the presence of an Infinite Being, an external power, which he

calls 'The Absolute Other'. This faith is a 'miracle' according to him and no man can remain excluded from it, "for that in which all human life is passion, and faith is a passion."[8] With this passion man may define himself but Kierkegaard claims at the outset that 'man is not yet a self' unless he has achieved a synthesis with God, with "the Power which constituted"[9] him. This lack of synthesis is what Kierkegaard calls 'alienation' which causes sickness or despair in man. The elimination of despair is health which is achieved only when the self, recognizing its dependence on the 'Power which constituted' it, wills to be itself. But man suffers from despair for want of faith in God and this "despair is 'The Sickness Unto Death,' "[10] because it is a desperate longing for death, not merely for extinction, but for the experience of not being the self that one is. In order to overcome it, man has to create his self through action. The despair which is the sickness unto death may take any one of the three forms: it may be the despair of not being conscious of having a self;[11] it may be the despair of not willing to be oneself;[12] or it may be the despair of willing to be oneself.[13]

Perhaps the most conspicuous figure among the catalysts of existentialism was Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). With him it became a direct revolt against the State, orthodox religion and philosophical systems. He shares Kierkegaard's glorification of the human 'will' and advocates 'authentic living'. He also insists that the individual must exercise his 'free choice' in creating values for his own evolution into a Superman. *Thus Spake Zarathustra* is Nietzsche's attempt to help man surpass himself, to become 'superman' through a 'radical inversion' of traditional values. His basic idea is that 'will' is the most important aspect of all existence, an idea he received from Schopenhaeur. But unlike the pessimistic Schopenhauer, Neitzsche emphasizes upon man's pride and transcendence and says that he should seek to surpass himself, to achieve greatness of 'will' and 'being'. Zarathustra, Nietzsche's ideal of superman, speaks of man as the creator of values, "Values did man only assign to things in order to maintain himself—he created only the significance of things, a human significance! Therefore, calleth himself 'man', that is, the valuator."[14] He further adds that valuing meant creating and only through valuation there would be value and "without valuation the nut of existence would be hollow."[15] This is possible only when man strives not only to survive but also to remake and overpower the entire universe through a myriad manifestation of the 'Will to Power'. The 'superman' is a life-furthering idea, the expression of man's 'Will to Power'. The motive power of all

organic life, according to him, is not the "Will to Live", which he thinks nonsense, but the desire to expand, to grow, to appropriate, to gain in power, in short, the 'Will to Power'. He also expresses that whatever comes in the way of man's transcendence and progress such as reason, morality, politics and religion, should be abolished. Reason, he affirms, makes man 'calculating' and hence it becomes a mechanism of escape and withdrawal from action. Reason is inhibitive in the fulfilment of human 'will'.

Beyond Good and Evil carries forward the same basic ideas of Nietzsche with particular reference to values and morality. Morality, according to him, is alien to the subjective 'will'. Those who take refuge in the citadel of morality, shun the responsibility of action and self-determination. By way of eulogising human action and establishing the supremacy of man, Nietzsche points out that the proud, creative individual goes beyond good and evil in action, thought and creation. The 'noble man' is neither a slave nor a citizen; he is the lawmaker, the one who determines by his choice and commitment what is right or wrong, good or bad. He is what Dostoevsky in *Crime and Punishment* calls the 'extraordinary' man. So man in Nietzsche is free to make a choice for good or bad according to his own ends and is thus able to achieve immediate and joyous release of his creative energies, in contrast with the Kierkegaardian man who is left helplessly suffering the agony of inwardness. With self-assertion man may be able to stand above the traditional morality:

"The dangerous and disquieting point has been reached when the greater, more manifold, more comprehensive life *is lived beyond* the old morality; the 'individual' stands out, and is obliged to have recourse to his own law-giving, his own arts and artifices for self-preservation, self-elevation, and self-deliverance."[16]

Tracing the origin of 'responsibillty,'[17] Nietzsche describes man as the 'sovereign individual', that resembles only himself, the man of the personal and independent will having a "genuine consciousness of power and freedom."[18] Such a man is the "lord of the free will"[19] who is always conscious of his superiority to everything in the universe, circumstances, nature and all creatures. This free man sets his own "standard of value,"[20] and the consciousness of the rare 'freedom', provides him with the privilege of 'responsibility' which sinks down to his innermost depths in the form of a 'dominating instinct' and "the sovereign man calls it his conscience."[21] Nietzsche, with his faith in the supremacy of man's consciousness and conscience, anticipates the later existentialists like Sartre and Camus.

In religion too, the Nietzschean man is an antithesis to the Kierkegaardian. Man in Kierkegaard moves from 'doubt' to 'faith'; whereas in Nietzsche man moves from 'faith' to 'doubt'. In the beginning, the individual may have 'faith' in the presence of some external power—God, or 'The Absolute Other'. But as he grows, he comes across the multiple contradictions and perplexities of life which give him the sense of futility and unreason of existence. When he finds himself in an utterly soulless and godless universe, he begins to doubt the existence of 'The Absolute Other'. Moreover, Nietzsche declares through Zarathustra that for the modern man *God is dead.*[22] This is an interesting theme upon which the atheistic existentialists have concentrated to convey the most awful fact that the individual is thrown into a dreadful situation in which he alone is responsible for his choices. 'Man', according to him, "is a rope stretched between the animal and the superman—a rope over an abyss."[23] Man should project himself for the highest achievement in life, crossing the bottomless abyss. Nietzsche recognizes man's potentiality of becoming God and tells the old Pope in 'Out of Service' that God who is dead should be completely abandoned:

"Away with *such* a God! Better to have no God, better to set up destiny on one's own account, better to be a fool, better to be God oneself."[24]

Hence, according to Nietzsche man should try to become a 'superman' through action and power of transcendence, because the 'superman' is the only meaning of the earth. Thus Nietzsche's basic ideas are the affirmation of the superman, the rejection of Christian morality, the doctrine of power, and the 'revision of all values'.

Another important philosopher who exerted a profound influence on subsequent existentialist thought was Martin Heidegger. He proposes that the nature of 'Being' is the proper subject-matter of philosophy. His concept of *Dasein* (literally 'Being there') used for human being or mode of human existence is a remarkable contribution to Sartre's concept of 'Being'. He speaks in the true voice of existentialism when he says that because each human being is characterized by a potentiality of making a choice in life, his essence lies in his existence. And so there is no pre-ordained nature of *Dasein*; its essence lies in realizing its possibilities. In *Being and Time* Heidegger evolves a method of existentialist phenomenology which reveals how things really are if we think about them and open our eyes to our true position in the world. He describes the world in which man exists and makes a choice for 'authentic living' in which he commits himself to act without any social precedence or rational

guidance. But 'authentic existence' is possible only when man thoroughly understands what he is. Once he has grasped that each individual is uniquely himself and no one else, that each of us has his own possibilities to fulfil, then his concern with the world can become a truly 'authentic' concern. But Heidegger further shows that notwithstanding man's 'authentic' existence, he finds himself in an agonizing situation which demands that he should choose and fully bear the dreadful responsibility for his choice. Thus he depicts man in a painful human situation—a situation in which accomplishment is a mere illusion and happiness an evasion—which permits only one value, the value of recognizing and bearing the nothingness of human existence. Human dignity rests on the heroic acknowledgment of this dreadful reality. Heidegger's concept of 'nothingness' is elaborately discussed by the French existentialists, particularly by Sartre.

A few great writers also created a favourable atmosphere for the growth of existentialist literature. Dostoevsky (1821-1881), Andre Gide (1869-1951), and Franz Kafka (1883-1924) probed deeply into human subjectivity and freedom in their works. Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* is one of the most revolutionary and original works in the history of existentialism. In it, major themes are stated through the inner life of the underground man, his moods, anxieties and decisions. The narrator rages against the substantial identities provided for him by the society, yet, simultaneously, he struggles to create an identity for himself. Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot* and *The Brothers Karamazov* in their themes anticipate much of later existentialist literature. Andre Gide wrote on existential themes and also lived like an existentialist. His works are the finest manifestations of his search for self-identity: "Gide's writings and his life had emphasized his search for individualism."[25] Though himself a victim of nausea and disgust with self in his life, he believes in human worth and dignity which he expresses in his writings: "There are strange possibilities in every man."[26] Franz Kafka too delineates the predicament of man, who, endowed with an insatiable appetite for transcendental certainty, finds himself in a world robbed of all spiritual possessions. Some of Kafka's novels like *The Trial*, *The Castle* and *The Metamorphosis* are informed by certain existential features. For example, Joseph K. in *The Trial* is doubtless eager to defend himself, but he does not know against what. *The Castle* presents a hero who is lost in the irrational and labyranthine ways of the world and is unable to attain his goal. In *The Metamorphosis* Kafka describes the unique but absurd situation of a man's consciousness of

effortlessly becoming a beast. Thus Kafka paints a dream-world, a world of uncertainty, nightmares and insecurity, of fear and trembling in which the self and the world are juxtaposed in opposition. These are some of the aspects of Kafka's existential vision of life that were further developed by Sartre and Camus.

Existentialism found its richest treatment in the hands of Jean-Paul Sartre (*b.* 1905) who is a unique expounder of atheistic existentialism. He says that the world is radically contingent, for man cannot account for human existence on any rational basis. Sartre's philosophical and literary works reveal the existential situation and depict its essential hopelessness. But his message is not entirely negative. A man can, with a measure of relief, confront the naked reality without recourse to the illusions provided by reason and thereby enter into 'authentic' existence. Sartre shares the view of human 'will' emphasized by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. But Nietzsche's influence is more powerful because Sartre also believes in the supremacy of man's existence in a godless universe. Sartre is of the opinion that "if God does not exist there is at least one being whose existence comes before its essence, a being which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it. That being is man or, as Heidegger has it, the human reality."[27] In this way he lays stress on the priority of existence. Sartre contradicts the idea of human nature, "because there is no God to have a conception of it."[28] He goes on to declare, "Man simply is,"[29] Man has immense potentiality and in order *to be* he has to exercise his 'will' and to project his being for essence in life. Sartre adds: "Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself."[30] This is the first principle of Sartre's philosophy.

Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* is a treatise on the philosophy of ontology influenced by Heidegger's ontological concern. But the treatment of the subject is entirely original dealing with various aspects of human condition. Sartre considers man to be the source of 'nothingness', and thus man himself is both 'being' and 'nothingness'. The concept of 'being' is basic in Sartre's writings. According to him, there are three kinds of being: an object has being 'in-itself'; a man has being 'for-itself', because he has consciousness which objects do not have; and, finally, we all have being 'for-others' which means that we all exist in the eyes of other people and think of ourselves on the evidence of what other people think of us. Being 'in-itself' means non-conscious being "which is what it is."[31] This mode of being is well explained by William Barrett: "Being-in-itself (en-soi) is the self-contained being of a thing. A stone is a stone, it

is what it is; and in being just what it is, no more and no less, the being of the thing always coincides with itself."[32] Being 'for-itself' means conscious being "which has to be what it is—i.e., which is what it is not and which is not what it is."[33] In other words, man (Being 'for-itself') continually makes himself and instead of being he 'has to be'; his present being is meaningful only in the light of the future toward which he projects himself. Thus 'for-itself' is a being of consciousness engaged in the pursuit of being toward selfness. Man is always aware of a 'lack' or 'nothingness' in him and thus internally he always negates being 'in-itself': "For-itself, in fact, is nothing but the pure nihilation of the In-itself; it is like a hole of being at the heart of being."[34] Thus the being of the object is non-being which is defined as a 'lack' and Sartre shows in the further examination of 'nothingness' that non-being is the condition of any transcendence toward Being. 'For-itself' is that form of human existence which is always in self-transcendence. In existing he lives beyond himself: "The For-itself is the being which determines itself to exist inasmuch as it cannot coincide with itself."[35] Discussing the nature of 'for-itself' Barrett points out that in being 'for-itself': "our existence from moment to moment is a perpetual flying beyond ourselves, or else a perpetual falling behind our own possibilities: in any case, our being never exactly coincides with itself."[36] This is the method of Sartre's phenomenological analysis of 'being' or human existence, or, more precisely, of human consciousness facing the world. Barrett adds:

"Being for itself (pour-soi) is co-extensive with the realm of consciousness, and the nature of consciousness is that it is perpetually beyond itself."[37]

Thus while existing, man ('for-itself') lives beyond himself.

It is difficult to assign and ascertain as to which form of 'being' has primacy over the other in Sartre's philosophy and literature. When he stresses being 'in-itself', he emerges as an existential realist, but when he gives primacy to being 'for-itself', he becomes what we may call an existential romantic. This duality in him has made him a controversial figure. But his literary works show that Sartre's man is different from the romantic who has a creative passion. In this context Norberto Bobbio writes:

"Paraphrasing the thesis of Sartre, one might say that the romantic individual was a useful passion. The romantic hero was Prometheus, in whom the act of liberation acquires a cosmic significance; the existentialistic hero is Orestes, the protagonist of Les Mouches, who accomplishes the terrible act of vengeance with the sole object of self-realization."[38]

After discussing the decadentism of Sartre, Bobbio concludes:

"Existentialism is an emasculated form of romanticism—a romanticism that has lost its own power, because, as Jaspers would say, it has lost its simplicity, in other words the illusion that it covers the world. *The existentialist is the Romantic stripped of his illusions. He is the disillusioned Romantic.*"[39]

Such is the treatment of man in Sartre's literary writings, though he would deny the charge of decadentism in his philosophical writings. Man, according to him, is not a decadent. A 'for-itself', with his self-awareness and power of transcendence, can become God. Sartre writes:

"the passion of man is the reverse of that of Christ, for man loses himself as man in order that God may be born. But the idea of God is contradictory and we lose ourselves in vain. *Man is a useless passion.*"[40]

In his plays and novels, Sartre has created his major characters along the lines of the Faustian superman. But the end of all is endless anxiety and nothingness. In Sartre's 'being' there is an emphasis on the reverse movement, that is from romantic idealism to existential realism. This kind of movement has been repeatedly stressed in his literary works. A being 'for-itself', with hopes and ideals, transcends himself but ultimately emerges as a disillusioned romantic when he shrinks backward and sinks into an unfathomable depth of nothingness and chaos. Jean Wahl rightly observes: "The 'for-itself' appears to be a Nothingness, or more precisely, a nullification."[41] A human being is personified anguish and agony. He is torn by inner conflict. He is forlorn and forsaken. Existence is characterized by nausea and falseness which make life miserable and disgusting. Thus man moves backward from romanticism to realism and emerges as an existentialist, the disillusioned romantic. For him, life is meaningless and empty. Hopes, dreams, ideals and values seem pointless; they are illusions, not realities. Existence is like a rudderless boat drifting astray without any purpose or goal. It is in this sense that Sartre describes man as a 'useless passion.' This kind of movement in a man's life is the reverse movement which is described as the shrinking backward of 'For-itself' towards 'In-itself-For-itself' about which Sartre speaks:

"Each human reality is at the same time a direct project to metamorphose its own 'For-itself' into an 'In-itself-For-itself' and a project of the appropriation of the world as a totality of being-in-itself, in the form of a fundamental quality."[42]

Hence man who is a kind of existential romantic in the beginning emerges as an existentialist after having experienced the reality

in life. Thus, romanticism is given a new significance and, as Colin Wilson says, it has assumed a different name:

"In the twentieth century romanticism revived under another name. It called itself existentialism. But its basic question was still the same, which of the two worlds is real: the world of supreme, god-like detachment and power, or the world in which we feel victimized, helpless, 'contingent'? Which is true: man's experience of his freedom, or of slavery to his body and the world?"[43]

So existentialism is a stage in the romantic pursuits of life when man's melancholy deepens into anguish. This is the stage when man faces the naked realities of life. Hence existentialism is a thrust into reality; whereas romanticism is, as Kaufmann says, a flight from it:

"Romanticism is flight from the present, whether into the past, the future, or another world, dreams, or, most often, a vague fog. It is self-deception. Romanticism yearns for deliverance from the cross of the Here and Now: it is willing to face anything but the facts."[44]

In the twentieth century, existentialism begins to acquire political overtones. Sartre's major writings are political. He has acknowledged Marxism as the only philosophy today. But he states the principal fact: "historical materialism furnished the only valid interpretation of history and that existentialism remained the only concrete approach to reality."[45] Marxism is based on biological and social datum of the human collectivity and its class structure, whereas existentialism gives priority to the interiority of individual consciousness. In *The Problem of Method*, Sartre finds out a method which suggests the way in which "existentialism seeks to modify Marxism and to change its direction."[46] In this treatise of his political philosophy he recreates Marxism and explains it in terms of individual *praxis* (the Greek word for 'action' or any purposeful human activity). Whole discussing the contribution of existentialism to Marxism, Mary Warnoch sums up Sartre's view: "existentialism which amounts to an insistence on man's capacity for free choice according to his own view of his situation, can improve Marxist theory, which claims to be a science."[47] Sartre claims this improvement on the fundamental concept of individual *praxis*, even if the individual were a victim of the social conditions. He further proposes the process of 'totalization,' that is, to pass from the individual to the group, from consciousness to history and affirms that the "dialectical totalization must include acts, passions, work and need"[48] of the individual because individual consciousness is the source of collectivity; it is the 'For-itself' that experien-

ces social realities, reacts and develops dialectically and creates social dialectic. In this way, clarifying the position of Marxism and Existentialism, Sartre advocates the "historical process of totalization."[49]

Thus Sartre's method is that of individual 'totalization' which creates the collective phenomenon. The individual, according to him, is capable of creating history with his consciousness and human activity. In an essay entitled "Materialism and Revolution," Sartre further puts forward his philosophy of revolution and defines the existential "situation"[50] of the revolutionary in a bourgeois world of evil and corruption. The revolutionary is in a 'situation' in which he plays the role of "double character of producer and oppressed person."[51] As an "historical agent" having a thrust toward the future, the revolutionary is defined by his "*going beyond* the situation in which he is placed."[52]

Summing up Sartre's political philosophy, Colin Wilson observes: "Sartre has attempted to persuade Marxian philosophy to abandon its old-fashioned nineteenth century materialism, and accept a more realistic existential psychology as the basis of its social optimism."[53] Wilson seems to be sharing Sartre's views and expresses hope for the "outcome of the 'cultural race' "[54] in Russia and even in America. He is convinced that "existential realism could also channel"[55] the American "intellectual vitality" to produce a "new 'world-culture.' "[56]

Sartre's political philosophy found expression even in his literary writings, but with some variations. He creates his major characters who display their awareness of the contemporary politics, and their anti-bourgeois attitude is everywhere discernible. But they are mainly involved in existential dilemmas leaving the political issues to get mystified and lost. He writes on the themes of politics which are deeply rooted in existential thought. Thus in Sartre's political writings existentialism has acquired a political colouring and becomes what may be called political existentialism.

Existentialism is treated on the highest level of atheism in Albert Camus's (1913-1960) works. With an instinctive emphasis on individual experience, existentialists like Camus have shown the individual on the threshold of revolt, which begins when he faces the utter unreason of existence and absurdity in life. In a world characterized by lack of significance and coherence, the revolting existential hero, rejecting the absolute values of the romantic, has to create personal values for himself:

"Meaning has to be created, not found, and it has to be created by the individual out of the actual experience of revolt."[57]

This kind of revolt is termed as the "absolute revolt."[58]

The theme of revolt finds its richest treatment in the philosophical as well as the literary writings of Albert Camus, who believes that "revolt is one of the 'essential dimensions' of mankind."[59] Man, after having experienced the absurdity of life, faces the problems of suicide or murder. Camus declares:

"Suicide and murder are thus two aspects of a single system, the system of an unhappy intellect which rather than suffer limitation chooses the dark victory which annihilates earth and heaven."[60]

Le Mythe de Sisphe is Camus's philosophical treatise which begins with a discussion of suicide and ends with the theme of revolt. Though its central message is that "the true revolt against the absurdity of existence consists, not in suicide, but in continuing to live. Suicide is 'acceptance pushed to its logical extreme.' Real revolt consists in 'dying unreconciled and not of one's own free will'.[61] But this message is not final because Camus admits that "suicide is the only serious philosophical problem."[62] Man kills himself when he fails to find sufficient justifications for living. When man is completely divorced from his own existence he ends his life and experiences the 'absurd':

"This feeling of estrangement between a man and his life, which sometimes ends in suicide, is the most elementary way of experiencing the absurd."[63]

Thus Camus, while discussing the problem of suicide, relates it to the absurd and further points out that the experience of the absurd results not only in physical suicide but also in philosophical suicide in which man kills his intellect for self-preservation:

"The absurd can prompt both self-destruction (through physical suicide) and self-preservation (through philosophical suicide)."[64]

Moreover, Camus asserts that in "every act of solitary self-destruction," "the man who kills himself in solitude still recognizes a value."[65] Man destroys himself at times and discovers personal values. In that case self-destruction or self-preservation is a kind of self-fulfilment.

The thinkers and writers we call existentialists may be described more adequately as men sharing a way of viewing things than men contributing their ideas to a systematic philosophy. Any attempt to categorize them into schools is likely to hinder rather than to help us in understanding them because they have expressed diverse views: theistic and atheistic. Moreover, there are some philosophers who might be described as existentialists but would reject the title, whereas others might be astonished to be so described. As we have seen,

there were even non-philosophical writers like Dostoevsky, Gide and Kafka who dealt with certain themes that are now interpreted to be existential. But one thing is certain that all of them have a common meeting ground when they describe man's uniqueness and subjectivity and discuss the basic problems of human existence. Man's autonomy and force of individualism, his rejection of reason and rationality, his repudiation of the adequacy of all traditional values, institutions and philosophy, his exercise of 'will' and 'freedom', his unique experience of 'nothingness' and absurdity in life—these are some of the striking existential features that were reflected through different revolts against traditional philosophy. Now it is mainly a philosophy of 'anguish' and also of 'liberty' and 'action'. Political existentialism is another aspect which seeks to recreate Marxism in this age. Taking these different views about the predicament of human existence together, we can have a unified vision of life which may be safely termed as existential vision.

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CHAPTER II

Shaping of the Vision

THE English novelists before Joseph Conrad studied man and his world as two entities of objective reality and used their art largely as a powerful "public instrument"[1] to present social problems or to study man in relation to society. Joseph Conrad broke away from the existing traditions, for he wrote fiction neither for entertainment nor for propagating his social ideas. His main preoccupation was to study man's existence and his predicament, his exploration being a search for 'self'. In Conrad's works man and his world are one entity of the subjective reality, that is, 'self.' "Like a later novelist, Andre Malraux, who has much in common with him . . . , Conrad is the novelist of extreme situations . . . his theme is man against himself, the environment, . . . having a double function, to isolate the character from society, and the larger world of men, so that he can be put *in extremis*, and to act as the agent of his self-confrontation."[2] Walter Allen thus suggests that Conrad's vision of life is typically modern. Allen makes himself more explicit a little later:

"The world Conrad describes, the moral dilemmas facing his characters, are those we know today, that seem to us now, as someone has said, almost to have come into existence in 1940."[3]

A study of Conrad's works, including his letters and miscellaneous writings, reveals the fact that various factors, chiefly autobiographical and political, contributed to the growth and shaping of this kind of vision. In order to study this growth in his vision, we can divide his life into two phases: the early Conrad and the later Conrad. His literary career began in 1895 with the publication of *Almayer's Folly*, the other tales and novels published during the first phase were *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896), *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (1897), *Tales of Unrest* (1898), *Lord Jim* (1900), *Youth: A Narrative*; and *Two Other Stories* (1903). The political novel *Nostromo* (1904) marks the change in Conrad's vision towards maturity on a political level, and the works of this second phase that have been studied besides *Nostromo* (1904), are *The Mirror of the Sea* (1906), *The Secret Agent* (1907), *Under Western Eyes* (1911), *A Personal Record* (1912), and *Notes on Life and Letters* (1921).

Conrad's life and works are inseparable. Conrad's "powerful personality" was "a personality at once simple and complex."[4] The

evolution of his early vision was deeply influenced by his Polish birth and by his experiences of sea-life. In spite of utter loneliness under a period of probation or training, Jessie Conrad, his wife, quotes the words of Conrad in which he says that he set out to "*justify* (*his*) *existence to* (*himself*), to redeem a tacit moral pledge."[5] This kind of self-engagement is to be seen both in his life and works. His father Apollo was a Polish patriot and a man of letters. The young Conrad shared these two dominant passions of his father. His father's translations of Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*[6] and Victor Hugo's *Travailleurs de la mer* also delighted him considerably. Victor Hugo gave him a foretaste of the sea-farer's life.[7] Having become motherless at eight and fatherless at twelve, Conrad in his lonely boyhood developed a liking for reading romances like Marryat's and displayed his irresistible romantic fascination for a sea-life as is evident from *Notes on Life and Letters*. Notwithstanding the repeated persuasions of his tutor and his uncle, he determined to embark upon a risky but a romantic career of a sailor in 1873. Like an existentialist, who had firm faith in his own potentiality, Conrad exercised his 'self-will' in overcoming all opposition and it is shown in *A Personal Record* how he finally left Cracow for Marseilles. This shows Conrad's 'free and conscious determination' of being a seaman—a case of the individual's 'fundamental project of being.'[8] In 1875 Conrad shipped out from Marseilles to Martinique on the ship Mont-Blanc. His uncle showed much concern with Conrad's lonely life in Marseilles as the young boy spent money lavishly and ran perpetually in debt. Jocelyn Baines produces evidence that once Conrad attempted suicide owing to the anguish caused by his increased gambling debts.[9] In 1876 he visited West Indies once again in the Saint-Antoine, one of the officers of which, Dominic Cervoni, was regarded by Conrad as his true 'sea-daddy'. Cervoni exercised an abiding influence on his mind and he appears in person in *The Mirror of the Sea* and *The Arrow of Gold*. Conrad admits that Cervoni was a source of inspiration to him in the creation of Nostromo in the novel of that name, of Jean Peyrol in *The Rover*, of Tom Lingard in *The Rescue* and of Attilio in *Suspense*. Further, he had varied sea-experiences while serving in several ships as an officer voyaging to different parts of the world, particularly across the Indian Ocean and in and around the Malay Archipelago and the Gulf of Siam. In 1881 he set out for Australia on his first voyage as an officer, and further joined the barque *Palestine* bound for Bangkok. She is the *Judea* of *Youth*—a work in which his personal experiences of this voyage are faithfully described. After some time, he joined the *Riversdale* bound for

Madras and thence he went to Bombay. Conrad as a second mate moved from "Bombay to Dunkirk in 1884 in a ship actually named 'Narcissus'."[10] His experiences of this voyage are described in his "two storm-pieces," *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* and *Typhoon.*

It is interesting to observe that while journeying on the sea Conrad was in the habit of reading. Ford Madox Ford, an intimate friend of Conrad, also gives an account of Conrad's reading of Marryat, Maupassant and Flaubert. He describes that Conrad read "Marryat in the shadow of the castle of the good King Rene, Daudet on the *Cannebiere* of Marseilles, . . . Maupassant on the French torpedo-boats on which he served and Flaubert on the French flagship, *Villed Ompteda.*"[11] Of course, Marryat inspired Conrad for a sea-life and Maupassant and Flaubert also exerted great influence on both Conrad and Ford but these authors had little to do with the shaping of Conrad's philosophical vision of life. Conrad and Ford were influenced by Maupassant and Flaubert as far as the style of writing fiction was concerned. Ford admits, "Our chief masters in style were Flaubert and Maupassant: Flaubert in the greater degree, Maupassant in the less."[12] Actually Conrad translated his experiences into his works according to his own conception of life. Ford would support this observation:

"It was in short the passion of Conrad . . . and that passion he applied to his writing: his darkness, his wide gestures, his eyes in which the light was like the glow of a volcano."[13]

Moreover, Conrad is an independent writer relying mainly on his own vision of life. In his letter to Galsworthy he makes the point clear, "In a book you should love the idea and be scrupulously faithful to *your conception of life.*"[14]

The year 1887 was fruitful in Conrad's life, as it offered him manifold experiences and rich materials for his early tales and novels. Certain details of *Lord Jim* may be traced to the sources discussed by Joseph D. Gordon[15]—how Conrad came across Jim Lingard, while sailing on the *Vidar* in 1887-88. Lingard was a white trader known as 'Tuan Jim' in the East. But probably the author borrowed only his name and not his character. Conrad served as chief mate in *Highland Forest,* bound for Java. During this journey he conceived of Captain MacWhirr of *Typhoon.* He again switched over to *Vidar* and came across the life of Malaya. The events of *Almayer's Folly, An Outcast of the Islands, Lord Jim, The Rescue,* and many other stories are set against the background of these enchanted Eastern Seas. Norman Sherry[16] refers to Conrad's acquaintance with Augustine Podmore Williams and discusses elaborately the similari-

ties between Jim and Williams. There is yet another speculation that Jim's adventures in Patusan are based on Conrad's knowledge of James Brooke, an English adventurer who settled in Sarawak on the West Coast of Borneo. Speaking about the locality of *The Shadow Line*, Conrad records: "As to locality it belongs to that part of the Eastern seas from which I have carried away into my writing life the greatest number of suggestions."[17] Entirely based on his autobiographical experiences, the story is that of his first command. 1889 was another significant year when he took two very important decisions: he began to write his first novel, *Almayer's Folly*, and he proceeded to the Belgian Congo, the scene of *Heart of Darkness*. The bitter Congo voyage told upon his health and outlook and created a kind of moral revulsion and nausea. His experience had been so grim and debilitating that he realized the absurdity of human existence and in a letter he expressed his anguish and his desire for a complete metamorphosis:

"If one could get rid of his heart and memory (and also brain) and then get a whole new set of these things, life would become ideally amusing."[18]

This is possible, he adds, only in creative and absorbing work. This interesting letter makes Edward W. Said speculate, "If he had had such work by him, he would have been able to hide himself in a new identity."[19] The problem of *hiding oneself in a new identity*, when the present existence becomes intolerable is not only Conrad's but also of his major characters like Jim and Razumov who are seen to be engaged in a ceaseless search for identity. As the *Congo Diary* indicates, Conrad suffered miserably on account of illness and discouragement resulting in the feeling of the monotony of existence. In 1891 he actually faced the existential dilemma, self-conflict, illogicality and absurdity of his own life and doubted the very concept of existence as put forward by Descartes. Conrad wrote:

"I am vegetating. I don't even think; therefore I don't exist (according to Descartes). But another person (a learned man) has said: 'No thought without phosphorous [sic.].' Whence it seems to be the phosphorous that is absent, while as for me, I am still here. But in that case *I should be existing without thinking*, which (according to Descartes) is impossible. Good heavens, could I be a Punch?"[20]

Conrad seems to be suggesting that a man may exist even without thinking that Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I am) is subject to revision that *I exist* therefore I think. This concept giving priority to 'I' or self-consciousness clearly anticipates Sartre's concept of the pre-reflective cogito: "In so far as my reflecting consciousness

is consciousness of itself, it is non-positional consciousness."[21] Sartre concludes that "the I manifests itself as the source of consciousness."[22]

During the Congo voyage Conrad also arrived at a stage when he expressed his death-wish because he was almost disgusted with his "long, long illness and very dismal convalescence."[23] He said "I had the time to wish myself dead over and over again with perfect sincerity.[24] Conrad recovered slowly and returned to the sea only to wind up his sea-faring career, because he knew that "the quarter-deck training does not prepare one sufficiently for the reception of literary criticism."[25] At this stage he made a "conscious choice" of being a literary writer of repute. But it was not so easy. Conrad the sea-man had to struggle very hard in order to be Conrad the novelist. While the composition of *Almayer's Folly* was still in progress, he describes his puzzling situation in a letter written on March 24, 1894:

"I am in the midst of struggling with Chapter XI (of *Almayer's Folly*); a struggle to the death, you know! If I let up, I am lost! I am writing you first before going out. I must go out sometimes, alas! I begrudge each minute I spend away from paper . . . . Then there are soaring flights; my thought goes wandering through vast spaces filled with shadowy forms. All is yet chaos, but, slowly, the apparitions change into living flesh, the shimmering mists take shape, and—who knows?—something may be born of the clash of nebulous ideas."[26]

Two novels, *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands*, were born. Conrad's 'going out' may be symbolic of an existential movement of a "being-for-itself" who always lives beyond itself. This is a movement of self toward future possibilities for an essence in life. The author asserts his existence with a view to creating a fictional world of his own, to establish himself as a writer of renown. But then he is caught, almost chained in the machine of existence and like Camus' Sisyphus he can be seen struggling, with no apparent end in sight. This existential dilemma is described in an extraordinary letter written the same year on July 20:

"Remember, though, that one is never entirely alone. Why are you afraid? And of what? Is it of solitude or of death? O strange fear! The only two things that make life bearable! But cast fear aside. Solitude never comes—and death must often be waited for during long years of bitterness and anger. Do you prefer that?

"But you are afraid of yourself; of the inseparable being for ever at your side—master and slave, victim and executioner—who suffers and causes suffering. That's how it is! One must drag the ball and chain of one's selfhood to the end. It is the price one pays

for the devilish and divine privilege of thought; so that in this life it is only the elect who are convicts—a glorious band which comprehends and groans but which treads the earth amidst a multitude of phantoms with maniacal gestures, with idiotic grimaces. Which would you be: idiot or convict?"[27]

Surely, this letter suggests two difficult poles of existence: the thoughtful 'convict' and the thoughtless 'idiot'. Conrad had experienced these extreme situations in his life. But, like an existentialist, after emerging from the chaotic sea of doubt and uncertainty, he expressed his firm faith in himself and a bold resolution like his Jim's, and thus shone in the midst of danger. He informed Charles Zagorski in 1896 that only literature remained to him as "a means of existence". He added, "You understand, my dear friend, that if I have undertaken this thing, it is with the firm resolution to make a name—and I have no doubt that I shall be successful in this connection."[28]

With this conviction and with twenty years of accumulated experience of sea-life with which he could no longer continue because of disease and financial stringency, Conrad settled down to a literary career in England. Now from ships he turned to man. To quote Conrad himself, "To deal with men is as fine an art as to deal with ships. Both men and ships live in an unstable element, are subject to subtle and powerful influences, and want to have their merits understood rather than their faults found out."[29] Mankind was his new and final calling.

He had his personal experiences of a ceaseless search for identity and of his relentless efforts to recover from the psychic injury caused by this search. He also realized that his dream of asserting his existence in an alien world had been an illusion. One is reminded of Conrad's words written to Edward Garnett expressing his disillusionment about his early Malayan books:

"All is illusion . . . . Every image floats vaguely in a sea of doubt—and the doubt itself is lost in an unexplored universe of incertitude."[30]

A novel but striking aspect of Conrad's vision is revealed here, and astonishingly Franz Kafka, the existentialist, seems to be voicing a similar realization. As late as 1921 Kafka describes his own experience of disillusionment:

"Everything is illusion: family, office, the street, the woman, all allusion, drawing nearer and further away, but the nearest truth is merely that I push my head against the wall of a cell without doors or windows."[31]

And further Kafka adds:

"Our art is dazzled blindness before the truth: the light on the grotesquely distored face is true, but nothing else."[32]

But both Conrad and Kafka wither into truth; they are made by circumstances to look sadly on the myriad illusions which are the necessary conditions of human existence. Illusion blinds man to the reality of his situation. This reality Conrad expressed to Cunningham Graham in 1897 in the following words:

"Know thyself. Understand that you are nothing, less than a shadow, more insignificant than a drop of water in the ocean, more fleeting than the illusion of a dream."[33]

Conrad in a Socratic tone asks man to know the reality of the 'self'. He also attempted to know himself in his life as well as in his works, and created characters who were engaged in a pursuit of 'self-knowing'. Their struggle to maintain their dignity and glory in the face of their existential realization, forms one of Conrad's themes. Thus he himself resembled a disillusioned romantic, in other words an existentialist. He has been aptly described by Follett as the "patriot exiled from his homeland, itself a sacred lost cause; the seaman exiled from the sea; the citizen of the world searching his own spirit for a habitation not discoverable in the world purpose."[34] Such is the predicament of Conrad's existence. This pressing situation, his sufferings and ailments were responsible for his unique vision which permeated his letters and works and ultimately became a personal philosophy of the author.

In this context a reference to Conrad's letter to Garnett written on March 23, 1896, seems to be relevant as it reflects Conrad's mood of extreme anguish and in it he raises the question of human existence, of 'becoming' and 'being'.

"If one looks at life in its true aspect then everything loses much of its unpleasant importance and the atmosphere becomes cleared of what are only unimportant mists that drift past in imposing shapes. When once the truth is grasped that one's own personality is only a ridiculous and aimless masquerade of something hopelessly unknown the attainment of serenity is not very far off. Then there remains nothing but the surrender to one's impulses, the fidelity to passing emotions which is perhaps a nearer approach to truth than any other philosophy of life. And why not? If we are 'ever becoming—never being' then I would be a fool if I tried to become this thing rather than that; for I know well that I will never be anything. I would rather grasp the solid satisfaction of my wrong-headedness and shake my fist at the idiotic mystery of Heaven."[35]

Conrad's realization is that though man may 'become' one thing or another, it is useless because the transcendence of man

never achieves finality. This concept of 'being' is existential and it finds deep philosophical treatment in the hands of later existentialists.[36] Out of disgust and utter hopelessness Conrad's romantic vision takes an atheistic and existential turn when he would shake his fist 'at the idiotic mystery of Heaven.' This attitude of rebellion also links Conrad with atheistic existentialists like Kafka, Sartre and Camus. But Conrad would not surrender, he would rather rely on self-assertion and self-consciousness which, according to him, shape man's future. In the second phase of his career, his vision matures as is evident from his letter written to Wells in 1903.

"...the future is of our own making and (for me) the most striking characteristic of the century is just that development, that maturing of our consciousness which should open our eyes to that truth—or that illusion."[37]

Edward W. Said makes the following comment on these letters: "Only a 'maturing of consciousness'—seeing more deeply into the mechanisms of existence—will clear the issues. It was still a question of either/or: either one surrendered to the flux of 'ever becoming—never being,' or one's consciousness matured enough to realize that order and the future were the results of self-assertion."[38] Thus we see that in the second phase, Conrad, with the emphasis on man's matured 'consciousness' and 'self-assertion,' emerges as an existentialist. Edward W. Said, on the basis of his study of Conrad's letters, arrives at a similar conclusion: "Conrad's letters—as we have seen—reveal him in a series of 'unbearable' and 'potential' situations with regard to his existential awareness."[39] It is significant to note that Conrad has expressed his existential dilemma not only in his letters but also in his fiction.

In the works of Conrad's first phase his major characters—Lingard, Jim and Kurtz—are romantics who suffer from disillusionment. Lingard's romantic faith in heavenly justice is shaken and after disillusionment he questions himself, "was there, under heaven, such a thing as justice?"[40] Willems' comment on this is significant: "There was no mercy under Heaven."[41] This kind of self-doubt is characteristic of Conrad's vision which later grows into the vision of a rebel, and Willems' reply contains the very spirit of atheistic existentialism. Jim's story is that of a man whov haing lost his real 'self' in a moment of crisis prepares himself to regain it through suffering and expiation. He is a self-conscious hero who analyses his own actions in the light of his personal values. Several critics have attempted to explore the possibility of a meaningful connection between Conrad's life and this work. It is quite suggestive that Conrad used the word 'jump' departing from Poland:

"I verily believe mine was the only case of a boy of my nationality and antecedents taking a, so to speak, standing jump out of his racial surroundings and associations."[42]

Conrad resembles Jim who deserts the pilgrims of *Patna*, who stand for Polish people faithful to their belief in freedom. Jocelyn Baines also opines that "It is easy to see a psychological parallel between Jim's efforts to vindicate himself after his desertion of the *Patna* and Conrad's own life."[43] Osborn Andreas too interprets Jim's 'jump' as "curiously reminiscent of Joseph Conrad's desertion of his Polish compatriots" and *Lord Jim* as his "great act of tacit contrition, conceived by him during one of those periods when a shake of the kaleidoscope had made the elements of his past life fall into such a pattern as to make it seem even to him that his departure from Poland had been a breach of good conduct."[44] L.P. Hartley too observes 'life's tragedy' in 'I jumped' and in his appreciation of *Lord Jim*, writes: "Nor could Conrad forgive himself for leaving Poland, which was another sinking ship. The feeling of guilt he had about it, and the fact that he could not help identifying himself with Lord Jim, make the novel one of his best."[45] Eloise K. Hay[46] shares the views of the above critics and points out certain interesting parallels between Conrad's own life and Lord Jim.

The foregoing opinions of the critics show that they have discussed at length a parallelism between Conrad's leaving Poland and Jim's desertion of the *Patna*. But a critic like Leo Gurko[47] would disapprove of any such parallelism; he rather traces in Jim a parallel to Conrad's father. But a close examination of the novel reveals that if it is not wholly autobiographical, at least it is based on Conrad's personal experiences and much of it could be taken as embodying the author's personal vision. The romantic reveries of Jim in early childhood and the choice of an English young man as the hero, suggest Conrad's irresistible fascination for sea-life and his ambition to lead the life of a British sailor. Conrad writes: "If I was to be a seaman, then I would be a British seaman and no other."[48] The disillusionment of Jim's romantic aspirations may have been a reflection of Conrad's disillusionment with the sea-life which was dull and full of struggle for existence in an indifferent and hostile universe. Jim's flight from one Eastern port to another also suggests Conrad's search for his self. Marlow's inability to know about the mysteriousness of Jim's character and the inscrutability of his motives, is characteristic of Conrad's vision which is romantic with existential leanings and hence mysterious and inscrutable.

There is no denying the fact that Conrad's Congo experience occurring at a crucial stage of his life proved to be a turning point in

his career. By 1894, however, Conrad's career on the sea was over and he had turned to writing. In 1890 Conrad had served as the Captain of a river steamer. A brief account of this experience is given in his *Congo Diary*. His autobiographical experiences during the Congo sojourn are described in a lively manner in *Heart of Darkness*. Speaking of its origin, Conrad admits: "It is well known that curious men go prying into all sorts of places (where they have no business) and come out of them with all kinds of spoil. This story, and one other, not in this volume, are all the spoil I brought out from the centre of Africa, where really, I had no sort of business."[49] He further confesses that this tale was written in "the mood of wistful regret, of reminiscent tenderness."[50] But it would be wrong to consider the tale as wholly autobiographical. Conrad himself makes this point clear:

"*Heart of Darkness* is experience, too; but it is experience pushed a little (and only very little) beyond the actual facts of the case for the perfectly legitimate, I believe, purpose of bringing it home to the minds and bosoms of the readers."[51]

This shows that Conrad used his own experience as the basis of *Heart of Darkness*, of course, giving it a philosophical touch. At the very outset, Marlow's introduction to it as a narrator is significant. Through him Conrad projects himself. The novelist admits that his relations with Marlow had grown very intimate in the course of years.[52] Moreover, Marlow's passion for maps and romantic longing to visit Africa when he grows up[53] is paralleled in those of Conrad.[54] Apart from this parallelism, there are accounts in *Congo Diary* which bear testimony to the fact that Conrad described himself in the portrayal of Marlow. Above all, the tale also embodies Marlow's existential consciousness in searching for Kurtz. He discovers the hollowness of his inner self, and also Kurtz's, whose life's pronouncement is 'The horror! The horror!' This story is much more than a mere tale of adventure. By means of its theme and its characterization of Kurtz and Marlow it reaches a philosophical level which reveals a truth about human existence. Conrad's life seems to be the material for his art; his nautical experiences admittedly offer him the richest materials for his early works. Taken together, all the tales and novels of the first phase show that his early romantic vision grows into an existential one. The major characters are self deluded exiles thrown into an existential universe where their romantic ideals are shattered and they are made to realize the naked reality of self-consciousness. Each of them is a 'being-for-itself' reduced to 'nothingness' on the level of existential reality.

In the second phase of Conrad's writing career, his vision grew deeper and with his matured political consciousness he became a kind of political existentialist. The political views and activities of his father Apollo exercised a potent influence upon the shaping of the vision of later Conrad. His early life was darkened by the savage repressions inflicted by Tsarist Russia on the Poles after the failure of the rebellion of 1863. Conrad describes it as "an event which affected the future of all my generation and has coloured my early impressions."[55] He further remarks that not only his father but other members of his family also influenced his political vision. He tells us that his paternal grandfather was a "comrade-in-arms during Napoleon's Moscow Campaign" and later became a "fellow officer in the Polish Army."[56] His paternal grandfather had two sons and one daughther who were "all deeply involved in the revolutionary work."[57] His father was a kind of Marxist in both outlook and practice. "Their house was a meeting place for Polish insurrectionists."[58] He seems to have been an ardent believer in the dictatorship of the proletariat and an advocate of the case of national liberation from Tsarist autocracy. He was seriously participating in the secret national Polish movement. This is nothing surprising as the progressives in Poland had become familiar with the revolutionary ideas of Marx and Engels as far back as the 1840s. That was the time when Marx had set up direct contact with Polish revolutionaries. Against this background of Tsarist Poland, one is led to believe that Conrad's father might have been one of the progressive Polish workers to whom the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* was not unknown. Conrad seems to have inherited from his father the political zeal and passion which inspired him to produce his major political novels: *Nostromo*, *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes*; although the growth of his political vision can also be traced in some of his early works like *An Outpost of Progress*, *Lord Jim* and *Heart of Darkness*.

The years 1902-1903 were crucial but highly significant in the literary career of Conrad. After finishing the last story of the *Typhoon* volume, Conrad arrived at a stage of *impasse* and exhaustion. He wrote:

"I don't mean to say that I became then conscious of any impending change in my mentality and in my attitude towards the tasks of my writing life. And perhaps there was never any change, except in that mysterious, extraneous thing which has nothing to do with the theories of art; *a subtle change in the nature of the inspiration*; a phenomenon for which I cannot in any way be held responsible. What, however, did cause me some concern was that after finishing

the last story of the *Typhoon* volume it seemed somehow that there was nothing more in the world to write about."[59]

Conrad's confession of 'a subtle change in the nature of the inspiration' might have been an unconscious hint at an equally 'subtle change' in the nature of his vision at this critical moment of existential *impasse*. He became a sceptical figure doubting his own self, his worth and the popularity of his works. He revealed his personal dilemma in the letters written to Edward Garnett in 1902, in which he expressed his repugnance to the *Youth* volume and described it as the 'three-headed monster in the green cover,' even going to the extent of saying, "I hate the sight of the thing."[60] Referring to the four stories of the *Typhoon* volume, Conrad wrote that he was:

"...ashamed of them all; I don't believe either in their popularity or in their merit...My mind is becoming base, my hand heavy, my tongue thick—as though I had drunk some subtle poison, some slow poison that will make me die, die as it were without an echo."[61]

In 1902 Conrad was so dejected that he failed to assess the true merits of his own works. He did not know, probably, that the two volumes mentioned above would earn him so much reputation, else he would not have passed such derogatory remarks on them.

Conrad, with existential *praxis*, finds a new way out and shows his concern with the political activities of the age. With a changed vision, he turns to the themes of contemporary politics and social crisis. His themes such as imperialism, autocracy, Marxism and revolution gave him a new vision to work in a novel direction. On the completion of *Nostromo* in 1904, Conrad described this achievement as a "fact upon which (his) friends may congratulate (him) as upon a recovery from a dangerous illness."[62] He went on to express his dissatisfaction in terms which suggest his similarity to a 'being-for-itself,' later envisioned by Sartre:

"...what the book is like, I don't know...Personally I am not satisfied. It is something, but not the thing I tried for. There is no exultation, none of that temporary sense of achievement which is so soothing. Even the mere feeling of relief at having done with it is wanting. The strain has been too great, has lasted too long. But I am ready for more. . . . I don't feel empty, exhausted. I am simply joyless,—like most men of little faith."[63]

In spite of 'joylessness' Conrad's readiness 'for more' is characteristic of a 'for-itself' who is a restless seeker of something *which he is not*. He asserts his existence *pour-soi* and there is gradual improvement in his mood. The early vision deepens into the political vision which is also evident in 'Author's Note' to *The Secret Agent*:

"I don't know whether I really felt that I wanted a change, change in my imagination, in my vision, and in my mental attitude, I rather think that a *change in the fundamental mood had already stolen over me unawares.*"[64]

With this change in his vision Conrad passes on from exotic and maritime themes to themes of political philosophy. He wrote three major political novels—*Nostromo*, *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes*.

In the first instance it seems that Conrad's political vision must have been necessarily Marxian. But a closer examination of his political works suggests that he was influenced by Marxism only in as far as he was anti-bourgeois in his attitude. As regards social change through revolution, Conrad's views were entirely different ftom those of Marx. Marx advocated class-consciousness while Conrad laid emphasis on individual consciousness. Conrad believed that only a 'single force' could cause revolutionary changes in society. It is possible that Conrad's prophetic vision of individual consciousness as different from class-consciousness was later responsible for a ramification of Marxism—Sartre's political existentialism or Marxian existentialism. According to him, man is the source of political consciousness and with *praxis*, that is human activity, he can create his own values and laws for a social change.

Thus the growth of his political vision has been gradual but quite consistent. In his early works like *An Outpost of Progress*, *Lord Jim*, and *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad describes the Eastern primitive world as opposed to the sophisticated and civilized Western world. Kayerts and Carlier in *An Outpost of Progress*, Jim in *Lord Jim* and Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* are self-willed characters who choose to embrace primitive life, but they have been made so much 'out of tune' with Nature by 'civilized' life that they fail to adjust themselves to new environments. Primitivism serves them as a release from the moral strains of civilization and offers them full freedom to act in their own ways. They illustrate the decadence of bourgeois culture and meet tragic existential ends. Their flight from the west to the east seems to be symbolic of the fact that the bourgeois culture was gradually losing its hold over man. In the second phase, with his maturer political vision, Conrad enters the actual bourgeois world—Latin America, London and Tsarist Russia—and his treatment of the themes shows his anti-bourgeois attitude with existential overtones. In *Nostromo*, *The Secret Agent*, and *Under Western Eyes*, Conrad shows the forces of despotism, anarchy and revolution that are at work in a society which is politically, socially and morally corrupt.

But the main stress is on the individual; man, according to him, is a force. Speaking of Conrad's religion, Baker comments:

"Man is apparently the one atom of self-consciousness in the whole Cosmos. His realization of man's uniqueness and loneliness in an indifferent and inscrutable universe, the acute sense of man's dignity and man's self-responsibility, and a sense, equally acute, equally profound, not merely of abstract justice, but of the superlative value to man of courage, endurance and loyalty of his fellow men—it was all this that constituted his religion for Conrad."[65]

This is the situation of Nostromo, in the novel of that name, of Professor in *The Secret Agent*, and of Razumov in *Under Western Eyes*. The author's main concern is the study of man, his isolation, his conscience and consciousness, and his self-assertions in a hostile universe of corruption, evil, anarchy, exploitation and revolution. Conrad is contemptuous of the masses, of all political and social institutions, and cares only for individual life and action.

While discussing the shaping of Conrad's vision it is necessary to refer to the Preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* which contains the author's artistic credo and also to some of his views expressed in his *Notes On Life and Letters*. Conrad holds the view that 'the artist descends within himself, and in that lonely region of stress and strife,' he makes 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."[66] Therefore, an artist "cannot be faithful to any one of the temporary formulas of his craft."[67] Each artist has his own vision and Conrad too stands above traditional literary movements. He declares:

". . . but they all: Realism, Romanticism, Nautralism, even the unofficial sentimentalism—(which, like the poor, is exceedingly difficult to get rid of), all these gods must, after a short period of fellowships, abandon him—even on the very threshold of the temple—to the stammerings of his conscience and to the outspoken consciousness of the difficulties of his work."[68]

At another place in *Notes On Life and Letters*, Conrad describes a novelist as "the chronicler of the adventures of mankind amongst the dangers of the kingdom of the earth."[69] He further lays stress on the "Liberty of imagination,"[70] which should be the richest possession of a novelist. With free imagination a novelist stands above all others who bear the authority of schools and make efforts to find themselves in a pedigree of distinguished ancestors. According to Conrad such novelists are inferior minds who "try voluntarily to discover the fettering dogmas of some romantic, realistic, or naturalistic

creed in the free work of its own inspiration."[71] He has a unique vision of his own and so he does not like to be placed in any of the literary movements. Moreover, the aim of art cannot be defined, like the life of man. There cannot be any purpose, or reason or logic in the aim of art as there is no logic behind man's existence. Conrad, once thrown into an existential "uneasy solitude,"[72] descends within himself, and in that 'lonely region of stress and strife,' makes effort to explore the truth of human existence. So the aim of art varies from one artist to another. In the same preface, he continues:

"Art is long and life is short, and success is very far off. And thous, doubtful of strength to travel so far, we talk a little about the aim—the aim of art, which, like life itself, is inspiring, difficult—obscured by mists. It is not in the clear logic of a triumphant conclusion; it is not in the unveiling of one of those heartless secrets which are called the laws of Nature."[73]

This also explains the life of man. Although the aim is not well defined, the existential man transcends to the height of glory and achievement as a 'for-itself'. But there are 'obscurities' in the way, and 'success is far off'. This is also applicable to Conrad the novelist and that is why he refutes all labels attached to him. In one of his letters to Sir Sidney Colvin written on March 18, 1917, Conrad expressed his dislike for any facile classification:

"I have been called a writer of the sea, of the tropics, a descriptive writer, a romantic writer—and also a realist. But as a matter of fact all my concern has been with the 'ideal' value of things, events and people."[74]

Here the concept of 'ideal' value is confusing but significant. His works and letters suggest that the 'ideal' value is the personal value which an individual creates for his 'ideal' existence. Conrad does not belong to any school or any literary movement. He is an independent, creative artist who explores human existence, its varied unique experiences most impartially in the *free work of its own inspiration* "rather than in the absurd formulas trying to prescribe this or that particular method of technique or conception."[75]

Thus we see that the romantic vision of early Conrad deepens into an existential vision of life. This vision comes very near the surface in some of his letters:

"I have often suffered in connection with my work from a sense of unreality, from intellectual doubt of the ground I stand on.

"Every one must walk in the light of his own heart's gospel. No man's light is good to any of his fellows. That's my creed, from biginning to end. That's my view of life—a view that rejects all

formulas, dogmas and principles of other people's making. These are only a web of illusions."[76]

Conrad in these words has expressed his 'creed', according to which, every man must create his own values for his existence and reject all existing traditions in life. These words perhaps contain, as Elizabeth Drew also suggests,[77] the reply to the question that arises from Conrad's complex and misleading idea of 'fidelity'. Conrad writes:

"Those who read me know my conviction that the world, the temporal world, rests on a few very simple ideas; . . . It rests notably, among others, on the idea of Fidelity."[78]

The immediate question is 'fidelity' to what? Possibly, the novelist emphasizes man's fidelity to himself, to 'the light of his own heart's gospel,' to his self-created principles of life for a meaningful existence. Conrad also expresses his doubt in himself and comes close to an existential view of life as revealed in the works of Sartre, Camus and other existentialist writers of the age.

In the chapters that follow, an attempt is made to study his works in the light of his existential vision at which he had arrived, as we have seen in this chapter, through the varied and successive influences of his parental example, social and political environment, his studies of men and books, and, above all, a natural kinship for the existential bent of mind. It was rather a search for identity which he seems to have discovered in a vision of life not very much removed from the existential.

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5. *Ibid.*, p. xiv (*Italic* mine).
6. Joseph Conrad, *A Personal Record*: *Some Reminiscences* (London and Toronto, J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1923), p. 71.
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45. L.P. Hartley, *The Novelist's Responsibility* (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1967), p. 6.
46. Eloise Knapp Hay, "Lord Jim: From Sketch to Novel," From *Tweentieth Century Interpretations*, ed. Robert E. Kuehn (Prentice Hall, 1969), pp. 14-34.
47. Leo Gurko, *Joseph Conrad: The Giant in Exile* (New York, The Macmillan and Company, 1962), p. 25.
48. Joseph Conrad, *A Personal Record*, p. 119.
49. Joseph Conrad, "Author's Note," *Youth: A Narrative and Two Other Stories* from *The Shaping of Fiction*, ed. Robert M. Bender (New York, Washington Square Press, 1970), p. 108.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 108. 51. *Ibid.* 52. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
53. Marlow tells the story: "Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say 'when I grow up I will go there'." J. Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* from *The Shaping of Fiction*, p. 116.
54. Conrad too records: "It was in 1868, when nine years old or thereabouts, that while looking at a map of Africa of the time and putting my finger on the blank space then representing the unsolved mystery of that continent, I said to myself with absolute assurance and an amazing audacity which are no longer in my character now: When I grow up I shall go there." J. Conrad, *A Personal Record*, p. 13.
55. Joseph Conrad, *A Personal Record*, p. 56.
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59. Joseph Conrad, "Author's Note," *Nostromo* (Penguin Books, 1963), p. 9. (*Italic* mine).

60. *Letters from Conrad*, 1895-1924, ed. Edward Garnett (Indianapolis, The Bobbs-Merill Co., 1928), pp. 186-87.
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CHAPTER III

Existence and Essence

E X I S T E N C E, being the first principle of existentialism, means the 'here' and 'now' of being; Essence, being the second, is the 'what' of this being. Hence the basic idea of existentialism is that man's existence is prior to his essence, that is, his being 'here' and 'now' precedes his being 'something'. Precisely this means as Sartre says that "man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world—and defines himself afterwards."[1] Man, according to him, defines himself by perpetually going beyond the given condition; "he reveals and determines his situation by transcending it in order to objectify himself—by work, action, or gesture."[2] Thus man is a free individual in the sense of not being determined but his freedom burdens him with a sense of responsibility. He exists only in the measure in which he 'makes' himself.[3] He is a 'being-for-itself' who always makes an effort for 'essence' in life and continually makes himself until he dies. So long as he is alive, man ('for itself') never coincides with himself, that is, never coincides with the idea he has of himself. So man always tries to live beyond himself; the individual's "fundamental and freely chosen project of being expresses the 'totality of his movement toward being, his original relationship to himself, the world, and others'."[4] This kind of 'project' entails man's transcendence and huge yet unique individual consciousness. Man begins the journey of his life with romantic dreams and ideals, but ultimately they prove to be mere illusions that define man negatively.[5] When he faces the naked reality of his existence, he emerges as a disillusioned romantic,[6] that is, an existenialist. But he is different from a romantic pessimist or a nihilist. He makes conscious efforts to discover the meaning of his existence amidst the meaninglessness of life. This is what Colin Wilson calls "the new existentialism".[7]

In the light of the foregoing, the present chapter studies man and his relation to himself, the world and others in the works of the early Conrad.

The theme of *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896) is Willems' transcendence, his betrayal and moral decay in an alien setting. In the very beginning of the novel we learn of Willems' "inward assertion

of unflinching resolve,"[8] and "his existence in a perpetual assurance of unquestional superiority."[9] Willems is a transcendental character who makes his first appearance as a "rising man sure to climb very high,"[10] the confidential clerk of Hudig and Co. He looks at the "shabby multitude; those degenerate descendants of Portuguese conquerors,"[11] with disgust: "They lived now by the grace of his will. This was power. Willems loved it."[12] He is a man with "great benevolence" and "an exalted sense of his duty to himself and the world at large."[13] This is the typical 'subjective-awareness' of existential humanism which is the foundation-stone of Sartre's philosophy. This awareness begets self-knowledge in him and makes him "ferociously conceited":

"He believed in his genius and in his knowledge of the world, others should know of it also, for their own good and for his greater glory."[14]

Looking down on his own shadow complacently, he calls it "The shadow of a successful man"; he is slightly dizzy with the intoxication of his own power and exclaims, "How glorious!"[15] This kind of self-transcendence parallels that of Camus' Clamence in *The Fall*. Clamence, like Willems, is "always bursting with vanity" and declares:

"I found nothing but superiorities in myself and this explained my good will and serenity."[16]

Willems disregards the existing social laws and moral values and sticks to his personal code of bribery, gambling and dishonesty. So does Camus' Clamence, whose deep-seated hypocrisy is soon exploded and he falls into debauchery and then into self-judgment. Conrad also shows the disillusionment of a 'being-for-itself' like Willems by presenting the symbolism of the 'house of cards' in the novel. The life of Willems is as fragile as a house made of cards. The novelist describes Willems' achievement and fall:

"Travelling on he achieves great length without any breadth, and is battered, besmirched, weary; he touches the goal at last; he grasps the reward of his perseverance, of his virtue of his healthy optimism: an untruthful tombstone over a dark and soon forgotten grave."[17]

This seems to suggest that the journey of Willems' life is an existential one. Ultimately he shrinks backward and all his romanticism evaporates. Both Lingard and Willems have been disillusioned in their lives. Lingard's faith in the 'justice' of heaven is shattered. He questions, "Was there, under heaven, such a thing as justice?"[18] Willems' reply, "There was no mercy under heaven,"[19] is charged with the

disillusionment of an atheistic existentialist who has realized that this is the life which has to be lived.

It is significant that the tales of Conrad are sometimes more experimental than his novels. Hence some of the *Tales of Unrest* (1898) deserve consideration. It is also remarkable that these tales were written at a time when the author himself had an existential awareness and in his letters reflected on 'ever becoming-never being' and on the 'maturing consciousness' and 'self-assertion', as we have seen in the preceding chapter. In these tales, Conrad raises the fundamental issues of human existence by delineating with force and precision the painful human consciousness and the fractured conscience of his protagonists.

'*Karain*: *a Memory*' deals with the theme of Karain's transcendence and disillusionment. At the very outset, with a "quiet dignity of his bearing",[20] he appears as the conqueror, the master, "the ruler of three villages."[21] He has a "devoted following"[22] and commands the utmost respect from his people, who, in spite of their being free men, call themselves his slaves. Sweeping his hand over the land, Karain expresses his egotistical self-regard: "All mine!"[23] At times he "cherished the recollections of his successes" and "he had an exulting eagerness for endeavour; when he talked, his aspect was warlike, chivalrous, and uplifting."[24] But the tragedy of this man is that he suffers from an inner void which is symbolically reflected by the 'nothingness' in the outward universe:

"There could be nothing outside. It was as if the earth had gone on spinning, and had left that crumb of its surface alone in space. He appeared utterly cut off from everything but the sunshine, and *that even seemed to be made for him alone.*"[25]

Conrad shows that Karain's self-consciousness is so huge that he is isolated from everything outside. But he reaches the height of his soul's transcendence and even in his isolation he is superb, Notwithstanding his glorious achievements in life, he is a tragic figure who "could not bear to be alone"[26] and when he is reminded of his past, he displays signs of fear, restlessness and oppression.

Once, while being true to his own vision of love, Karain had killed his close friend Matara. When both had gone in search of Matara's sister and a Dutchman with whom she had fled from *Campong*, Matara had decided to kill them to wash away his dishonour. But Karain was already deeply enamoured of the lady's beauty, "silencing the reason and ravishing the heart of the beholders."[27] Karain had conjured up the vision of that beautiful lady and had admitted to himself: "In my sleep I saw her face, and

was both joyful and sorry."[28] This was his personal secret which he won't disclose even to Matara. At last when Matara aimed at her, Karain pulled the trigger and his friend was seen falling with his arms outstretched. Thus for his own love he had sacrificed friendship.

Conrad suggests in this tale that friendship is a deception, while love is a greater deception, an illusion. Karain has been loyal to the vision of that woman, but when the Dutchman asks her if she knows him, she replies in the negative. Karain cannot simply believe it. The woman who had been haunting his vision for so many years, fails even to recognise him. His romantic illusion of love is shattered and his melancholy deepens into 'anguish'. He has an experience of his littleness in the face of the 'strange', 'vast' and fearful 'space'[29] around him. His disillusionment is followed by hallucination. One evening, as he sits by the fire, his consciousness is troubled by the shadowy re-appearance of Matara. His fierce gaze unnerves Karain, who is overpowered by a sense of guilt. In such a state of mental agony or torture, Karain finds some moral support from his sword-bearer, an old man who seems to know Karain's secret and can command a "spirit stronger than the unrest"[30] of Matara. As long as the old man lives with him, Karain transcends to the height of glory; but when he is no more, the moral pull having been broken, Karain emerges as a self-alienated individual. The 'reverse' journey of his life begins. This journey can be described as existential, an "interminable and exhausting journey,"[31] every step of which takes him further away from the goal which he aims at. His 'being-for-itself' shrinks backward; from a ruler he becomes a slave:

"I am the ruler of a conquered land, a lover of war and danger, a fighter and a plotter. But the old man has died, and I am again the slave of the dead."[32]

Karain becomes "enigmatical and touching" and looks like a "haggard" and lean "fugitive" as if he has "not slept for weeks," and "not eaten for days."[33] Conrad sketches his outward "hollow" appearance after an "exhausting contest" with self:

". . . his face showed another kind of fatigue, the tormented weariness, the anger and the fear of a struggle against a thought, an idea—against something that cannot be grappled, that never rests—a shadow, a nothing, unconquerable and immortal, that preys upon life."[34]

This inner conflict tears Karain into pieces. He further undergoes a painful consciousness of the past. In such a moment Karain would

lean forward to listen to a "far-off note of discord" and "would start half up in his seat, as though he had been familiarly touched on the shoulder."[35] Karain's experience of this kind parallels that of Camus' Clamence in *The Fall*, when the hero, while coming back from the court, hears a laughter behind him, looks round and sees no one: "there was nothing mysterious about that laugh; it was a good, hearty, almost friendly laugh."[36]

Karain now attempts to leave his country and to go to a land where "the dead do not speak."[37] He finds himself in a merciless and chaotic universe of "warm deluge"[38] and appears in the cabin "looking over his shoulder like a man pursued."[39] Before the white men: the narrator, Hollis, and Jackson, he begs for strength, 'unbelief', and 'charm'. They ponder and their hearts sink. They describe their uneasiness when they look at that Malay:

"We felt as though we three had been called to the very gate of Infernal Regions to judge, to decide the fate of a wanderer coming suddenly from a world of sunshine and illusions."[40]

This clearly suggests Karain's fall from the 'world of sunshine into the darkness of the Inferno, from the romantic illusions' of love and glory into the existential reality of 'nothingness' and disillusionment.

The Return is another remarkable tale dealing with the subject of Alvan Hervey's desertion by his wife, who had left him for another man, and his dilemma of unanswerable agonizing question when she returns. Both Moser[41] and Guerard[42] have dismissed it as a failure showing Conrad's inability to treat sex successfully. But the real interest of the tale does not lie so much in its plot as in Hervey's consciousness of himself and his wife. He considers himself to be a well connected, well educated and intelligent person. He is a man of a fair name and high social position, who falls in love with a charming lady and marries her.

One afternoon when Hervey returns home he is exposed suddenly to a "staggering sense of insecurity."[43] He learns from a letter lying on his wife's dressing table that she has given him up for a fat journalist. The letter produces a terrible shock on Hervey's consciousness:

"...he was stunned by a noise meaningless and violent, like the clash of gongs or the beating of drums; a great aimless uproar that, in a manner, prevented him from hearing himself think and made his mind an absolute blank. This absurd and distracting tumult seemed to ooze out of the written words, to issue from between his very fingers that trembled, holding the paper."[44]

Such is the horror in the 'written words' that he drops the letter "as though it had been something hot, or venomous, or filthy."[45]

This is an instance of unique individual consciousness much emphasized by later existentialist writers like Sartre and Camus.[46]

Hervey's sense of morality is wounded by his wife's desertion and he finds himself in a universe of humiliation, suffering and moral chaos. His life becomes utterly intolerable. He faces the agonizing question, Why should his wife leave him? A raging wave of humiliation sweeps through his mind and leaves nothing there but a "perpetual sense of undeserved abasement."[47] He suffers from a sense of loss and waste of his "well-ordered past."[48] Hervey's main concern is the life of 'dignity' and 'honour', which is shaken by a "tempest of anguish within him."[49] Consequently, he faces an existential dilemma and is "unable to distinguish clearly between what is and what ought to be; between the inexcusable truth and the valid pretences."[50] In other words, he fails to distinguish between the 'truth' of her desertion and the 'pretences' or persuasion that she should not have betrayed him. At this stage, he realizes that "truth would be of no use to him. Some kind of concealment seemed a necessity because one cannot explain."[51] Commenting on it, Edward W. Said applies Sartre's theory of emotions to Hervey's reaction:

"In Sartre's terms, he begins his magical alteration of the objective reality; and Conrad says of him, he now needs a fresh crop of lies (beliefs) to cultivate."[52]

As a 'being-for-itself', Hervey aims at a glorious and triumphant morality in life. "He yearned unaffectedly to see morality (in his person) triumphant before the world."[53] His past indicates that he has been able to enlarge his world through self-transcendence. But he is miserable in the present on account of his wife's desertion which has wounded his sense of morality and has left in his mind "a trail of invincible sadness, a sense of loss and bitter solitude, as though he had been robbed and exiled."[54] "He stood alone, naked and afraid, like the first man on the first day of evil."[55]

Hervey has reached a mental state when even the return of his wife agonizes him all the more. The rush of anguish is so fierce and exasperating that:

"It seemed to him that the walls were coming apart, that the furniture swayed at him; the ceiling slanted queerly for a moment, a tall wardrobe tried to topple over."[56]

His troubled consciousness horrifies him and he feels disturbed by his wife's presence. Edward W. Said has analysed it in terms of existential awareness:

"Conrad proceeds to develop the kind of half-blind, half-lucid existential consciousness that Hervey has of himself and his wife.

The wife is herself, and her being disturbs him; Hervey admits this to himself only on the level of brute sensation that admits of no intellectual sophistry."[57]

Hervey asks her furiously, "Who do you take me for? How dare you look at me like this?"[58] He would crush her, and he fondly thinks himself to be superior to her:

"Opinion was on his side; morality, men and gods were on his side; law, conscience—all the world! She had nothing but that look."[59]

Conrad, perhaps ironically, makes Hervey realize that there is no truth in what he thinks: it is a self-deception. He feels vanquished and impotent. Having been "absorbed by the tragedy of his life" Hervey forgets her very existence, and again in term of Sartre's psychology of escape, he strives for self-knowledge through his wife. "Thus Hervey is 'absorbed by the tragedy of his life,' and is seeking in his wife a new means of finding himself."[60]

For a moralist like Hervey 'Self-restraint' should be the basis of life. While preaching to his wife, he says, "You know. It's happiness, it's dignity—its everything."[61] He thinks that want of self-restraint leads to pain, humiliation, loss of respect and friends and every thing that ennobles life. Then comes the solemn moment of the climax of Hervey's transcendence, where his 'ideal' and 'moral' values seem still preserved and enclosed by the four walls of the house. On the height of transcendence Hervey attains and shares the absolute, though confusedly:

"He understood confusedly that he was part of an immense and beneficent power, which had a reward ready for every discretion."[62]

According to his moral philosophy, "Life is a serious matter."[63] He advises his wife to respect the moral foundations of society because therein lies man's duty, honour and honesty.

But his ideal of morality does not exclude the concept of forgiveness. Ironically enough, the moment he utters the word 'forgive', he seems to hear peals of his wife's mocking laughter which not only interrupts his words but also destroys "the peace of his self-absorption with the vile pain of a reality intruding upon the beauty of a dream."[64] The romantic dream of Christian morality and forgiveness is being laughed at and Hervey experiences the 'vile pain' of existential reality. This situation takes him to "the bewilderment of a mysterious terror."[65] When he looks at her, he thinks of the future. The present horror is so intense that he mistrusts his wife's self-control because she has been false to him. Hervey arrives at a calm resignation and decides to forget all this.

When he assures her that he loved her and still loves her, she replies, "You are deceiving yourself. You never loved me."[66] She has a bitter resentment against him who could offer her nothing but the coarseness of "abominable materialism."[67] When Hervey hears these shocking words of his wife the reality is revealed to him that he and his wife have been skimming over the surface of life, ignoring the hidden stream. And further his positive realization is that "morality is not a method of happiness."[68] This terrible revelation disillusions his romantic notions and Hervey emerges as an existentialist when he concludes that in life:

"The acts of men and women, success, humiliation, dignity, failure—*nothing mattered.*"[69]

With its powerful delineation of individual consciousness resulting in the experience of existential reality and the meaninglessness of the traditional values, this tale is an important landmark in the development of Conrad's existential vision.

Lord Jim (1900) earned a high reputation for Joseph Conrad. The novel deals with Jim's desertion of the *Patna* carrying eight hundred pilgrims, his sense of self-betrayal and search for expiation. Jim is a man of exquisite sensibility who has "Ability in the abstract"[70] and is capable of struggling hard for his 'essence' in life. His engagement with himself, his own life is different from a simple desire to make a living. He is driven by an intangible idea of projecting himself into the dangerous world in a way the others cannot readily understand.

Life at sea is different from what Jim expects it to be. He spends many days "stretched on his back, dazed, battered, hopeless, and tormented as if at the bottom of an abyss of unrest," and sees nothing but the "disorder of his tossed cabin."[71] He is overwhelmed with a desire to escape:

"now and again an uncontrolable rush of anguish would grip him bodily, make him gasp and writhe under the blankets, and then the unintelligent brutality of an existence liable to the agony of such sensations filled him with a despairing desire to escape at any cost."[72]

But Jim's being propels him forward and he finds "a fascination in the sight of those men, in their appearance of doing so well on such a small allowance of danger and toil."[73] This fascination for humanity is characteristic of 'existential humanism' illustrated by Camus, especially in *The Plague.*[74] Jim renounces the idea of escape and takes up a berth as chief mate of the *Patna*, a decrepit ship that will deliver about eight hundred pilgrims to a port on the

Red Sea. *Patna* moves on steadily and at first Jim's thoughts are romantic—full of "valorous deeds," and "dreams," of "the success of his imaginary achievements." He has unbounded self-confidence. "There was nothing he could not face."[75]

In a moment of crisis Jim shows his unpreparedness and jumps from the ship as he thinks that it would sink. But the ship reaches its destination without its officers. The officers, including Jim, are guilty of abandoning their ship. The authorities convene an official inquiry but Jim's case is not simple. Marlow, the narrator, knowing the limitations of the inquiry rightly says that law cannot "inquire into the state of a man's soul."[76] Commenting sarcastically on the inquiry, Marlow points out that its "object was not the fundamental *why*, but the superficial *how*, of this affair."[77] Conrad aims at showing that the inquiry is meaningless and superficial because Jim stands above the laws of society. He is a man governed by self-law. His irrational act of 'jump' which parallels Meursault's killing of the Arab in Camus' *The Outsider*, cannot be justified by any reason or logic; nor is it punishable by any law. Similar is the situation in which Camus' Meursault is placed when he is involved in a personal tragedy which results in a frightening and unjust trial. He too, like Jim, stands above law. He is governed by his own law and observes the facts of life, death and sex only from the outside. In the metaphysics of Jim's behaviour Joseph Conrad seems to have anticipated not only Albert Camus but also William Golding whose work has been called existential by Frederick R. Karl.[78] Golding's Sammy Mountjoy in *Free Fall* astonishingly echoes the utterances of Jim. After having jumped from the *Patna*, Jim admits his unpreparedness and explains that in trying to escape the conscious choice of 'jump' he actually exercises it involuntarily. Jim tries to clarify the situation: "I don't want to excuse myself; but I would like to explain—I would like somebody to understand."[79] Sammy Mountjoy has a similar issue to face:

"Mine was an amoral [word], a savage place in which man was trapped without hope, to enjoy what he could while it was going. But since I record all this not so much to excuse myself as to understand myself."[80]

At such an existential moment for Sammy, "right and wrong were nominal and relative"[81] and for Jim as well there is not the thickness of a paper between right and wrong in his act of jump.

Since the *Patna* episode, after having lost his dignity and honour Jim emerges as a restless seeker of his 'real self'. The novel is not a simple story of a romantic engaged in redeeming a

straightforward act of betrayal or cowardice in abandoning the ship. The act was not deliberate; it was irrational. Moreover, Jim's fine conscience would not allow him to witness the sight of suffering humanity:

". . . he saw in his own lively mind the panic and horror; and as a result he allowed himself to believe that it would be best for all concerned if they sank quietly and asleep with the ship."[82]

To Jim it was no decision; it had happened somehow. "This is the central focus in Conrad's vision of man—not his conscious evil but his unwilling fallibility."[83] His mental agony puts him in an existential predicament. *He is not what he is* and *he wishes to be what he is not*. He is much less than a man. Defining an existentialist Sartre would say that he is the "being who is not what he is and who is what he is not." Thus through his self-assertion Jim makes efforts for what Sartre calls "the individual completion of the self which haunts the For-itself."[84] Jim paves the way for his future possibilities and progresses onward.[85] His giving up one job after another is possibly due to the 'basic incompleteness' of his 'for-itself' and also due to the presence of someone who reminds him of his past. "Through the presence of the other, I am no longer master of the situation."[86] Moreover, in search of an opportunity to prove to himself and to the world that he is not the man who had 'jumped', he flies from one place to another. He has a dual personality, the known and the unknown. This inscrutable mystery of his character baffles both Marlow and Stein. Marlow comments:

"I could never make up my mind,...whether his line of conduct amounted to shirking his ghost or to facing him out."[87]

It is interesting to note that Jim's conduct baffles both Marlow and Stein in the same manner as was "Bernard rather baffled by Mersault's way of life."[88] Camus' Patrice Mersault in *A Happy Death*, after killing the cripple Roland Zagreus and snatching away all his money sets out in search of happiness. Mersault, like Jim, is depicted as 'an unsatisfied and strange being' who runs after himself and shifts from place to place, and when he is reminded of his past, he is nauseated. He had killed Zagreus, as Camus says, "in the innocence of his heart,"[89] and was fully "aware of no other reality in himself than that of a passion for adventure, a desire for power, a warm and intelligent instinct for a relationship with the world."[90] Jim also makes a conscious attempt to gain personal salvation. Both Jim and Mersault try to reach some place which may not remind them of the past.

But Jim's unalterable past impinges on his present and makes him miserable. This is Conrad's use of conscious psychology which

is closely related to Sartre's phenomenological theory of emotions as analysed by Edward W. Said. He observes that Conrad's "initial scrutiny of the present, is what Sartre calls an 'objective reality."[91]

Frederick R. Karl's following comment on the modern appeal in Jim's character points to the fact that in *Lord Jim* Conrad raises the existential question, "How to be!" with which the twentieth-century mind is seriously concerned:

"Jim in his semiarticulate and stumbling way, in his sense of almost complete failure, in his inability to act powerfully and wisely, is a compelling guide to the modern temper; and his frustrated quest for personal salvation in an evil world is Conrad's distressing prophecy for the twentieth century. . . . Conrad's way of conceiving this novel makes *Lord Jim* his as yet most pregnant statement of man."[92]

The mysterious working of Jim's mind invites the attention of Marlow and Stein who discuss the metaphysical significance of Jim's behaviour and declare him to be a 'romantic' whose "question is not how to get cured, but how to live."[93] Speaking to Marlow, Stein declares:

"A man that is born falls into a dream like a man who falls into the sea. If he tries to climb out into the air as inexperienced people endeavour to do, he drowns—*nicht wahr*? . . . . No! I tell you! The way is to the destructive element submit yourself, and with the exertions of your hands and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you up. So if you ask me—how to be?"[94]

Jim's behaviour is quite in consonance with this advice. He is a 'romantic' who jumps involuntarily into the "everlasting deep hole"[95] and with the exertions of his will he emerges from the 'destructive element'. His jump into the sea is symbolic of his fall from his personal idealism which has been described by Tony Tenner as "the romantic idealist's fall into the base real world."[96] After a momentary deviation, symbolized by the jump, Jim emerges again into his 'ego-ideal' and through action tries to know himself. Likewise, Camus' Mersault in *A Happy Death* has an 'ego-ideal' of happiness and at one stage he realizes "that henceforth all his efforts would be to submit to this happiness and to confront its terrible truth."[97] In this case the novelist's advice to the hero is to sink into the sea and to "lose himself in order to find himself again."[98] Mersault follows it "in order to gain a new support, a firmer hope."[99]

Jim moves ahead in search of a new world entirely free from his past like a "straggler yearningi nconsolably for his humble place in the ranks."[100] Camus' Mersault seems to be making a similar effort

when he moves from Prague for the rest of his journey and his return, through Genoa, to Algiers. The novelist remarks that the train in which Mersault was travelling, would "draw him out of a life the very memory of which he wanted to erase and lead him to the threshold of a new world where desire would be king."[101] Jim's character is so enigmatic that Marlow, the narrator, does not wholly succeed in describing Jim's metaphysical 'being'. He confesses his failure: "Even Stein could say no more than that he was romantic. I only knew he was one of us."[102]

Jim is a tragic visionary who has immense potentiality of living beyond himself. In *Patusan* he finds a "totally new set of conditions for his imaginative faculty to work upon."[103] Marlow had never seen "Jim look so grave, so self-possessed in an impenetrable, impressive way."[104] *Patusan* provides him with a "chance he had been dreaming of",[105] "A magnificent chance!" but "chances are what men make them."[106] Jim assures Marlow "I promise to take care of myself. . . . I feel as if nothing could touch me. Why! this is luck from the word *Go*. I wouldn't spoil such a magnificent chance."[107] Jim's awareness of this kind is existential.[108]

Jim goes ahead to choose the life of "fierce egoism"[109] and Marlow observes:

"He had proved his grasp of the unfamiliar situation, his intellectual alertness in that field of thought. There was his readiness, too! Amazing."[110]

With 'dignity' and 'seriousness' Jim loves the land and the people of *Patusan* and wins their trust and admiration: "He had made himself responsible for success on his own head."[111] While working as the manager of Stein's trading post in *Patusan*, Jim takes great personal pride in the lunar spectacle as if he had something to do with regulating it. Marlow's observation is significant. Jim "regulated so many things in *Patusan*."[112] Marlow further illustrates Jim's power and sense of responsibility because the natives "trusted him implicitly. Him alone!"[113] Jim's superiority is striking, "he was in every sense alone of his kind there, but the unsuspected qualities of his nature had brought him in such close touch with his surroundings that this isolation seemed only the effect of his power."[114] This loneliness "added to his stature." He seems to be isolated because he is incomparable in *Patusan*—"The land without a past, where his word was the one truth of every passing day."[115] With the flying away of the defeated Sherif Ali, Jim becomes the "virtual ruler of the land."[116] Jim asserts his 'existence' in a singular way in the primitive land of *Patusan* and fully exercises his freedom for self-expression:

"He appeared like a creature not only of another kind but of another essence."[117] Marlow describes his power of transcendence:

"He dominated the forest, the secular gloom, the old mankind. He was like a figure set up on a pedestal, to represent in his persistent youth the power, and perhaps the virtues, of races that never grow old, that have emerged from the gloom."[118]

Notwithstanding all antagonistic forces in *Patusan*, which he has been facing with extraordinary courage and will-power, he shows his self-confidence to Marlow:

"I feel that if I go straight nothing can touch me. Indeed I do...I have lots of confidence in myself."[119]

But Jim is once again restless when 'Gentleman Brown', a "diabolic and symbolic mirror of his weakness,"[120] appears on the scene of *Patusan*. Brown is a devoted ruffian with a long history of crimes in the East. His arrogance and utter scorn for the human race disturb the peace and order of life created by Jim in *Patusan*. Jim is not afraid of his own death in a clash with Brown, but his deep humanism is shaken lest "something might happen for which he would never forgive himself," for he feels that he is "responsible for every life in the land."[121] Jim's awareness is existential[122] for it entails 'anguish'. Brown's presence disturbs him. During their conversation Brown makes a "sickening suggestion of common guilt."[123] Jim is reminded of his past, of the inner void or 'nothingness' which he has been carrying with him. Because of his guilty conscience Jim finds his own reflection in Brown. The news that Dain Waris and many other natives were killed by Brown completely unnerves him. The hero, faithful to his 'ego-ideal,' permits the ordered world he has built in *Patusan* to collapse; the existential romantic suffers from intense disillusionment in the face of reality about himself. He has no courage to elude this reality; he must live with it, even if it ruins him. He loses his life and refuses to fight because "There was nothing to fight for. He was going to prove his power in another way and conquer the fatal destiny itself."[124] Like an existential man he exercises his choice of self-sacrifice and embraces his ultimate victory in death. His fidelity to 'ego-ideal' makes his personal salvation both heroic and futile.

Lord Jim thus dramatizes Jim's heroic aims and noble aspirations and his crumbling to pieces when confronted with reality—the reality of his existence, the realization of the "spiritual cleavage"[125] within him. Moreover, Jim has "no dealings but with himself" and with a "faith mightier than the laws of order and progress"[126] he attains personal salvation. He is "overwhelmed by

his own personality."[127] The novel is thus an important document for an understanding of the existential features of Conrad's metaphysics.

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) is a significant tale in which Kurtz, the chief of the inner station for collecting ivory from the natives of the Congo, and Marlow the narrator, are introduced as two representatives of British imperialism. The primitive culture of central Africa offers Kurtz a kind of release from the moral restraints of the civilized world. As a result he follows his own 'ego-ideal' to realize himself. Kurtz has been variously described in the story as a "podigy," "an emissary of pity and science and progress," having "higher intelligence, wide sympathies, a singleness of purpose," a "special being,"[128] and a "universal genius."[129] Douglas Brown observes in him a kind of "maniacal assertion of the self against traditional morality, integrity in human dealing, and law."[130] Kurtz like Camus' Clamence in *The Fall* claims that everything belongs to him. Marlow describes this attitude of Kurtz " 'My ivory'. Oh, yes, I heard him. 'My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my—' everything belonged to him."[131] This is the stage when he realizes the all-absorbing power of self—the self of a 'man-god' or a superman. Camus' Clamence[132] also looks upon himself as something of a superman: he lives in the continuity of "I, I, I."[133] So does Kurtz live in the perpetual self-transcendence of "My, My, My." But Kurtz's claim that everything belongs to him is a mere 'trifle'; he is ignorant that he himself has been claimed by the 'God-forsaken wilderness.'

With this kind of self-assertion Kurtz zealously dedicates himself to his mission like a 'for-itself' and attains glory—the position of 'man-god', a messiah of progress and civilization in the eyes of the natives. Marlow remarks about him:

"Still, I was curious to see whether this man, who had come out equipped with moral ideas of some sort, would climb to the top after all and how he would set about his work when there."[134]

But Kurtz's 'moral ideas' are not derived from traditional morality; he follows his own. As a free individual he chooses evil and develops a predatory lust for ivory, for personal glory. He discovers in self-awareness the secret of egotistic self-regard that leads him to presiding over certain "unspeakable rites."[135]

Though Conrad is silent about these 'unspeakable rites' in which Kurtz takes part, they seem to be related to Kurtz's ascendancy to the position of 'man-god' in Congo. Stephen A. Reid suggests that:

"Kurtz's unspeakable rites and secrets concern (with whatever attendant bestiality) human sacrifice and Kurtz's consuming a portion of the sacrificial victim. Further, these sacrifices were established in the interest of perpetuating Kurtz's position as a man-god."[136]

The self-transcendence of Kurtz to the position of 'man-god' is a tendency of the existential man.[137] Kurtz's descent into the 'heart of darkness' may possibly be explained by this tendency of *becoming his own god to attain the state of 'conscious completeness' by losing himself as a civilized man.* This is how the civilized European Kurtz gives himself over to 'unspeakable rites' and descends into bestiality in Congo. Lionel Trilling describes Kurtz as a man who "goes down into that hell which is the historical beginning of the human soul."[138] Ironically, when Kurtz looks into his own soul he discovers that he is "hollow at the core."[139] His excessive greed results in the loss of the integrity of his personality in his own eyes. Though "his ascendancy was extraordinary"[140] the consciousness of self-degradation and loss of purpose in life horrifies him. Conrad presents Kurtz's all-consuming, all-devouring personality through Marlow:

"It was as though an animated image of death carved out of old ivory had been shaking its hand with menaces at a motionless crowd of men made of dark and glittering bronze."[141]

And Kurtz's wide-open mouth gave him a "weirdly voracious aspect, as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him."[142] The weird and voracious outside of Kurtz seems to symbolize the unfathomable depth of the 'hollowness' within him. It also suggests the miserable plight of the man who seems to carry death with him. To Marlow, he says, "I am lying here in the dark waiting for death."[143] But "we can 'wait for' only a determined event,"[144] while death is always undetermined. The consciousness of death is so very depressing that Kurtz conjures up the idea of self-destruction, because in Sartrean phraseology, "A waiting for death would be self-destructive, for it would be the negation of all waiting."[145] Besides, Heidegger's thesis that the consciousness of death heightens self-awareness and confers upon man the status of individuality also seems applicable to Kurtz's complex personality. Hence in spite of all his subjective awareness, Kurtz's hold on life weakens. He raves in his magnificent tones about wealth and fame. The evil core of the man seems to take over his feature, which acquires an "expression of sombre pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror—of an intense and hopeless

despair."[146] His last words, "The horror! The horror!" are a "judgement upon the adventures of his soul on this earth."[147] Marlow observes how Kurtz "struggled with himself,"[148] and he also comes across "the inconceivable mystery of soul that knew no restraint, no faith, and no fear, yet struggling blindly with itself."[149] With this kind of struggle with 'self', Kurtz emerges as an existentialist whose only reality is the darkness of the soul.

Krieger Murray points out that there are two authentic visions in the Kierkegaardian universe—the 'tragic' and the 'religious.'[150] Kurtz, according to him, is a tragic visionary:

"Like Kurtz, the tragic visionary may at the critical moment search within and find himself 'hollow at the core,' but only because he has suddenly been seized from without by the hollowness of his moral universe, whose structure and meaning have until then sustained him. What the shock reveals to its victim—the existential absurdity of the moral life—explodes the meaning of the moral life, its immanent God and ground."[151]

But Kurtz is more of an atheistic 'tragic visionary' who exercises his 'freedom of choice' in a way that his romantic 'ego-ideals' are shattered in the face of the existential reality of 'hollowness' and death through which he too, like Jim, discovers a 'moral victory'. Marlow describes his cry as "an affirmation, a moral victory paid for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions. But it was a victory."[152]

Even Marlow, the narrator, is no less disillusioned than Kurtz. His journey in search of Kurtz, at first, is a romantic one, at once adventurous and heart-breaking. The impact of the Congo universe is so sickening that he seems to be losing his faith and pride in the culture and civilization of his country. Moreover, he is obsessed by Kurtz's disillusionment as expressed in his last word 'horror'. He has remained so loyal to Kurtz that even long after his death he hears "the echo of his [Kurtz's] magnificent eloquence thrown to me [him] from a soul as translucently pure as a cliff of crystal."[153] The word 'horror' uttered by Kurtz has made him proud of his knowledge of man's existential predicament in a world of illusion. With this superior knowledge he returns to Brussels, "the sepulchral city,"[154] where people can be seen always dreaming their "insignificant and silly dreams"[155] of selfishness, greed and lust. On the other hand, Conrad's vision is distilled in the persuasive voice of Marlow who suggests that human mind is supreme for it contains everything in it: "The mind of man is capable of anything—because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future."[156] He

further asserts himself, "I have a voice, too, and for good or evil mine is the speech that cannot be silenced."[157]

After Kurtz's death the spiritual agony has passed on to Marlow, whose crisis is that of an individual who does not subscribe to the accepted norms and codes of society. He goes on living the life that Kurtz has dropped,[158] and his "ultimate wisdom" is that "*life is a greater riddle than some of us think it to be.*"[159] In order to live this life he leaves the message:

"I don't like work—no man does—but I like what is in the work—*the chance to find yourself.* Your own reality—for yourself, not for others—what no other man can even know. They can only see the mere show, and never can tell what it really means."[160]

These words clearly establish Marlow's existential stance. He expresses his firm faith in man's personal reality. This view of life is essentially Conrad's who expressed a strikingly similar philosophy of life in some of his letters:

"Everyone must walk in the light of his own heart's gospel. No man's light is good to any of his fellows. That's my creed from beginning to end. . . . Another man's truth is only a dismal lie to me."[161]

Thus man in early Conrad is a typically twentieth-century man. Willems, Karain, Hervey, Jim and Kurtz,—all assert their existence *pour-soi* in their romantic journeys of life but emerge as disillusioned romantics, that is, existentialists. The heroes of early tales—Willems, Karain and Hervey—are, as we have seen, characterized by individual consciousness, transcendence and disillusionment. It is really the later protagonists—Jim and Kurtz—who embody certain existential features that raise them to a higher plane. They have a huge consciousness of their own guilt. But while Jim spends his life and courts death in expiation, Kurtz is not at all allowed time for it, because death overtakes him too soon. The limited scope of the form of the short story perhaps did not allow the author to portray a long-drawn-out expiation like Jim's. However, the grasp of existential reality with a positive affirmation of faith in personal values, though accompanied by one's sense of inadequacy to realize them, is clearly discernible in both Jim and Kurtz. Their deaths are the most triumphant moments of their lives—the triumphs are not worldly but moral and spiritual. They are neither pessimists, like the nineteenth-century romantics, nor nihilists; they rather discover some positive truths about human existence, each in his own way. They may be described as existential romantics for whom the traditional values do not exist; the existentialist values do.[162] Conrad's characters

struggle for existence while exercising their 'freedom of choice' and asserting 'individual dignity'. They are destroyed but never defeated.

Conrad's vision, therefore, appears to become gradually richer and profounder, and till about the beginning of the twentieth century his *Lord Jim* and *Heart of Darkness* are among the most powerful anticipations of the existential vision in English literature.

Notes and References

1. Sartre, "Existentialism and Humanism," p. 124.
2. Sartre, *The Problem of Method* (London, Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1963), p. 150.
3. "Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself." Sartre, "Existentialism and Humanism," p. 124.
4. Robert G. Olson, *An Introduction to Existentialism*, p. 119.
5. Sartre writes that "dreams, expectations and hopes serve to define a man only as deceptive dreams, abortive hopes, expectations unfulfilled; that is to say, they define him negatively, not positively." Sartre, "Existentialism and Humanism," p. 135.
6. Norberto Bobbio, *The Philosophy of Decadentism: A Study in Existentialism*, p. 57.
7. Colin Wilson, *Beyond the Outsider* (London, Pan Books Ltd., 1966), p. 22
8. Joseph Conrad, *An Outcast of the Islands* (London, Toronto, J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1923), p. 3. 9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*, p. 4. 11. *Ibid.* 12. *Ibid.* 13. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
14. Joseph Conrad, *An Outcast of the Islands*, p. 6. 15. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
16. Albert Camus, *The Fall* (Penguin Books, 1968), p. 37.
17. Joseph Conrad, *An Outcast of the Islands*, p. 196.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 265. 19. *Ibid.*
20. Joseph Conrad, "Karain: a Memory," *Tales of Unrest* (London, Eveleigh Nash & Grayson Ltd.), p. 16.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 3. 22. *Ibid.*
23. Joseph Conrad, "Karain: a Memory," p. 4.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 13. 25. *Ibid.*, p. 8. 26. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 39. 28. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 54. 30. *Ibid.*, pp. 58-9.
31. Emmanuel Maunier, *Existentialist Philosophies: An Introduction* (London, Rockliff Salisbury Square, 1948), p. 91.
32. Joseph Conrad, "Karain: a Memory," p. 59.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 31. 34. *Ibid.* 35. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
36. Albert Camus, *The Fall*, tr. Justin O'Brien (Penguin Books, 1957), p. 30.

37. Joseph Conrad, "Karain: a Memory," p. 61.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 27-8. 39. *Ibid.*, p. 28. 40. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
41. Thomas Moser., *Joseph Conrad: Achievements and Decline* (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), pp. 77, 124.
42. Albert J. Guerard, *Conrad the Novelist* (Cambridge, Mass.., Harvard University Press, 1958), pp. 96-9.
43. Joseph Conrad, "The Return," *Tales of Unrest*, p. 182.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 183. 45. *Ibid.*
46. Albert Camus, for example, describes a similar experience in his famous novel *The Plague*. When the number of rats went on increasing throughout the day: "People out at night would often feel under foot the squelchy roundness of a still warm body." And further, the 'picture of consternation' of the whole town included even "a quite healthy man who all of a sudden feels his temperature shoot up and the blood seething like wildfire in his veins." Albert Camus, *The Plague*, tr. Stuart Gilbert (Penguin Books, 1967), pp. 15-6.
47. Joseph Conrad, "The Return," p. 186.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 187. 49. *Ibid.*, p. 189. 50. *Ibid.*, p. 191.
51. *Ibid.*
52. Edward W. Said, *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 105.
53. Joseph Conrad, "The Return," p. 193.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 194. 55. *Ibid.*, pp. 194-95. 56. *Ibid.*, p. 201.
57. Edward W. Said, *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography*, p. 107. (*Italic* mine).
58. Joseph Conrad, "The Return," p. 206. 59. *Ibid.*
60. Edward W. Said, *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography*, p. 109.
61. Joseph Conrad, "The Return," p. 225. 62. *Ibid.*, p. 226.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 228. 64. *Ibid.*, pp. 241-42. 65. *Ibid.*, p. 243.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 257. 67. *Ibid.* 68. *Ibid.*, p. 267.
69. *Ibid.* (*Italic* mine).
70. *Ibid.*, (London, Dent, Everyman's Library, 1963), p. 3.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 9. 73. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
74. It is worthwhile to point out that Conrad introduces the sea as a backdrop for the saga of human struggle and action much in the same manner as the ice-bound Himalayan ranges are a test of the hero's moral courage and integrity, in John Master's *Far, Far, The Mountain Peak*; or, as Camus' epidemic-stricken city in *The Plague* serves to highlight the drama of man's choice and commitment.

75. Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, p. 15.
76. *Ibid.*, p. 42. 77. *Ibid.*
78. Frederick R. Karl, *A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1964), p. 254.
79. Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, p. 60.
80. William Golding, *Free Fall* (London, Faber and Faber, 1968), p. 226. 81. *Ibid.*
82. David Daiches, *The Novel and the Modern World*, p. 34.
83. Tony Tanner, *Conrad: Lord Jim* (London, Edward Arnold Ltd., 1963), p. 59.
84. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 91.
85. "Progress is not explained by change but by the basic incompleteness of the For-itself. The For-itself, an unsatisfied and strange being, running after itself in an eternal and useless pursuit, is the source of Time." Wilfred Desan, *The Tragic Finale: An Essay on the Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 43.
86. Wilfred Desan, *The Tragic Finale*, p. 67.
87. Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, p. 144.
88. Albert Camus, *A Happy Death* (Penguin Books, 1973), p. 90.
89. *Ibid.*, p. 96. 90. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
91. Edward W. Said, *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography*, p. 100.
92. Frederick R. Karl, *A Reader's Guide to Joseph Conrad* (Thames and Hudson, 1960), p. 130.
93. Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, p. 155. 94. *Ibid.*, p. 156.
95. *Ibid.*, p. 82. 96. Tony Tanner, *Conrad: Lord Jim*, p. 32.
97. Albert Camus, *A Happy Death*, p. 99.
98. *Ibid.* 99. *Ibid.*
100. Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, p. 165.
101. Albert Camus, *A Happy Death*, p. 55.
102. Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, p. 164. 103. *Ibid.*, p. 160.
104. *Ibid.*, p. 168. 105. *Ibid.*, p. 169.
106. *Ibid.*, p. 177. 107. *Ibid.*
108. This clearly refers to the existential view that man's "existence precedes essence, for man only exists in so far as he shapes his own existence and thus confers an essence upon it by his own conscious choice." Sir Paul Harvey and J.E. Heseltine, ed. *The Oxford Companion to French Literature* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 261.
109. Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, p. 182. 110. *Ibid.* 111. *Ibid.*, p. 193.
112. *Ibid.* 113. *Ibid.*, p. 196. 114. *Ibid.*, p. 199.

115. *Ibid.* 116. *Ibid.*, p. 200. 117. *Ibid.*, p. 168.
118. *Ibid.*, p. 194. 119. *Ibid.*, p. 239.
120. Alan Friedman, "The Novel," *The Twentieth Century Mind History, Ideas, and Literature in Britain* (1900-1918), ed. C.B. Cox and A.E.Dyson (Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 423.
121. Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, p. 291.
122. Sartre writes: "And, when we say that man is responsible for himself, we do not mean that he is responsible only for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men." Sartre, "Existentialism and Humanism," p. 125.
123. Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, p. 285. 124. *Ibid.*, p. 302.
125. Albert J. Guerard, "Sympathy and Judgement in Lord Jim," *Twentieth-Century Interpretations of Lord Jim*, ed. Robert E. Kuehn (N.J., Prentice Hall Inc. Englewood Cliffs, 1969), p. 91.
126. Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, p. 249. 127. *Ibid.*, p. 251.
128. Joseph Conrad, "Heart of Darkness," *The Shaping of Fiction*, ed. Robert M. Bender (New York, Washington Square Press, 1970), p. 136. 129. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
130. Douglas Brown, "From Heart of Darkness to Nostromo: An Approach to Conrad," *The Modern Age, The Pelican Guide to English Literature*, ed. Boris Ford (Penguin Books, 1963, Vol. VII, p. 132.
131. Joseph Conrad, "Heart of Darkness," p. 164.
132. Clamence admits humbly: "I was always bursting with vanity. I, I, I is the refrain of my whole life and it could be heard in everything I said. I could never speak without boasting, especially if I did so with that shattering discretion of which I was a master. It is quite true that I always lived free and powerful." Albert Camus, *The Fall*, p. 37.
133. Albert Camus, *The Fall*, p. 38.
134. Joseph Conrad, "Heart of Darkness," p. 143.
135. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
136. Stephen A. Reid; "The 'Unspeakable Rites' in Heart of Darkness," *Conrad: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Marvin Mudrick (N.J. Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 45.
137. "Man is the being who aspires to be God," Sartre writes,..... Man is to lose himself as a man in order that God shall be born; that is, man naturally aspires away from his unsatisfying human condition towards a state of conscious completeness." Iris Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* (Collins, The Fontana Library, 1969), p. 66.

138. Lionel Trilling, "The Modern Element in Modern Literature," *Partisan Review*, Vol. XXVII (Jan.-Feb. 1961), p. 26.
139. Joseph Conrad, "Heart of Darkness," p. 174.
140. *Ibid.* 141. *Ibid.*, p. 176. 142. *Ibid.*
143. *Ibid.*, p. 187. 144. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 535.
145. *Ibid.*, p. 540.
146. Joseph Conrad, "Heart of Darkness," p. 187.
147. *Ibid.*, p. 188. 148. *Ibid.*, p. 184. 149. *Ibid.*
150. Krieger Murray, *The Tragic Vision: Variations on a Theme in Literary Interpretations* (New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p. 15.
151. Krieger Murray, *The Tragic Vision*, p. 15.
152. Joseph Conrad, "Heart of Darkness," p. 189.
153. *Ibid.* 154. *Ibid.* 155. *Ibid.*
156. *Ibid.*, p. 149. 157. *Ibid.*
158. Osborn Andreas, *Joseph Conrad: A Study in Non-Conformity* (London, Vision Press Ltd., 1962), p. 52.
159. Joseph Conrad, "Heart of Darkness," p. 188 (*Italic* mine). 160. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
161. Elizabeth Drew, *The Novel: A Modern Guide to Fifteen Masterpieces* (New York, Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1969), p. 165. Also quoted in Tony Tanner's "Butterflies and Beetles—Conrad's Two Truths," *Twentieth-Century Interpretations of Lord Jim* (N.J. Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, 1969), p. 66.
162. Discussing the existentialist values Olson writes: ". . . the most important among these are freedom of choice and individual dignity." Robert G. Olson, *An Introduction to Existentialism* (New York, Dover Publications, Inc., 1962), p. 13.

CHAPTER IV

Political Existentialism

THERE was a marked change in Conrad's vision in the second phase of his literary career. About 1902-1903 the novelist reached the stage of vacuity and *impasse* in his writing life, and it seemed to him that "there was nothing more in the world to write about".[1] He also expressed his disgust with his own literary creations; he described the *Youth* volume as a "three-headed monster in the green cover,"[2] and that he was ashamed of the stories[3] included in the *Typhoon* volume. But his creative imagination helped him in his *depassement*. Moreover, a change in the fundamental mood had already stolen over him unawares.[4] Suddenly he was inspired to write *Nostromo* (1904) by the life story of an American seaman and assured himself that "perhaps, there still was in the world something to write about".[5] As a result, from maritime and exotic themes Conrad switched over to the themes of contemporary politics. His existential vision grew political and the novelist adopted a view of life which seems to anticipate 'Neo-Marxism' or 'Political Existentialism' of thinkers like Sartre.

Conrad's anti-bourgeois attitude with an emphasis on 'individual consciousness' and 'freedom of choice' had found expression even in some of his early works like *An Outpost of Progress*, *Lord Jim* and *Heart of Darkness*. In them the author has described the Eastern primitive world where his protagonists decide to use their 'freedom' for a purposeful existence. Conrad seems to think of 'civilization' as a thin layer of ice which at any moment might break and make the unwary sink into its dark depths. Into these depths sink Carlier and Kayerts in *An Outpost of Progress*, Jim in *Lord Jim* and Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*. Sometimes his characters seem to embrace the primitive ways of life because of their dissatisfaction with the ugly aspects of the Western civilization, the hold of which appears to be slackening over Conrad's characters like Jim and Kurtz.

In an introductory essay to *Conrad's Prefaces to His Works*, Edward Garnett suggests that *An Outpost of Progress* is a tale of the Congo which "directly challenged the fashionable imperialistic propaganda and Kipling's gospel of "the White Man's burden'."[6] In this tale Kayerts and Carlier find an opportunity to distinguish them-

selves as pioneers of trade at an outpost which is ironically described as an outpost of progress. They think that the primitive outpost would be an ideal place for the exercise of their self-will and freedom. But the "subtle influences of surroundings" make them feel dull and lonely; they are "suddenly left unassisted to face the wilderness; a wilderness rendered more strange, more incomprehensible by the mysterious glimpses of the vigorous life it contained."[7] But the irony is that they cannot use their 'freedom'. In such a world, they are "like those lifelong prisoners who, liberated after many years, do not know what use to make of their freedom."[8] In Sartrean phraseology they are 'condemned to freedom' or, as Heidegger would have it, they are 'abandoned'.[9] Both Kayerts and Carlier are like the three characters of Sartre's play *No Exit* (1944) who, huddled together in a stuffy cell, have lost their freedom of choice to such an extent that even when the doors of the cell are open, they simply cannot leave it.

Conrad shows that Kayerts and Carlier are miserable in the primitive surroundings on account of solitude, want of proper food, and, above all, the 'torch' of civilization which they have carried and which has given them enough darkness. Gradually, they lose their hold on life. They are pioneers of trade and progress, and their "existence is only rendered possible through the high organisation of civilized crowds."[10] The author suggests that when they come in contact "with pure unmitigated savagery, with primitive nature and primitive man."[11] end with "the mysterious glimpses of the vigorous life it contained,"[12] they do not feel at home because they have been made "insignificant and incapable"[13] by the bourgeois civilization. To them, existence seems meaningless, and the catch-words on which the civilized world rests appear to them mere illusions:

"We talk with indignation, or enthusiasm; we talk about oppression, cruelty, crime, devotion, self-sacrifice, virtue, and we know nothing real beyond the words. Nobody knows what suffering or sacrifice mean—except, perhaps, the victims of the mysterious purpose of these illusions."[14]

The author has rightly taken the bourgeois civilization in its worst aspect—that of colonialism. He refers, ironically, to the 'print' entitled, "Our Colonial Expansion"[15] written in high-flown language. Kayerts and Carlier find great consolation from this book and begin to "think better of themselves."[16] To Kayerts this is a "splendid book,"[17] as it speaks of "the rights and duties of civilization, of the sacredness of the civilising work"[18] and extols "the merits of those who went about bringing light, and faith, and commerce to the dark places of the earth."[19] Carlier hopes that in "a hundred years, there will be perhaps a town here."[20]

But an undercurrent of irony runs throughout the tale and Conrad's anti-bourgeois attitude finds an existential direction. In "the absolute and dumb solitude of the post,"[21] the ties of civilization are loosened and both of them are isolated not only from the outside primitive world but also from each other. Each of them develops an awareness of his independent existence and starts living alone. Thus from devoted friends, they become a pair of accomplices. With time grows their disgust with meaningless existence. This disgust (shall we call it 'nausea'?) further leads to a clash, ending in Carlier's death and Kayerts' suicide. Kayerts' end itself is an ironic comment on 'progress' and 'civilization' of which he had heard the call:

"Society was calling to its accomplished child to come, to be judged, to be condemned; it called him to return to that rubbish heap from which he had wandered away, so that justice could be done."[22]

But, like an existential man, he "has lost his way"[23] and will not return. He is a man governed by 'self-law' and he exercises his choice of freedom[24] by committing suicide, unlike others who "went on stupidly living through disease and sorrow."[25]

In the end, through the vivid picture of Kayerts' suicide Conrad appears to be hitting at the bourgeois consciousness of which Christianity is a part. The highly sarcastic picture of the 'bourgeois soldier', hanging by a leather strap from the cross, in a pose of stiff attention but with a taunting tongue extending out of his mouth, horrifies the Managing Director:

"His toes were only a couple of inches above the ground; his arms hung stiffly down; he seemed to be standing rigidly at attention, but with one purple cheek playfully posed on the shoulder. And, irreverently, he was putting out a swollen tongue at his Managing Director."[26]

This tale, in its anti-bourgeois attitude combined with certain existential themes, foreshadows Conrad's later achievements in his great political novels.

The anti-bourgeois theme of *An Outpost of Progress* is developed on a higher level of existential reality in *Lord Jim*. Jim is a product of modern civilization, and his irrational jump is in consonance with the bourgeois values of self-preservation at the cost of the multitude. But his heart is not with the bourgeois civilization. This dichotomy between fine conscience and the crude 'act' is highlighted by his ultimate escape from the Western bourgeois civilization to the eastern primitive culture of *Patusan*.

Jim's 'jump' into "an everlasting deep hole"[27] signifies the fall of a civilized man, for whom the last gleam of light from the universe is gone. He resembles a lost man asserting his 'being-for-itself' in the darkness because the light of civilization is out. With this sense of crisis Jim attends to the official 'inquiry', which is concerned with the 'superficial how' of the *Patna* affair, and "not the fundamental why" of it. This superficiality is a comment on the civilized world, and Jim stands above such an inquiry. After the inquiry Jim's shifting from one job to another and his ultimate flight from the West to the East is symbolic of a sensitive individual's dissatisfaction with the decadent bourgeois civilization. Now Jim shows his faith in himself, a "faith mightier than the laws of order and progress."[28] He wins the "trust, the love, the confidence of the people."[29] He embraces primitive life with his conscious choice to exercise his 'freedom' and to translate his exquisite sensibility into action. Patusan, not only preserves his *individuality* and his personal values but also offers him sufficient scope for the realization of his identity. It is in such a culture that he is able to rise to his full stature. Above the laws of 'order', 'progress' and 'civilization', Jim reaches his zenith and becomes a 'virtual ruler' of the people. He is loved by all. "He had all the advantages on his side-possession, security, power; *he was on the side of an overwhelming force.*"[30]

It is significant that it is through the inroad of Western culture (the arrival of Gentleman Brown), that Jim's final tragedy is brought about. During his conversation with Jim Brown makes a "subtle reference to their common blood, an assumption of common experience; a sickening suggestion of common guilt, of secret knowledge that was like a bond of their minds and of their hearts."[31] Jim is reminded of his past which unnerves him, and he is no *longer master of the 'ruling-situation'*, because with Brown's look the 'situation escapes him.'[32] The appearance of Brown creates an aspect of *broken conscience* and 'common guilt': he plays 'the devil's part'.[33] Jim deals with Brown in his own way, but Brown, "whose mad and ferocious vanity is the counterpart of Jim's refined egoism,"[34] deceives him. Moreover, Jim has a deep human awareness: "I am responsible for every life in the land."[35] But his moral responsibility is shattered by Brown's deception resulting in the murder of Dain Waris and others. This makes him utter the agonizing existential cry. "Fight! what for?"[36] His ultimate realization of the reality about himself is expressed in his own words, "I have no life."[37] In the end, he exercises his choice of freedom like Kayerts by embracing death honourably, thinking that it would finally redeem him.

Thus we see that Conrad's political theme with existential overtones is expressed in *Lord Jim* than in *An Outpost of Progrsss*. Kayerts is on the base level; whereas Jim is raised to the level of humanity, "he is one of us."[38]

The same theme is powerfully treated in *Heart of Darkness*, one of the early tales which Conrad based on his Congo experience. In it Kurtz settles down in the Congo with the white man's burden of civilizing the backward people. But the ambition to expand the British empire possibly generates in him a similar ambition to collect ivory for himself. This results in his moral degradation and the loss of the integrity of his personality in his own eyes. Following him on the same civilizing mission, Marlow observes that there is brutal exploitation of the natives by the whites. Though Kurtz is dead, his tormented soul possesses Marlow, who returns home with a fractured conscience.

Describing the atmosphere of *Heart of Darkness* Raymond Williams has made an apt observation:

"It is a world of darkness of many kinds that this voyage explores, but among these kinds—the reminder is still critically necessary—is the reality of colonial exploitation, the ambiguity of the 'civilizing mission' into Africa."[39]

This is true. The natives offer ivory to their British officers who, in turn, give them a heap of manufactured goods, beads, and brass-wire. Marlow's observation is a true account of the British policy of exploitation and colonialism in the African countries. He learns from the Accountant that the Manager of the Interior station, Mr. Kurtz, is "a first class agent," a "very remarkable person,"[40] who sends more 'ivory' to England than all others combined

Kurtz is an "emissary of pity and science and progress."[41] He is a representative of the contemporary decadent bourgeois civilization which was probing the dark immensities of primeval life on its 'instructing' and 'civilizing' mission. But Kurtz's character is ironically treated by Conrad. Kurtz, like Kayerts in *An Outpost of Progress*, is really unable to adjust himself wholly to the primeval life of the Congo. There are two personalities of Kurtz: the "original Kurtz,"[42] and the "shade of Mr. Kurtz."[43] The 'original' Kurtz is an educated and civilized man to whose making all "Europe contributed";[44] he is a musician, a journalist, a brilliant speaker, a man who had the making of a political leader, and, above all, a 'universal genius'. He is the man whom the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs, had asked to make a report for its future guidance. But the 'original' Kurtz undergoes a change

and the 'transformed' Kurtz is the man whose "nerves went wrong, and caused him to preside at certain midnight dances ending with unspeakable rites."[45] This change is due to the fact that "Conrad sees the necessary isolation, cosmic and human, of the primitivist hero Kurtz,"[46] and also due to the "basic fact of Conrad's conceiving the whole experience from within the standpoint of a moral civilization."[47] About this experience, Michael Bell goes on to say:

"[Conrad] sees it in terms of a release from civilized moral restraint which derives its potentially heroic aspect in two ways: by comparison with the moral hollowness of contemporary civilized man and by virtue of the courage, albeit perverse courage, that is required to pursue this human potentiality to its extreme."[48]

Kurtz as a 'for-itself' takes full advantage of his 'release', and his 'human potentiality' carries him to the extreme of evil, that is, predatory greed for 'ivory'.

In *Heart of Darkness*, 'ivory' may be taken as a symbol of the greed of the decadent bourgeois culture. Perhaps it is also a symbol of the civilized Kurtz in the immensity of the dark, powerful life of nature of which it is a freakish product. Marlow refers, ironically, to this symbolism:

"The wilderness had patted him on the head, and, behold, it was like a ball—an ivory ball; it had caressed him, and lo! he had withered; it had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation. He was its spoiled and pampered favourite. Ivory? I should think so."[49]

Such is the power and vastness of the primitive life against which the insignificance and littleness of the civilized life is set off. The very word 'Kurtz' is suggestive of his littleness: "Kurtz—Kurtz—that means short in German—don't it?"[50]

But Kurtz, like Jim, has an existence *pour-soi*, and, of his own accord, he has chosen this life to explore the possibilities of his being. He claims that everything belongs to him, but the tragedy is that he himself has been claimed by the "powers of darkness".[51] Kurtz has "immense plans,"[52] and "images of wealth,"[53] and utters "My intended, my station, my career, my ideas,"[54] But when alone in the "God-forsaken wilderness,"[55] he looks within himself, he discovers that he is 'hollow'. He then pronounces the "judgement upon the adventures of his soul on this earth",[56] and having experienced this existential reality, he voices his despair and disillusionment in his piercing last words "The horror! The horror!"[57] Obviously, this horror is caused by Kurtz's realization of his own

moral degradation. But the feeling of 'horror' broadens from the personal to the social and political level, when we understand that his moral decay was ultimately due to the necessities of trade and to his desire for material prosperity, both of which are essentially products of the Western bourgeois civilization. The contrast between the real Mr. Kurtz and the shade of Kurtz highlights the emaciating influence cast by this materialistic civilization on the soul of man—an influence that has made man incapable of establishing perfect harmony with the vast and mysterious life of nature. The beauty of this tale is that all this is not preached directly: it rather suggests its theme with what Conrad himself has called "resonance" and "tonality."[58] Kurtz's inward hollowness becomes a symbol of the spiritual hollowness of the contemporary materialistic civilization. This is perhaps, why T.S. Eliot selected "Mistah Kurtz—he dead"[59] as the epigraph for *The Hollow Men.*

With this tale Conrad's vision grows deeper and he raises Kurtz above Kayerts or Jim and makes him an existential victim of an impenetrable 'darkness'—the darkness of the bourgeois civilization as much as that of the primitive African life or of the evil that has crept into his own soul.

The later Conrad shifts from the primitive East to the real bourgeois world—that of the Latin American revolutionaries in *Nostromo* (1904), the London anarchists in *The Secret Agent* (1907) and the Russian emigres in *Under Western Eyes* (1911). In these works his main interest lies in the exposition of contemporary political themes: the ruthless materialism of the capitalistic system, the immaturity and moral corruption of man in the world of political instability, and the anarchy and revolution that are the natural results of such a situation.

Douglas Hewitt rightly regards *Nostromo* as "a remarkably central novel".[60] The political activities like civil wars, the simmering of revolution against the bourgeois system or even the "historical allusions" to which the author refers in *Nostromo* are never dragged in for parading his erudition; but, as he himself admits "each of them is closely related to actuality"[61]—the actuality of modern politics. V.S. Pritchett rightly remarks, "It might have been written in 1954 and not, as it was, in 1904."[62] Walter Allen observes:

"*Nostromo* is a political novel in the profoundest meaning of the word and this is the index of Conrad's achievement—it may stand as a picture of the modern world in a microcosm".[63]

This picture includes a suggestive portrayal of "all the forces that shape the modern world, nationalism, liberalism, journalism,

finance, capitalism colonial exploitation; and all these".[64] Thus *Nostromo* is an important document for the understanding of the various forces behind the political situation in the modern bourgeois world.

In *Nostromo*, against the background of Latin American Costaguana, "a land full of intrigues and revolution,"[65] Conrad presents a "drama of the political and revolutionary vicissitudes of the town of Sulaco".[66] But his real object seems to be to depict the situation of man in the bourgeois civilization which is based on the ruthless expansion of powerful material interests, which victimises, corrupts and disillusions some of his more sensitive characters like Nostromo and Decoud. While writing *Nostromo* Conrad was possibly aware of contemporary political conditions—the "political immaturity of the enlightened classes,"[67] the "political barbarism of the ... people,"[68] the "black abyss,"[69] separating a "soulless autocracy" from "the benighted, starved souls of its people,"[70] and their clinging to "the moral corruption and mental darkness of slavery".[71] In "Autocracy and War" (1905) Conrad, commenting on the nineteenth-century monarchies, writes that there is "absolutism inherent in every form of government,"[72] and that every "form of legality is bound to degenerate into oppression."[73] He also expresses his misgivings about democracy, especially if it chooses "to pin its faith to the supremacy of material interests," unless it had "some statesmen of *exceptional ability and overwhelming prestige*"[74] who could succeed in managing the affairs, national and international. In *Nostromo* Don Juste Lopez, an inept believer in parliamentary institutions, is treated ironically, almost contemptuously. Decoud's walking out when Lopez begins to speak of clemency, justice and honesty, and the contemptuous description of Lopez's voice as the deep buzzing of some ponderous insect when he visits Charles Gould—all these show Conrad's ironic view of the parliamentary system. Moreover, in the land of Costaguana, democratic ideas and institutions are meaningless and unreal:

"Liberals! The words one knows so well have a nightmarish meaning in this country. Liberty, democracy, patriotism, government—all of them have a flavour of folly and murder".[75]

It is revealing that Conrad admired the views of Anatole France expressed in *Crainquebille*. In 1904 Conrad wrote approvingly of him:

"He is indulgent to the weaknesses of the people, and perceives that political institutions, whether contrived by the wisdom of the few or the ignorance of the many, are incapable of securing the happiness of mankind".[76]

Conrad seems to have been in search of a political system which could satisfy the political and economic aspirations of the people while giving full opportunity for the recognition of individual worth—a system which could combine the individual and the mass as the source of political power. Pedrito Montero seems to voice Conrad's own opinion:

". . . the highest expression of democracy was Caesarism: the imperial rule based upon the direct popular vote. Caesarism was conservative. It was strong. It recognized the legitimate needs of democracy which requires orders, titles, and distinctions. They would be showered upon deserving men. Caesarism was peace. It was progressive".[77]

Conrad expressed similar views in his "Autocracy and War"[78] (1905) one year after the publication of *Nostromo*. Referring to "the incredible infatuation which could put its trust in the peaceful nature of industrial and commercial competition,"[79] Conrad makes a prophecy that "the true peace of the world...will be built on less perishable foundations than those of material interests."[80]

The contrast between the civilized and the primitive life may be seen when Don Jose, looking about with kindly eyes, points out the features of the country to Mrs. Gould, how "It unrolled itself... to an immense quivering horizon of grass and sky, wherebig white clouds seemed to fall slowly into the darkness of their own shadows."[81] And there is the insignificance and helplessness of man whose efforts are futile against the vastness of the natural forces: "Men ploughed..., small on a boundless expanse, as if attacking immensity itself."[82] This is the condition of man whose human spirit has been ravaged by the bourgeois civilization.

Conrad also bitterly attacks the bourgeois capitalists through the ironic characterization of Mr. Holroyd, a fanatic who represents international capitalism. Charles Gould observes: "He's at the head of immense silver and iron interests."[83] His is the "religion of silver and iron."[84] He has emotionally linked the material progress with his "purer forms of Christianity".[85] Holroyd justifies his pursuit of material interests, for he is trying to bring order, peace and progress to the whole world. Through Mrs. Gould, Conrad ridicules ironically Holroyd's "sense of religion".

"But it seemed to me that he looked upon his own God as a sort of influential partner, who gets his share of profits in the endowment of churches. That's a sort of idolatry. He told me he endowed churches every year, Charley."[86]

Charles Gould "the Idealist-Creator of Material Interests,"[87] while talking to his wife, says:

"What is wanted here is law, good faith, order security. Anyone can declaim about these things, but I pin my faith to material interests."[88]

In his view once the 'material interests' get a firm footing "a better justice will come afterwards".[89] This is how he justifies money-making. But Conrad shows that behind all the ideals of human life lies greed which is characteristic of bourgeois civilization. Conrad denounces this greed by presenting Gould's facile idealism in an ironical light. It appears to Charles Gould that San Tome mine would create order and security in the province.[90]

But instead of providing security the silver mine becomes a focus for the spreading of discontent, exploitation and intrigue. Though Charles Gould knows the miners individually, to Mrs. Gould they all look alike with thier "flat, joyless faces."[91] The worth of human personality has been so much devalued that all these miners appear to be a mass of "infinitely graduated shades of reddish-brown, of blackish-brown, of coppery-brown backs."[92] Similarly the settlements of the miners also have no individuality of their own, they are named Village One, Village Two and Village Three. Even the cultural life of the common people has been disturbed by the inroads of modern civilization: "There will be no more popular feasts held here".[93] The mine may have its devotees in persons like Charles Gould and its Administrator, but it broods over the novel like a sinister presence, corrupting mankind and destroying the individuality of man. The novel symbolically closes with a reference to the whole landscape as being overhung by "a big white cloud shining like a mass of solid silver."[94] In the novel there are repeated allusions to the mastery that the silver exercises over the souls of men, especially of Nostromo, who is at one place described as being haunted by "the spectre of the unlawful treasure . . . like a figure of silver, pitiless and secret, with a finger on its pale lips."[95] Obviously, Conrad takes 'silver,' like 'ivory' in *Heart of Darkness*, as a symbol of the sinister charm and power of the materialism of the bourgeois civilization. Conrad is on the side of the poor, the exploited and the downtrodden. In his last words Nostromo speaks to Mrs. Gould of "the wealth that you know so well how to take from the hands of the poor."[96] He goes on to utter two remarkable sentences which seem to be pivotal for an understanding of Conrad's approach to politics and morality: "The world rests upon the poor" and "there is something accursed in wealth."[97] Nostromo is the victim of silver, but Dr. Monygham and Mrs. Gould can take a more detached and objective view. Perhaps, they are Conrad's own mouthpieces in this regard. Dr. Monygham says:

"There is no peace and no rest in the development of material interests. They have their law, and their justice. But it is founded on expediency, and is inhuman; it is without rectitude, without the continuity and the force that can be found only in a moral principle. Mrs. Gould, the time approaches when all that the Gould concession stands for shall weigh as heavily upon the people as the barbarism, cruelty, and misrule of a few years back."[98]

Mrs. Gould with "her young ideal of life, of love, of work" fears the destiny of being "all alone in the Treasure House of the World,"[99] and:

"In the indistinct voice of an unlucky sleeper, lying passive in the grip of a merciless nightmare, she stammered out aimlessly the words: 'Material interests'."[100]

She is almost the only character in the novel for whom the silver has no attraction. With dignity she waves aside the dying Nostromo's rather helf-hearted proposal of revealing to her the hinding place of the treasure.[101] Doubtless, the novelist identifies himself with her in her scorn of and indifference to 'material interests'.

Against the background of the inroads of the Western civilization and its materialistic values in Costaguana, the novelist portrays a dominating and dignified man, an "undoubted Great man—with a private history of his own.[102] He says, "For myself I needed there a man of the People as free as possible from his class conventions and all settled modes of thinking."[103] And the man created by him is Gian' Battista Fidanza, whom for his incorruptibility and trustworthiness of the English call Nostromo (our man). He has a "force of character"[104] and makes his appearance "as a sort of universal factotum—a prodigy of efficiency, in his own sphere of life."[105] "A very fierce-looking man,"[106] Nostromo, Capataz de Cargadores, seems to be a transcendental being with a "magnificent" look, "broad-shouldered, narrow-hipped."[107] He is an 'incorruptible' man with an ego-ideal. The author remarks that "His work is an exercise of personal powers," and that "his leisure is spent in receiving the marks of extraordinary adulation," which he likes.[108] Thus "He is content to feel himself a power—within the People."[109] He is kind and charitable. He gives away small items of silver, and is often penniless because of his careless generosity. He possesses the real treasures—high reputation and self-respect that bring peace of mind.

He is a man of unique individuality—"incomparable," "respected and feared," "the unquestioned patron of secret societies, a republican like old Giorgio, and a revolutionist at heart (but in

another manner)."[110] Conrad seems to have deliberately created such an 'existentialist-revolutionist' (if such a phrase can be used) character to be a "victim in the changing scenes of a revolution"[111] and of "events flowing from the passions of men short-sighted in good and evil"[112]—a victim of his own transcendental love for the shining silver and the magnificent life it promises him, as of the "anonymous social forces" causing in him "loss of self-control."[113] He is also caught in the net of circumstances (his not being questioned about the treasure, the death of Decoud and the loss of four ingots of silver); but he has succumbed to temptation by his own 'free choice'. There is nothing to prevent him from revealing the truth about the treasure except his own deep-rooted greed. He himself feels guilty: "he would look fixedly at his fingers, as if surprised they [the silver ingots] had left no stain on his skin."[114] Moreover, he feels that he has paid for the silver "by a soul lost and by a vanished life."[115] The author, possibly, suggests that the 'lost soul' and the 'vanished life' are not only those of Teresa Viola and Martin Decoud respectively, they are Nostromo's too. He has, like Doctor Faustus, got the treasure in exchange for his "soul and body"[116] as the dying Teresa said so prophetically.

Nostromo's crime eats up his existence "like a malignant growth, consumes it like a fever".[117] Though for the world he remains the same magnificent Capataz, almost all his noble qualities and virtues begin to erode. He loses his magnificence in his own eyes and begins to regard himself "a craven slave"[118] of the treasure. His scorn of worldly wealth, his famed honesty and incorruptibility, his truthfulness, his fearlessness have all been slowly transformed into their very opposites, and the brave Nostromo has to creep along the ravine of the Great Isabels like a thief, afraid and "with his ears alert to every sound."[119] What a fall is there! And the irony of it is that Nostromo alone is conscious of his degradation. He is utterly disillusioned about himself. He feels that his ideals and virtues are but a 'sham', and he experiences the existential reality that only the evil symbolized by the treasure, which he has embraced, is real.

"His courage, his magnificence, his leisure, his work, everything was as before, only everything was a sham. But the treasure was real. He clung to it with a more tenacious, mental grip. But he hated the feel of the ingots."[120]

He feels betrayed: "I die betrayed—betrayed by—,"[121] whether he has been betrayed by the evil in himself or by the circumstances beyond his control, he does not say. But of this he is sure that "he

belonged body and soul to the unlawfulness of his audacity."[122] Even on his death-bed there is a "pained involuntary reluctance"[123] in his offer of revealing the hiding place of the treasure to Mrs. Gould. This is now "the man who had lived his own life on the assumption of unbroken fidelity, rectitude, and courage!"[124]

But Nostromo does not seem to belong wholly to evil, because in him love for Giselle Viola still seems to be stronger than greed. He said, "She was faithful. We were going very far—very soon. I could have torn myself away from that accursed treasure for her. For that child I would have left boxes and boxes of it—full."[125] This seems to redeem him even in his fall. Nostromo will remain eternal in his love. The echoes of Linda's piercing cry of its affirmation, "Never! Gian' Battista"[126] will never die. The "yellow beam"[127] of the Great Isabel and the radiance of the moonlight continue to dispel as much of the darkness as they can. The novel fittingly concludes with the remark that "the genius of the magnificent Capataz de Cargadores dominated the dark gulf containing his conquests of treasure and love."[128] Even in his defeat he is triumphant.

Irving Howe remarks, "The polar forces of the novel are politics and loneliness, social vortex and private desolation."[129] Nostromo also seems to belong to two worlds—the world of material interests, of political intrigue and revolution, and the world of his own individual *praxis* and isolation. Conrad has repeatedly emphasized that Nostromo is a 'power—within the People'. The scene of his death is highly suggestive with a "knot of night-prowlers—the poorest of the poor"[130] hanging about the door of the hospital, and, with a pale Marxist photographer "small, frail, bloodthirsty, the hater of capitalists,"[131] watching him and trying to fish out from him secret information about the treasure and about Dr Monygham. But the magnificent Capataz breathes his last without making any attempt to reply to these tendentious queries. Though a "Man of the People,"[132] Nostromo maintains his existential dignity and aloofness to the very end.

The object of the novel is, possibly, to glorify the people on the one hand, and on the other, to condemn the capitalistic system in one of its most vulnerably points. Conrad creates a forceful, apparently incorruptible, and magnificent character—one of the finest flowers of the proletariat. He further shows how the capitalistic system eats into the vitals of even such a powerful personality entrapped inextricably in the meshes of the bourgeois world resulting in the ultimate loss of both his 'body and soul'. Conrad's attack on

this system is so subtle, so profound and so powerful because he has couched it in existentialist terms. Viewed in this light, *Nostromo* is an almost unanswerable indictment of bourgeois values as much as it is a revelation of the greatness and power of the proletariat as manifested in one individual.

The prolonged ordeal of *Nostromo* drained Conrad's strength and he began to feel pent up. Meanwhile he wrote a few essays, the chief among them being, "Autocracy and War" (1905). Once again certain anarchist and revolutionary activities in London were becoming more compelling and insistent on his thought and imagination. As a result, a "few words uttered by a friend in casual conversation about anarchists or rather anarchist activities,"[133] combined with his memory of an "old story of the attempt to blow up the Greenwich observatory,"[134] and shaped a drama of London espionage.

The Secret Agent deals with the story of Mr. Verloc, an agent provocateur employed by the Russian embassy to spy upon a group of London anarchists with whom he goes on mixing as one of them. He is forced by his employer "to commit an outrage meant to force the British government into abandoning its tolerance of refugee radicals."[135] He decides to blow up the Greenwich observatory, and since he is "a man without values. without fidelities, or commitments except to himself,"[136] he entrusts the job to his idiot brother-in-law Stevie who perishes in the attempt. This results in Mrs. Verloc's murder of her husband and her consequent despair, madness and suicide.

In this novel, Conrad studies Marxist activities in a bourgeois society. He shows how Marxism has left varied impacts on different types of revolutionists, and brings out their inadequacy to create any social revolution. The author seems to share the revolutionary ideas of Marx but suggests his own way of effecting a social change through the character of the Professor who relies mainly on his "force of personality"[137] and his unique but secret revolutionary activities. Although Conrad has said in his "Author's Note" that the novel centres round "Winnie Verloc's story,"[138] his treatment of the Professor is significant in a study of the novelist's political existentialism. Winnie's existential revolt, occurring near the end of the novel, is studied in a later chapter of this thesis.

The group of revolutionaries portrayed in *The Secret Agent* is composed of men of varied views and attitudes. One of them, Michaelis, has been described as "the hermit of visions in the desert of a penitentiary" making a "pathetically hopeless attempt to em-

brace and hug to his breast a self-generated universe."[139] He believes in the law of historical materialism. To him:

"history is made with tools, not with ideas; and everything is changed by economic conditions—art, philosophy, love, virtue—truth itself."[140]

He further srates the Marxist view about the future of mankind:

"The future is as certain as the past—slavery, feudalism, individualism, collectivism. This is the statement of a law, not an empty prophecy."[141]

In this way, Michaelis is more of a Marxist propagandist than a practical revolutionist. Ossipon, another Marxist in the group, is more practical in his attitude. He describes the present economic conditions as cannibalistic:

"Do you know how I would call the nature of the present economic conditions? I would call it cannibalistic. That's what it is: They are nourishing their greed on the quivering flesh and the warm blood of the people—nothing else."[142]

But he regards the ideas of Michaelis as "nonsense". He says that mere teaching propaganda won't bring about a successful revolution:

"There is no law and no certainty. The teaching propaganda be hanged. What the people knows does not matter, were its knowledge ever so accurate. The only thing that matters to us is the emotional state of the masses. Without emotion there is no action."[143]

He lays stress on the 'emotion' of the masses whom one might lead to consolidated action. But he comes in conflict with anarchists like Verloc and terrorists like Yundt. To Ossipon's words Verloc mutters a "Damn"[144] and Yundt also reacts unfavourably with his "venomous spluttering."[145] Verloc is not satisfied with his friends. "In the light of Mr. Vladimir's philosophy of bomb throwing they [the Marxists] appeared hopelessly futile."[146] Verloc shows his disgust with Karl Yundt, the old terrorist, and his sense of morality is offended by the optimistic Marxism of Michaelis. This illustrates the conflict between the anarchist and the Marxist ideologies, which could be witnessed in Conrad's time.

Against this background of political turmoil and confused Marxist and anarchist activities, there stands out a remarkable individual—the Professor. Conrad shows his positive awareness of Marxist ideas and activities, but at the same time he seems to feel that their activities are insignificant and futile in the absence of a dominant individual with a 'force' who could harmonize and direct their activities towards a definite goal. With his exalted egoism, the Professor looks down upon other revolutionaries and considers them

as mere fanatics and propagandists. He condemns them because they depend on social conventions and class-consciousness. He is a "transcendental"[147] figure who lives beyond the given situation. Marxism may be acceptable to him as it is anti-bourgeois and stands for social change. But the Professor goes beyond this ideology and asserts his own reality—the reality of his 'detonator' and his independent form of activity. He defines his revolutionary goal thus: "To break up the superstition and worship of legality should be our aim."[148] Referring to other revolutionists, he says:

"You plan the future, you lose yourselves in reveries of economical systems derived from what is; whereas *what's wanted is a clean sweep and a clear start for a new conception of life.* That sort of future will take care of itself if you will only make room for it. Therefore I would shovel my stuff in heaps at the corners of the streets if I had enough for that; and as I haven't, I do my best by perfecting a really dependable detonator."[149]

The words 'clean sweep' and 'a clear start for a new conception of life" are a direct comment on Marxist ideology and possibly suggest some new kind of *praxis.* The Professor condemns those who are weak and calls them "The source of all evil on this earth!"[150] He wants to 'exterminate' all the weak-willed persons:

"First the great multitude of the weak must go, then the only relatively strong . . . Every taint, every vice, every prejudice, every convention must meet its doom."[151]

When asked by Ossipon "what remains?" the Professor replies with self-assertion, "I remain—if I am strong enough."[152] He continues forcibly: "I *am* the force."[153] Of course, he also realizes the limitation of his detonator which takes twenty seconds to operate: "The worst is that the manner of exploding is always the weak point with us."[154] Nonetheless what enables the Professor to keep himself aloof from the circle of anarchists, is that he has a sense of strong individualism and singleness of purpose—that of finding a perfect detonator. He is quite aware of the revolutionary goal, while others are not. This is the reason why he does not play at being an anarchist. Thus Conrad distinguishes him from other anarchists and raises him above them to the level of an 'existentialist-revolutionist'.

But the novel provides no concrete solution, because Conrad like Sartre describes powerfully the political activities and their demoralizing influences on the protagonist who is utterly lost and meets the fate of an existentialist. At the close of the novel, the "incorruptible" Professor, realizing "nothingness", walks down "averting his eyes from the odious multitude of mankind".[155] He looks "frail,

insignificant, shabby, miserable, and terrible in the simplicity of his idea calling madness and despair to the regeneration of the world."[156] Thus the Professor without any faith in political institutions or in the masses but solely concerned with the symbolic 'force' of his detonator, retires like a "pest in the streat full of men."[157] Yet, the author emphasizes that "He was a force."[158] He aims at a clean revolutionary sweep against the bourgeois set-up in his own way, and his self-assertion is doubtless his existential stance.

Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* deals with the theme of anarchy and revolution in Tsarist Russia. In it the novelist studies the 'situation' and the role of the hero as a revolutionary 'worker' and also delineates the hero's existential dilemma. Razumov betrays Haldin, a fellow student-terrorist and a political assassin, who seeks refuge with him. Since the Haldin affair Razumov appears as a man who has betrayed his conscience and he proceeds to seek redemption through confession, self-condemnation and expiation in the hostile universe of political instability and anarchy.

The novel was written in Conrad's full awareness of the contemporary political situation in Russia, the background of the novel being St. Petersburg and Geneva where people were struggling against autocracy. During the period 1894-1904, for the first time in history the proletariat raised its revolutionary voice through its own Marxist party. In 1905 the Russian proletariat was experiencing all the horrors of capitalistic exploitation. The fundamental needs of social development and the vital interests of the workers and peasants imperatively demanded, above all, the abolition of monarchy and landlordism. In order to achieve this goal a kind of revolution was needed. 1905 was the year of an abortive Russian revolution and Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* (1911) seems to have foreshadowed the great October revolution of 1917.

In this novel Conrad describes varied revolutionary activities focussed under the Western eyes of the narrator. In Geneva Peter Ivanovitch, the 'Arch-Revolutionist,' imagines that the "great Powers of Europe are bound to disappear," because they "will exhaust themselves struggling against their proletariat".[159] While speaking to Nathalia Haldin, he displays his admiration for "the firm and exquisite genius of Eleanor-Madame de S—,"[160] the Russian woman of a "force that would move heaven and earth"[161] against the 'unclean bureaucracy' of Russia. Reflecting upon the spirit of Russia, Conrad points out that "cynicism"[162] is the mark of both Russian autocracy and Russian revolt. He continues that cynicism:

"informs the declarations of statesmen, the theories of her revolutionists, and the mystic vaticinations of prophets to the point of

making *freedom look like a form of debauch, and the Christian virtues themselves appear actually indecent*".[163]

Conrad's stress on man's 'will' is evident in Miss Haldin's conversation with the narrator during which she expresses her revolutionary idea that people's 'universal will' should be awakened, the "degradation of servitude, absolutist lies must be uprooted and swept out."[164] She seems to be echoing the voice of Conrad in the following words: "*Reform is impossible* . . . . There is no legality, there are no institutions."[165] Thus Miss Haldin stands against "arbitrary decrees," and a "handful of cruel—perhaps blind—officials against a nation."[166] Through the narration of the *dame de Compagnie* Conrad depicts the miserable and nauseating picture of underground workers, "the cruelties, oppressions, and injustices"[167] inflicted by the government on them. She lives in the hope of seeing all the "Ministries destroyed"[168] and approves of Haldin's act of political murder. It is significant that the novelist has portrayed the world of the revolutionaries also as full of hypocrisy and deceit. The doubt expressed by Miss Haldin about Madame de S—, ("Is not that lady a woman of the great world, an aristocrat?"[169]) is later confirmed by the narrator's "positive abhorrence" for the same lady, because he knows that "in the affairs of this world she was avaricious, greedy, and unscrupulous," and also that "She had been worsted in a sordid and desperate quarrel about money matters with the family of her late husband, the diplomatist."[170] And in the end she dies without making a will and a lot of nephews and nieces come down from St. Petersburg "like a flock of vultures"[171] and fight amonst themselves for her property. Likewise Peter Ivanovitch, 'the Arch-Revolutionist,' after having met Councillor Mikulin in a railway carriage all alone and having talked together half the night, marries a peasant girl. This is the end of the 'revolutionary' career of the 'Arch-Revolutionist' who significantly is the target of the novelist's irony even in the last line of the novel: "Peter Ivanovitch is an inspired man."[172] Even Nikita the so-called revolutionist and arch-slayer of gendarmes who burst the drums of Razumov's ears, turns out to be "a scoundrel of the worst kind", a spy of the police who killed in "both camps."[173]

From this soil of the "ferocity and imbecility of an autocratic rule" and the "no less imbecile and atrocious answer of a purely Utopian revolutionism,"[174] springs Razumov, a "young man, with a healthy capacity for work and sane ambitions."[175] Though circumstances force him to become a police spy, he is accepted as a fellow-revolutionary in the world of underground revolutionists in Geneva.

But probably because he is fully aware of the shallowness and futility of their activities, and also because he has to preserve his 'freedom', he keeps himself essentially outside their circle. He believes firmly:

"it was not necessary for everybody to belong to an organisation. *The most valuable personalities remained outside. Some of the best work was done outside the organization.*"[176]

Razumov categorically asserts: " 'But I—you know—I don't belong to any circle. I . . .' "[177] With this kind of assertion he remains throughout the novel as an 'existentialist-revolutionist'; while engaged secretly in revolutionary work, he maintains his individuality. He is an "extraordinary person", a "marked personality,"[178] even to Peter Ivanovitch.

The middle position of Razumov in this novel illustrates Conrad's efforts to "sustain the note of scrupulous impartiality" and "detachment from all passions, prejudices, and even from personal memories."[179] Like his creator, Razumov stands between "senseless desperation" and "senseless tyranny,"[180] between the powerless people and the dreamy idealists[181] whom, as contrasted to his essential sanity[182] and realism, he regards as mere phantoms.[183] On the one hand, he calls himself "a worker"[184] and prophesies the triumph of the Russian proletariat:

"What's going on with us is of no importance—a mere sensational story to amuse the readers of the papers—the superior contemptuous Europe. It is hateful to think of. *But let them wait a bit!*"[185]

He seems to have a true Marxist's contempt for democracy:

"I fancy you are mistaken, Peter Ivanovitch. If I were really an extraordinary person, I would not be here, walking with you in a garden of Switzerland, Canton of Geneva, Commune of—what's the name of the Commune this place belongs to? . . . Never mind—*the heart of democracy, anyhow. A fit heart for it; no bigger than a parched pea and about as much value.*"[186]

On the other hand, he has strong disgust for the activities of the 'revolutionists' and condemns their methods:

"Better that thousands should suffer than that a people should become a disintegrated mass, helpless like dust in the wind. Obscurantism is better than the light of incendiary torches. The seed germinates in the night. Out of the dark soil springs the perfect plant. But a volcanic eruption is sterile, the ruin of the fertile ground. And am I, who love my country—who have nothing but that to love and put my faith in—am I to have my future, perhaps my usefulness, ruined by this sanguinary fanatic?"[187]

Razumov believes in "Evolution not Revolution."[188] Conrad seems to aim at "a fundamental change of hearts" which does not

necessarily follow "the downfall of any given human institutions."[189] Perhaps he implies that what is needed is a patient 'evolution' at the individual level. What repels Razumov in the methods of the terrorists and anarchists is not only the futility of shedding human blood, but also the subordination of human intelligence to the passions of the mob:

'Am I to let my intelligence, my aspirations towards a better lot, be robbed of the only thing it has to go upon at the will of violent enthusiasts? . . . And what can you people do by scattering a few drops of blood on the snow?"[190]

Thus in the middle position of Razumov, the novelist has crystallized his own efforts at scrupulous impartiality and the Western narrator's cool and objective observation and analysis. The novelist, the narrator and the protagonist seem to fuse together in the sanity and objectivity of their attitude and their not identifying themselves with any extremist viewpoint.

The political detachment of Razumov is given new dimensions by his conscious existential isolation of which he is proud, and by his being "nobody's child."[191] He belongs to no social or family background. To Haldin he says:

"You are a son, a brother, a nephew, a cousin—I don't know what—to no end of people. *I am just a man.* Here I stand before you. *A man with a mind.*"[192]

Similarly, when Peter Ivanovitch claims him as a being "one of *us* [the revolutionists]", "Razumov retorts with pride and force: "I have no name. I have no. . . . "[193] Like an existentialist, in order to preserve his 'freedom,' he does not want to commit himself to any narrow or partial attitude. He can identify himself with nothing smaller than his whole country:

"I don't want anyone to claim me. But Russia *can't* 'disown me. She cannot!"[194]

He proceeds to make a declaration of 'freedom' with a dramatic force which is equalled only by his confession:

"Razumov struck his breast with his fist. 'I am *it*!' "[195]

People like Peter Ivanovitch who want him to be 'cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd' within the narrow limits of a political dogma, arouse in him a violent disgust and repulsion:

"Peter Ivanovitch, meditating behind his dark glasses, became to him suddenly so odious that if he had had a knife, he fancied he could have stabbed him not only without compunction, but with a horrible triumphant satisfaction."[196]

At the very outset we learn that Razumov is born of the sea of political chaos and still more of "the moral corruption of an

oppressed society where the noblest aspirations of humanity, the desire of freedom, an ardent patriotism, the love of justice, the sense of pity, and even the fidelity of simple minds are prostituted to the lusts of hate and fear, the inseparable companions of an uneasy despotism."[197] But he is an individual who has an acute awareness of his 'freedom'. He himself admits: "I am more free than any social democratic revolution could make me."[198] His personal 'freedom' is an existential feature which burdens him with a sense of responsibility for the emancipation of the oppressed humanity. But to use a Sartrean phrase, Razumov is in a "situation,"[199] the complex situation of a revolutionary who is both "an oppressed person and the keystone of the society which oppresses him."[200] Razumov calls himself a 'worker', and while speaking to Haldin, he asserts, "I sit here *working*...And don't you think I am working for progress too? I've got to find *my own ideas of* the true way..."[201] He moves in the company of the bourgeois oppressors "to understand"[202] them and their world, and he also moves in his own world "to be understood."[203] This 'work', according to Sartre, is, "among other things, a direct link between man and the universe, man's hold on Nature and, at the same time, a primary kind of relation between men."[204] Razumov, while explaining his 'situation' to Haldin, his relation to society, says, "As to ties, the only ties I have in the world are social."[205] Placed in this 'situation' and conscious of his 'freedom' and 'responsibility', Razumov is a "young man of conspicuous abilities,"[206] a man "of promise—of remarkable aptitudes,"[207] of "deep convictions,"[208] who "chooses or is compelled to live a life of egoistic self-regard or compulsive self-assertion: the existence *poursoi*,"[209] solely concerned with "his *work*, his studies, and with his own future."[210] This explains his 'going beyond' the present situation, his "thrust toward the future,"[211] for the realization of his political goal. Razumov in 'going beyond' himself always makes an effort to grasp a new situation and in doing it he has an awareness of being what Sartre would call "an historical agent."[212] While introducing himself to Haldin, Razumov remarkably anticipates Sartre's views by expressing his historical responsibility:

"I have no domestic tradition. . . .My tradition is *historical*. What have I to look back to but that national past from which you gentlemen want to wrench away your future?. . .You come from your province, but all this land is mine—or I have nothing. . . .I am content in fitting m yself to be a *worker*."[213]

He stands above all traditions. But since he is a revolutionary 'worker', he sees human relationships in terms of 'work', and like

a Sartrean 'worker', he sees "history as progress,"[214] as is evident from his emphatic slogan written on a piece of paper "History not Theory."[215]

Razumov is against anarchism and fanaticism. It appears that his beliefs in the futility of anarchism and in the need of an individual with human activity to bring about social change are his own creations. To Haldin, Razumov's words are:

"And what can you people do by scattering a few drops of blood on the snow? On this Immensity. On this unhappy Immensity! I tell you,...'that what it needs is not a lot of haunting phantoms that I could walk through—but a man!' "[216]

Conrad emphasises here the role of a man like Razumov, a 'man with a mind':

"this young man was different from the other types of revolutionist members of committees, secret emissaries, vulgar and unmannerly fugitive professors, . . .—fanatics, pedants, proletarians all."[217]

Such a man actually wants "order"[218] in contradistinction to a 'rebel' like Haldin. In this context Conrad's philosophy is expressed through Razumov who holds the opinion that:

"What it needed was not the conflicting aspirations of a people, *but a will strong and one*: it wanted not the babble of many voices, but *a man—strong and one.*"[219]

Conrad, it seems, needs a man of transcendence capable of moving the whole proletariat in one direction:

"Capable men were wanted. Enlightened intelligences. Devoted hearts. But absolute power should be preserved—the tool ready for the man—for the great autocrat of the future. Razumov believed in him. The logic of history made him unavoidable. The state of the people demanded him. 'What else,' he asked himself ardently, 'could move all that mass in one direction? Nothing could. Nothing but a single will.' "[220]

Razumov, possibly, voices the need for a 'man' capable of what Sartre calls 'conscious and concerted action'.[221] He believes strongly in "Direction not Destruction."[222] Razumov, a 'for-itself' with a strong will to create a revolution in the whole country, a man different from the typical Marxist revolutionary, possibly has in him the making of 'the great autocrat of the future' who could move the whole mass in one direction.

But even such a wonderful character is shown to be utterly lost when involved in his personal existential dilemma. He becomes "the puppet of his past"[223] which not only haunts his mind but goads

him: "Confess, go out—and perish."[224] His fine conscience pricks him and he feels deeply, "In giving Victor Haldin up, it was myself, after all, whom I have betrayed most basely."[225] This sense of self-betrayal shatters all his revolutionary ideals"[226] and the revolutionary in him also perishes. The narrator's earlier comment, which possibly reflects Conrad's own opinion, is thus fully borne out: "Hopes grotesquely betrayed, ideals caricatured—that is the definition of revolutionary success."[227] This seems to anticipate Sartre's views about the ultimate disillusionment of a revolutionary:

"Idealism deceives him in that it binds him with rights and values that are already given; it conceals from him his power to blaze his own path. But materialism, by robbing him of his freedom, also deceives him. Revolutionary philosophy should be a philosophy of transcendence."[228]

Restless because of his guilty conscience, Razumov feels a pressing need for confession and ultimate redemption. He confesses his act of betrayal before the group of revolutionists. Consequently, he suffers terribly as an isolated victim. The drums of his ears are burst by Nikita, and after being the victim of a serious accident, he becomes a miserable invalid. But, like an existentialist, he emerges with his self-created value of absolute 'freedom'. Razumov remarks:

"I made myself free from falsehood, from remorse—independent of every single human being on this earth."[229]

Like *Nostromo*, this novel, too, ends with an affirmation of human sympathy and dignity. The "charity"[230] extended by the revolutionary world to Razumov, the betrayer, the devoted nursing of the selfless and 'saintly' Tekla, and the recognition of Razumov's nobility and greatness by even Miss Haldin, the sister of the betrayed, sharing "her compassionate labours between the horrors of overcrowded jails, and the heartrending misery of bereaved homes"[231]—all this is a living testimony to the profound influence that Razumov exerts upon the lives of those with whom he comes in contact. By the side of such a man, even the 'Arch-Revolutionist' Peter Ivanovitch dwindles into insignificance for he has thrown away his 'revolutionary' ideals to settle down to a tame domestic life in Russia with a peasant girl who, the narrator hopes, "won't hesitate to beat him."[232] Like the illustrious Nostromo, 'the Man of the People' whose death is watched by only an insignificant photographer, the 'hater of capitalists', the 'wonderful' Razumov, also retires to pass the remaining days of his crippled existence under the care of the exploited and abused woman-servant Tekla. Thus

Conrad has harmonised "an impartial view of humanity in all its degrees of splendour and misery" with "a special regard for the rights of the unprivileged of this earth."[233]

The case of Mathieu, the hero of Sartre's trilogy, *Roads to Freedom*, provides a remarkable parallel. In spite of the Communist Brunet's repeated persuasion, Mathieu, like Razumov, is unwilling to join the Communists, because he considers all political struggle to be futile and pointless and, more so, because by joining the Communist Party he will be forced to renounce his personal 'freedom'. It is not without significance that a similar idea of 'freedom' had already informed the later political works of Conrad. The Professor in *The Secret Agent* stands alone with his symbolic detonator and does not take any interest in the Marxist activities of Michaelis or Ossipon. Razumov in *Under Western Eyes* is also an isolated being who does not belong to any revolutionary group or organisation, but only remains true to himself. Like Razumov who sacrifices his love for Miss Haldin to regain his freedom from 'falsehood' and 'remorse', Sartre's Mathieu, too, breaks with his mistress in order to preserve his freedom. Conrad's political theme is thus submerged under the searchings of an isolated individual involved in the process of existentialist relationships with the world for his own path to 'absolute freedom'. The same happens in Sartre's *Roads to Freedom* where the people's struggle against fascism is replaced by the individual's concern for 'inner freedom'.

'But Conrad's political philosophy suggests some kind of 'action' at the individual level which may create what may be called a 'collective *praxis*. He wrote:

"Action, in which is to be found the illusion of a mastered destiny, can alone satisfy our uneasy vanity, and lay to rest the haunting fear of the future—a sentiment concealed, indeed, but proving its existence by the force it has, when invoked, to stir the passions of a nation. It will be long before we have learned that in the great darkness before us there is nothing that we need fear. Let us act lest we perish—is the cry."[234]

With this 'cry' for 'action' Conrad sets out in search of an 'intellectual' because he is of the view that "The ground of every revolution had to be intellectually prepared."[235] He also thinks that if a slave of the Russian autocracy desires to step out "beyond the gates" to "draw the first breath of freedom," he "will have to build his future with no other material but *he can find within himself*."[236] Conrad seems to have discovered such a revolutionary force in the Professor and "A man of ideas—and a man of action

too"[237] in Razumov. He believes that for a successful revolution a "solemn prophet full of words and fire ought to be given the task of preparing the minds"[238] of the people. Conrad's ideology bears a striking resemblance to that of Jean-Paul Sartre[239] who is also in search of an 'intellectual' rather than a politician. Sartre further claims that only an intellectual can "make use of Marxism"[240] and his role is "to maintain a position in which he seeks to discover the possibilities of reconstruction of a socialist world, even if, for the time being, reality seems to be against it."[241]

Although, like other existential novelists, Conrad does not provide any solution to the contemporary political problems and his idealistic heroes suffer from disillusionment, it would be rash to conclude that his political vision is pessimistic or nihilistic showing merely the futility of human activity in a world of political chaos. Conrad the existentialist rather glorifies *praxis*. He also shows that there is a tragic nobility in his characters who are haunted by a cause too big for them. Each of them discovers his personal reality in the tragic political pursuit and is victorious even in defeat, condemnation and death. Conrad seems to believe that a socialist or Marxist society can be achieved only through the 'Direction' of an individual and not through democratic processes or 'Destruction' wrought by the so-called revolutionists, terrorists and anarchists. Thus his anti-imperialist attitude with existential overtones in his early works, and his sympathetic awareness of Marxist activities with a marked emphasis on individual 'force' and *praxis* in his later political novels, are suggestive of his prophetic vision of modern political existentialism.

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6. Edward Garnett, ed. *Conrad's Preface to His Works* (London, J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1937), p. 9.
7. Joseph Conrad, "An Outpost of Progress," *Tales of Unrest* (London, Eveleigh Nash & Grayson Ltd.), p. 128.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
9. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 485.
10. Joseph Conrad, "An Outpost of Progress," p. 128.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 129. 12. *Ibid.*, p. 128. 13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, p. 153. 15. *Ibid.*, p. 136. 16. *Ibid.*, p. 137.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 136. 18. *Ibid.*, pp. 136-37. 19. *Ibid.*, p. 137.
20. *Ibid.* 21. *Ibid.*, p. 156.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 168. 23. *Ibid.*, p. 169.
24. Kayerts' choice is evidently the choice of an existential man which is based on the concept of 'personal freedom,' as, according to Sartre's proposition, man is 'condemned to be free.'
25. Joseph Conrad, "An Outpost of Progress," p. 146.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 170.
27. Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim* (London, Dent, Everyman's Library, paperback edition, 1963), p. 82.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 249. 29. *Ibid.*, p. 279.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 280 (*Italic* mine).
31. *Ibid.*, p. 285.
32. Sartre writes: "With the other's look the 'situation' escapes me . . . . *I am no longer master of the situation.*" Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 265.
33. Sartre further writes: "The appearance of the other, on the contrary, causes the appearance in the situation of an aspect

which I did not wish, of which I am not master, and which on principle escapes me since it is for the other. This is what Gide has appropriately called 'devil's part'. It is the unpredictable but still real *reverse* side." Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 265 (*Italic* mine).

34. Paul L. Wiley, *Conrad's Measure of Man* (Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 1954), pp. 50-6.
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61. Joseph Conrad, "Author's Note," *Nostromo* (Penguin Books, 1963), p. 11.
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65. Joseph Conrad, "Author's Note," *Nostromo*, p. 11.
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67. Joseph Conrad, "Autocracy and War," *Notes on Life and Letters* (London, Toronto, J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1924), p. 96.
68. *Ibid.* 69. *Ibid.*, p. 89. 70. *Ibid.* 71. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 101. 73. *Ibid.*
74. *Ibid.*, p. 107. (*Italic* mine)
75. Joseph Conrad, *Nostromo*, p. 337.
76. Joseph Conrad, "Anatole France—Crainquebille," *Notes on Life and Letters*, p. 33.

77. Joseph Conrad, *Nostromo*, p. 335.
78. Joseph Conrad, "Autocracy and War," p. 107.
79. *Ibid.*, p. 106. 80. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
81. Joseph Conrad, *Nostromo*, p. 83.
82. *Ibid.* 83. *Ibid.*, p. 70. 84. *Ibid.*, p. 71 85. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
86. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
87. Joseph Conrad, "Author's Note," *Nostromo*, p. 12.
88. Joseph Conrad, *Nostromo*, p. 81.
89. *Ibid.* 90. *Ibid.*, p. 101. 91. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
92. *Ibid.* 93. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
94. *Ibid.*, p. 463. 95. *Ibid.*, p. 444. 96. *Ibid.*, p. 458.
97. *Ibid.* 98. *Ibid.*, p. 419. 99. *Ibid*, p. 428. 100. *Ibid.*
101. *Ibid.*, p. 458.
102. Joseph Conrad, "Author's Note," *Nostromo*, p. 13.
103. *Ibid.*, p. 12. 104. Joseph Conrad, *Nostromo*, p. 25.
105. *Ibid.*, p. 48. 106. *Ibid.*, p. 175. 107. *Ibid.*, p. 212.
108. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
109. Joseph Conrad, "Author's Note," *Nostromo*, p. 12.
110. Joseph Conrad, *Nostromo*, p. 430.
111. Joseph Conrad, "Author's Note," *Nostromo*, p. 10.
112. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
113. Eloise Knapp Hay, *The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad* (London and Chicago, 1963), p. 163.
114. Joseph Conrad, *Nostromo*, p. 429.
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118. *Ibid.*, p. 444. 119. *Ibid.* 120. *Ibid.*, p. 429.
121. *Ibid.*, p. 467. 122. *Ibid.*, p. 435. 123. *Ibid.*, p. 458.
124. *Ibid.* 125. *Ibid.*, p. 457. 126. *Ibid.*, p. 463.
127. *Ibid.*, p. 462. 128. *Ibid.*, p. 463.
129. Irving Howe, *Politics and the Novel* (Greenwich, Conn., Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1967), p. 109.
130. Joseph Conrad, *Nostromo*, p. 459. 131. *Ibid.*
132. Joseph Conrad, "Author's Note," *Nostromo*, p. 13.
133. Joseph Conrad, "Author's Note," *The Secret Agent* (Penguin Books, 1967), p. 8. 134. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
135. Irving Howe, *Politics and the Novel*, p. 95.
136. Walter Sullivan, "Irony and Disorder: The Secret Agent," *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. LXXXI, No. 1 (Winter, 1973), p. 125.
137. Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, p. 63.
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139. Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, p. 49.
140. *Ibid.* 141. *Ibid.* 142. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

143. *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50. 144. *Ibid.*, p. 50. 145. *Ibid.*
146. *Ibid.* 147. *Ibid.*, p. 67. 148. *Ibid.*
149. *Ibid.*, p. 67 (*Italic* mine). 150. *Ibid.*, p. 243.
151. *Ibid.* 152. *Ibid.* 153. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
154. *Ibid.* 155. *Ibid.*, p. 249. 156. *Ibid.*
157. *Ibid.* 158. *Ibid.*
159. Joseph Conrad, *Under Western Eyes* (Penguin Books, 1957), p. 105. 160. *Ibid.*, p. 114. 161. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
162. *Ibid.*, p. 63. 163. *Ibid.* (*Italic* mine).
164. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
165. *Ibid.* In "Autocracy and War" also Conrad wrote: "It is impossible to initiate a rational scheme of reform upon a phase of blind absolutism." Joseph Conrad, "Autocracy and War," p. 96.
166. Joseph Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, p. 116.
167. *Ibid.*, p. 134. 168. *Ibid.* 169. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
170. *Ibid.*, p. 139. 171. *Ibid.*, p. 314. 172. *Ibid.*
173. *Ibid.*, p. 313.
174. Joseph Conrad, "Author's Note," *Under Western Eyes*, pp. 8-9.
175. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
176. Joseph Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, p. 67 (*Italic* mine).
177. *Ibid.* 178. *Ibid.*, p. 174.
179. Joseph Conrad, "Author's Note," *Under Western Eyes*, p. 7.
180. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
181. "Between the two he was done for. Between the drunkenness of the peasant incapable of action and the dream-intoxication of the idealist incapable of perceiving the reason of things, and the true character of men." *Under Western Eyes*, p. 33.
182. "I hated him simply because I am sane. It is in that character that he outraged me." *Ibid.*, p. 85.
183. "If he were lying here on the floor I could walk over his breast . . . . The fellow is a mere phantom . . . ." *Ibid.*, p. 86.
184. *Ibid.*, p. 162. 185. *Ibid.*, p. 160 (*Italic* mine).
186. Joseph Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, p. 174 (*Italic* mine).
187. *Ibid.*, p. 36. 188. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
189. Joseph Conrad, "Author's Note," *Under Western Eyes*, p. 9.
190. Joseph Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, p. 58.
191. Joseph Conrad, "Author's Note," *Under Western Eyes*, p. 8.
192. Joseph Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, pp. 57-8 (*Italics* mine).
193. *Ibid.*, p. 176. 194. *Ibid.* 195. *Ibid.*
196. *Ibid.*, pp. 176-77. 197. *Ibid.*, p. 14. 198. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
199. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Materialism and Revolution," *Literary and*

Philosophical Essays, tr. Annette Michelson (Hutchinson, Radius Books, 1968), p. 209.

200. Sartre defines the 'situation' of a revolutionary: "In other words it is as an oppressed person that he is indispensable to this society. That is, the revolutionary belongs to those who work for the dominant class . . . . The revolutionary is necessarily a worker and one of the oppressed, and it is as a worker that he is oppressed. This double character of producer and oppressed person is sufficient to define the revolutionary's situation but not the revolutionary himself." Jean-Paul Sartre, "Materialism and Revolution," p. 210.
201. Joseph Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, p. 57 (*Italic* mine).
202. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Materialism and Revolution," p. 211.
203. Joseph Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, p. 39.
204. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Materialism and Revolution," p. 211.
205. Joseph Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, p. 57.
206. *Ibid.*, p. 45. 207. *Ibid.*, p. 46. 208. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
209. Morton Dauwen Zabel, "Introduction to Under Western Eyes," *Conrad: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Marvin Mudrick (N.J., Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, 1966), p. 133.
210. Joseph Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, p. 17.
211. "The revolutionary, on the other hand, is defined by his *going beyond* the situation in which he is placed. And because he does go beyond it towards a radically new situation, he can grasp it in its synthetic wholeness, or, if you like, he makes it exist for himself as totality. Thus it is by means of this thrust toward the future and from the point of view of the future that he realizes it." Jean-Paul Sartre, "Materialism and Revolution," pp. 210-11.
212. Describing the revolutionary Sartre says, "Since he wants to change it, he must consider it immediately from a historical point of view and he must consider himself an historical agent." Jean-Paul Sartre, "Materialism and Revolution," p. 211.
213. Joseph Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, p. 58 (*Italic* mine).
214. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Materialism and Revolution," p. 211.
215. Joseph Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, p. 62. 216. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
217. *Ibid.*, p. 184.
218. "The revolutionary, in contradistinction to the rebel, actually wants an 'order'." Jean-Paul Sartre, "Materialism and Revolution," p. 224.
219. Joseph Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, p. 35 (*Italic* mine).
220. *Ibid.*, p 37.

221. "Dialectical materialism undoubtedly exists in order to explain and justify this transcendence towards the future. But it endeavours to ascribe freedom to things, not to man—which is absurd. A state of the world will never be able to produce class-consciousness. And the Marxists are so well aware of this that they rely upon militants—that is upon a conscious and concerted action—in order to activate the masses and awaken this consciousness within them." Jean-Paul Sartre, "Materialism and Revolution," p. 220.
222. Joseph Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, p. 62.
223. *Ibid.*, p. 299. 224. *Ibid.*, p. 298. 225. *Ibid.*, p. 298.
226. *Ibid.*, p. 286. 227. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
228. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Materialism and Revolution," p. 221.
229. Joseph Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, p. 303.
230. *Ibid.*, p. 313. 231. *Ibid.*, p. 311. 232. *Ibid.*, p. 314.
233. Joseph Conrad, "Author's Note," *A Personal Record*, p. ix.
234. Joseph Conrad, "Autocracy and War," p. 109.
235. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
236. Joseph Conrad, "Autocracy and War," p. 103 (*Italic* mine).
237. Joseph Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, p. 74.
238. Joseph Conrad, "Autocracy and War," p. 111.
239. Sartre, too, lays stress on an 'intellectual' for a successful revolution. He writes: "The intellectual suggests above all the idea of radical action. And his practical knowledge, because it is practical, can only find its support in social groups which themselves demand radical action." Jean-Paul Sartre, *Politics and Literature*, tr. J.A. Underwood, John Calder (London, Calder and Boyars, 1973), p. 17.
240. *Ibid.*, p. 24. 241. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

CHAPTER V

The Unreason of Existence

The idea of 'nothingness' is central to existentialist writings. Mary Warnoch points out two meanings of this word as applied to Heidegger's philosophy:

"In the first sense, nothingness was a kind of gap or separation which lay between a man and the world, or rather between a man's consciousness and the world of objects of which he was conscious. The second sense of 'Nothingness' was that almost of 'futility', of the vanishing and evaporating of objects in the world."[1]

As for Sartre, she writes that she shares the same idea of nothingness but with some variation. Sartre does not wholly believe in 'futility'. Man to him is a 'being-for-itself', a conscious being who comes across 'nothingness' which is like the "space" outside him as well as the "emptiness *within* him"[2] which he tries to "fill by his own actions, his thoughts and his perceptions."[3] It is not without significance that this theme of 'nothingness' had already found expression, as we shall see, in Conrad's fiction. Some of his characters seem thrown into the chaos of a godless universe where they realize the futility and meaninglessness of life. To them action seems impossible, the outward objects disappear and carrying an inner void they suffer from nausea and hallucination. But others who have 'potentiality', struggle hard against an unreal and hostile universe and, though their realization is 'nothingness' and unreason of existence, they move beyond it and make efforts to fill the "gap" for the realization of some positive value in life.

Joseph Conrad himself experienced this kind of 'nothingness' during his visit to Congo in 1890, which found expression in *Heart of Darkness* (1898). Only a year before its publication, Conrad, realizing the cold unconcern of the universe with man and of 'nothingness' between the two, wrote a letter to R.B. Cunningham expressing both his sense of nothingness and his mistrust of reason:

"Of course reason is hateful,—but why? Because it demonstrates (to those who have the courage) that we, living, are out of life—utterly out of it. The mysteries of a universe made of drops of fire and clods of mud do not concern us in the least—"*Life knows us not and we do not know life.*"[4]

This idea finds expression in the works of Conrad. In his novels, man seems to be in an indifferent, unreal and mysterious universe of 'drops of fire and clods of mud' in which he is isolated from the outward objects and thus experiences the unreason of existence. Moreover, Conrad found no ethical purpose behind this universe:

"The ethical view of the universe involves us at last in so many cruel and absurd contradictions, where the last vestiges of faith, hope, charity, and even of reason itself, seem ready to perish, that I have come to suspect that the aim of creation cannot be ethical at all."[5]

Likewise in Conrad's fiction the characters do not find any ethical purpose behind the world. This universe is purposeless, neither good nor bad, neither moral nor immoral, nor is there any God to govern it. So man's reliance on God is absurd. The working of the universe is mysterious and so is the complexity of man's existence. Man has an existence *pour-soi* and is engaged in his "senseless struggle against forces which can neither be mastered nor comprehended."[6]

Willems in *An Outcast of the Islands* shows his utter disgust with the kind of life he is leading. He begins to hate Aissaw hom he loved. Her eyes hurt him violently and he behaves like "a tall madman making a great disturbance about something invisible; a being absurd, repulsive, pathetic, and droll."[7] A "fearful oppression" of the existence of Willems and Aissa weighs heavy on Lingard who feels "great emptiness"[8] in his heart. He feels that there is within him a "space without any light, where his thoughts wandered forlornly, unable to escape, unable to rest, unable to die, to vanish. . . ."[9] Willems' hopelessness increases; his present is miserable but the past too is dead and meaningless. In the immobility of the universe his thoughts go to the past for some relief, but the past is "crowded yet empty, like an old cemetery full of neglected graves, where lie dead hopes that never return".[10] After Lingard's departure Willems is enveloped by "the cruel solitude of one abandoned by men; the reproachful silence which surrounds an outcast ejected by his kind, the silence unbroken by the slightest whisper of hope; an immense and impenetrable silence that swallows up without echo the murmur of regret and the cry of revolt."[11] In such a solitude "All was night within him"[12] and he moves on with his thoughts:

" . . . restless, sombre, tangled, chilling, horrible and venomous, like a nestful of snakes."[13]

With this consciousness of inner void and mental agony Willems realizes 'nothingness' in life though Aissa is very close to

him: "He was robbed of everything; robbed of his passion, of his liberty, of forgetfulness, of consolation."[14] At this stage he stands self-alienated and seems to be falling into a hollow where he must perish. And all at once he feels that he is "peering into a sombre hollow, into a deep black hole full of decay and of whitened bones; into an immense and inevitable grave full of corruption where sooner or later he must, unavoidably, fall."[15] In such a situation the reality of his existence is revealed to him and he speaks half-aloud to himself: "I am a lost man."[16] Willems' positive realization that he has lost the game of life parallels that of Sartre's Roquentin in *Nausea*: "I lost the whole game. At the same time, I learnt that you always lose."[17]

In *Karain: A Memory* the hero experiences both inner and outer void. The land where Karain rules is a universe of 'black clouds', 'merciless sun', 'empty' beach and 'deserted' village, that mirrors, symbolically, the 'gap' within the deluge-haunted Karain. This is the land where "each sunrise, like a dazzling act of special creation, was disconnected from the eve and the morrow."[18] Such an immense darkness creates a 'gap' or a 'void' which is symbolic of the "depth of horrible void"[19] within the hero, an inner hollowness caused by his memories of the past, which he tries to hide with an "elaborate front."[20] He is caught in the clinging web of fear, and sometimes when an owl hoots far away, he behaves most absurdly and starts as if he were a "man waking up abruptly to the sense of danger."[21] This unique individual consciousness is due to his realization of life's absurdity.

The novelist further delineates Karain's painful mental agony and his guilty conscience. He becomes "absurd and unanswerable,"[22] and sometimes he is haunted by "a sombre, glowing fury within him—a brooding and vague sense of wrong."[23] With the passing away of his mysterious sword-bearer (who gave him moral support), Karain is utterly isolated in life and he is almost crushed under the heavy weight of his own existence. He has not the courage even to go out. For five days "No one had seen him!"[24] Then comes a time before sunset when

"the growling clouds carried with a rush the ridge of hills, and came tumbling down the inner slopes. Everything disappeared; black whirling vapours filled the bay, and in the midst of them the schooner swung here and there in the shifting gusts of wind. A single clap of thunder detonated in the hollow with a violence that seemed capable of bursting into small pieces the ring of high land, and a warm deluge descended. The wind died out."[25]

Such a chaotic universe, which seems to symbolize Karain's inner chaos, makes him restless and self-alienated. Carrying 'nothingness' within, he appears in the doorway of the cabin and then steps in "with a headlong stride and looking over his shoulder like a man pursued."[26] The narrator and the other two white men, Hollis and Jackson, fail to understand the existential dilemma of Karain who narrates his "futile tale of the burden of life."[27] The narrator comments: "It was hard for us to bear the intensity of that undisclosed distress.[28] Being asked "Where is the danger?," Karain replies, "In every place where I am."[29]

Kayerts and Carlier too in *An Outpost of Progress* are isolated from outward realities and find themselves in a universe of 'emptiness' and 'void'. To them:

"The river, the forest, all the great land throbbing with life, were like a great emptiness. Even the brilliant sunshine disclosed nothing intelligible. Things appeared and disappeared before their eyes in an unconnected and aimless kind of way. The river seemed to come from nowhere and flow nowhither. It flowed through a void."[30]

This 'void' without is due to the void within which has been created by their consciousness of having fallen into a primitive universe. Their civilized nerves are tried by the primitive life and they suffer terribly from "an inarticulate feeling that something from within them was gone."[31] They are not in the least impressed by "the absolute and dumb solitude of the post"[32] and the vigorous life it contained. They feel entirely cut off from the world:

"The images of home; the memory of people like them of men that thought and felt as they used to think and feel, receded into distances made indistinct by the glare of unclouded sunshine."[33]

In such a solitude both Kayerts and Carlier are isolated from each other, and

"suddenly it seemed to Kayerts that he had never seen that man before. Who was he? He knew nothing about him."[34]

And further they come into "violent collision"[35] with each other. After a few moments of "an agony frightful and absurd,"[36] Kayerts "felt deadly sick, and stood for a time in profound darkness."[37] Carlier's death shakes him badly. The "violence of the emotions"[38] produces a feeling of "exhausted serenity"[39] in Kayerts, and in the "depths of horror and despair"[40] he finds "repose in the conviction that life had no more secrets for him: neither had death."[41] He sits by the corpse of Carlier thinking, and he seems to be utterly disillusioned:

"His old thoughts, convictions, likes and dislikes, things he respected and things he abhorred, appeared in their true light at last. Appeared contemptible and childish, false and ridiculous."[42]

In such a state Kayerts comes across "new wisdom"[43] that "He had been all his life, till that moment, a believer in a lot of nonsense like the rest of mankind—who are fools."[44] He also suffers from an hallucination. He imagines that he is dead and that Carlier is sitting in his chair. Meanwhile he sleeps and suddenly wakes up from a trance to a unique but absurd situation of being 'immured for ever in a tomb':

"He stood up, saw the body, and threw his arms above his head with a cry like that of a man who, waking from a trance, finds himself immured for ever in a tomb."[45]

With this experience Kayerts discovers in himself an existential man "who has lost his way."[46]

In *Lord Jim* the *Patna* moves under a 'serene' and 'scorching' sky "enveloped in a fulgor of sunshine that killed all thought, oppressed the heart, withered all impulses of strength and energy."[47] Jim realizes the unreason of existence partly because of the soulless sky overhead and a lifeless sea beneath, and later because of his irrational and immoral 'jump' from the *Patna*. He says, "It was as if I had jumped into a well—into an everlasting deep hole."[48] Jim was already feeling "severely left alone."[49] Marlow describes Jim's isolation from his fellow seamen:

"But he kept his distance—he kept his distance. He wanted me to know he had kept his distance; that there was nothing in common between him and these men—who had the hammer. Nothing whatever. It is more than probable he thought himself cut off from them by a space that could not be traversed, by an obstacle that could not be overcome, by a chasm without bottom."[50]

After the fatal 'jump' too Jim is conscious of a 'space' between himself and the rest of humanity by an unlucky chain of events. Thus he is placed in a situation in which, with his personal code of moral values, he finds himself an alien. Jim's conscience is so terribly shaken that it causes moral annihilation of his body and soul alike. His 'saved' life is 'groundless':

"His saved life was over for want of ground under his feet, for want of sight for his eyes, for want of voices in his ears. Annihilation—hey! And all the time it was only a clouded sky, a sea that did not break, the air that did not stir. Only a night; only a silence."[51]

Conrad describes a similar experience of the narrator in *The Shadow Line*. During the storm the narrator is possessed by an 'uneasiness,'[52]

as if "some support had been withdrawn."[53] He faces the "darkness before creation"[54] as Marlow faces the 'night of the first ages' in *Heart of Darkness*. The storm causes existential isolation, the sense of which is heightened by the intense darkness:

"It had closed behind me. I knew I was invisible to the man at the helm. Neither could I see anything. He was alone, I was alone, every man was alone where he stood. And every form was gone too, spar, sail, fittings, rails; everything was blotted out in the dreadful smoothness of that absolute night."[55]

The narrator feels like praying for a "flash of lightning"[56] which might have been a relief; but lightning is sure to be followed by thunder which would be as menacing as the darkness. So he does not pray and "Nothing happened."[57] The similarity of this 'absolute night' with the dark and clouded night of Jim's jump is striking. The 'clouded sky' and the 'night' in *Lord Jim* suggest the hero's moral chaos, bewilderment and isolation from the light of personal morality. He refers to the disappearance of the lights of the abandoned ship, which would have indicated to him that the ship had not sunk, and so he could have swum back. With this light disappears the light of Jim's heart and he is for ever 'filled with darkness.' When the inner light is gone Jim like the narrator of *The Shadow Line* faces the problem of knowing himself. He cannot understand how to be. But like a 'for-itself', he makes a series of efforts to fill the 'gap', though in the course of these efforts he occasionally feels his littleness and insignificance in the vast scheme of this universe. He suffers from a sense of failure to make an adequate choice in life. He regrets having missed a chance, "Ah! what a chance missed!"[58] But he is not wholly lost; he has no time to regret what he has 'lost'; his chief concern is to 'obtain'. With this mission he goes ahead and reaches Patusan. Even when Jim rises in social status in Patusan and tries to get rid of his past, he is not free from the darkness within. The problem remains. In spite of the glory and esteem he wins there, his life is happy only outwardly, since the reality of his 'self' is enveloped by darkness which even the full moon fails to disperse. Albert J. Guerard suggests:

"The moonlight of Patusan is certainly associated with immobility and isolation, and with times when Jim is seriously entranced by his pride and illusions of success. This moonlight comments on the unreality of his aspirations".[59]

Guerard also admits the interpretation of this 'moon spectacle' advanced by Dorothy Van Ghent who suggests that the chasm between the hills represents Jim's 'spiritual cleavage', and the compari-

son of the moon with "an ascending spirit out of a grave; its sheen descended, cold and pale, like the ghost of a dead sunlight" symbolizes the inevitable end of Jim's idealism as well as life. In this context, Dorothy Van Ghent describes Jim's self-alienation:

"He is not only an outcast from his kind but he is also an outcast from himself, cloven spiritually, unable to recognize his own identity, separated from himself as the two halves of the hills are separated."[60]

Jim had taken the desperate leap that landed him into "the life of Patusan, into the trust, the love, the confidence of the people."[61] But the tragedy is that neither of these nor the moonlight is the reality of his existence; these are mere illusions. With the betrayal of his best friend Dain Waris by Gentleman Brown, Jim loses all interest in life and passes away "under a cloud."[62]

Conrad's *Youth: A Narrative* is based on the theme of "nothingness" and 'futility' of human action in the face of an indescribably strange, indifferent and merciless universe of "angry clouds and an infuriated sea."[63] Judea, the ship, has been treated as an existential character in this narrative, which describes her endless struggle for existence in a hostile universe of disaster and chaos. She resembles "an old candle-box" struggling against a furious gale on the Atlantic, which blows "with spite, without interval, without mercy, without rest."[64] Marlow narrates the acute restlessness of Judea surrounded by "the howl of the wind," "the tumult of the sea," and "the noise of water pouring over her deck":

"There was no rest for her and no rest for us. She tossed, she pitched, she stood on her head, she sat on her tail, she rolled, she groaned, and we had to hold on while on deck and cling to our bunks when below, in a constant effort of body and worry of mind."[65]

The burning of the ship has been described as a furious, mournful and imposing funeral of a dear one:

"A magnificent death had come like a grace, like a gift, like a reward to that old ship at the end of her laborious days. The surrender of her weary ghost to the keeping of stars and sea was stirring like the sight of a glorious triumph."[66]

In this way Conrad discovers a triumphant value and grace even in her 'death'.

The novelist also describes the narrator's experiences of 'nothingness' in a disturbed universe:

"The sea was white like a sheet of foam, like a caldron of boiling milk; there was not a break in the clouds, no—not the size of a man's hand—no, not for so much as ten seconds. There was for us

no sky, there were for us no stars, no sun, no universe—nothing but angry clouds and an infuriated sea."[67]

Because of the 'angry clouds' and much more because of an intense self-awareness of isolation, the universe has ceased to exist for Marlow. This is clearly an existential experience of a man for whom the outward realities have disappeared. But a 'being-for-itself' attempts to assert his existence even in such a situation. So does the protagonist of this tale who believes that youth has the potentiality of 'strength', 'faith' and 'imagination'. Youth enables him to respond heroically to the challenges of life. Man struggles hard for existence, but the ultimate realization is his disillusionment at the level of an existential reality—the reality of 'nothingness' and absurdity. There comes a moment when the 'heavy' sea crashes aboard and sweeps clean over the men on the ship. Marlow describes the utter hopelessness and the paralysing effect it produces on them; they are "deafened with the wind,"[68] and are without spirit enough in them even to wish themselves dead. From this stage of extreme powerlessness, he is carried to an existential world of "absurd dream"[69] where he utters, "I wasn't quite sure whether I was alive."[70]

The theme of isolation is one of the main features of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. It is a tale concerned with Kurtz's disillusionment and Marlow's nightmarish journey into the dark African Congo. Marlow begins his voyage with a view to meeting Kurtz during the course of the journey. Marlow feels disgusted with his bitter experiences because the universe in which he travels is a 'God-forsaken wilderness.' He is a stranger in trading places "with names like *Gran' Bassam, Little Popo*; names that seemed to belong to some sordid farce acted in front of a sinister back-cloth."[71] He has a "mournful and senseless delusion"[72] on account of his "isolation"[73] from others with whom he has no point of contact because "the oily and languid sea, the uniform sombreness of the coast"[74] have kept him "away from the truth of things."[75] Conrad describes Marlow's isolation when he loses contact with the outer realities of life and feels 'nothingness'. To him everything seems unreal, ineffectual: the shelling of the coast by the men-of-war, the landing of soldiers, and the objectless blasting. In all these meaningless proceedings Marlow finds a "touch of insanity", "a sense of lugubrious drollery", and shows his disgust with this kind of journey which was like "a weary pilgrimage amongst hints for nightmares."[76] Marlow's nightmarish experience is what Murray Krieger describes "the Kafka-esque nightmare of Africa."[77] In such a world he comes

across "the merry dance of death" and trade going on in a "still and earthy atmosphere as of an overheated catacomb"[78]; and again he witnesses "streams of death in life."[79] All these bring him to "the extremity of an impotent despair."[80]

Marlow's journey is so depressing and absurd that it seems to him that he has "stepped into the gloomy circle of some Inferno,"[81] where "rushing noise filled the mournful stillness of the grove, where not a breath stirred, not a leaf moved, with a mysterious sound—as though the tearing pace of the launched earth had suddenly become audible."[82] In that 'Inferno', Marlow observes black shapes "in all the attitude of pain, abandonment, and despair."[83] He is completely lost in his unreal surroundings and realizes the meaninglessness of human actions. He asks himself, "what it all meant."[84] He finds a "taint of imbecile rapacity" in all the affairs of the 'primeval' life, and the "silent wilderness" strikes him as "something great and invincible."[85] The whole experience is so dream-like and unreal that Marlow the narrator finds it difficult to communicate its effect to the listeners:

"It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream—making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible which is of the very essence of dreams. . . ."[86]

After a pause:

". . . No, it is impossible; it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence—that which makes its truth, its meaning—its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream—alone. . . ."[87]

This is undoubtedly the existential dilemma which man experiences when he cannot communicate his experinces to others.

Existentialist philosophy lays emphasis on man's journey of the reverse.[88] Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* may aptly be described as the story of reverse. Kurtz aims at glory, being the 'emissary of pity and science' but ultimately discovers that he is hollow at the core. The civilized man, placed in the wilderness of a primitive universe, falls into evil which leads him into the heart of darkness. Marlow too realizes that he has been claimed by the powers of darkness and that "Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings."[89] Marlow's journey which draws him nearer Kurtz—the journey in the heart of darkness—may be described an existential journey in a 'universe of reverses'. The more

he advances the more he is driven away from civilization. During his exhausting journey trappings of civilization disappear and even Marlow who has enough 'restraint' seems to be shrinking backward and falling into the 'primeval mud'. To save Kurtz's 'Intended' he tells a lie against his principle. In a gloomy universe as this, Marlow loses all direction in life and suffers from utter isolation:

"You lost your way on that river as you would in a desert, and butted all day long against shoals, trying to find the channel, till you thought yourself bewitched and cut off for ever from everything you had known once—somewhere far away—in another existence perhaps."[90]

With the burial of Kurtz in a muddy hole Marlow's realization is that he too has been buried. Instead of joining Kurtz's burial Marlow remains dreaming of his strange experiences. This is the moment when he is aware of the futility of life:

"Droll thing life is—that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose."[91]

The only advantage one can derive from this life is not much of an advantage because one cannot benefit from it: "The most you can hope from it is some knowledge of yourself—that comes too late—a crop of unextinguishable regrets."[92] Marlow further describes his struggle with death—death being a part of his consciousness and not a reality other than himself:

"I have wrestled with death. It is the most unexciting contest you can imagine. It takes places in an impalpable greyness, with nothing underfoot, with nothing around, without spectators, without clamour, without glory, without the great desire of victory, without the great fear of defeat, in a sickly atmosphere of tepid scepticism, without much belief in your own right, and still less in that of your adversary. If such is the form of ultimate wisdom then life is a greater riddle than some of us think it to be."[93]

Marlow seems to be a Hedeiggerian man whose consciousness of death heightens self-awareness and confers upon him the status of individuality. Thus we see that Marlow's journey in the Congo is essentially the existential journey of a 'for-itself' who realizes his littleness in the mystery, mercilessness and futility of life, but emerges with a positive knowledge of truth about human existence.

In *Typhoon* Conrad describes how the seamen on the steamer Nan-Shan undergo certain experiences of isolation caused by the furies of the sea and hurricane. Once again, as in *Youth: A Narrative*, the ship is described as a living creature being tossed in a hostile universe. But she struggles for her existence, and characters like

Captain MacWhirr too exhibit through their efforts, as in Hemingway's *Old Man and the Sea*, that man may be crushed but never defeated. At the very outset "the lurid sunshine cast faint and sickly shadows," the "swell ran higher and swifter every moment" and the ship Nan-Shan "lurched heavily in the smooth, deep hollows of the sea."[94] A dense cloud appears low and motionless upon the sea "resembling a solid obstacle in the path of the ship."[95] And

"She went floundering towards it like an exhausted creature driven to its death."[96]

The "blackness ahead of the ship," its "appalling stillness"[97] and the "heavy sprays" envelop *Nan-Shan* wholly and "she began to jerk and plunge as though she had gone mad with fright."[98] In such a horrible universe Captain MacWhirr "could expect no relief of that sort from any one of earth. Such is the loneliness of command."[99] The strong wind sweeps at him and he feels "under his feet the uneasiness of his ship" completely "stricken by a blind man's helplessness."[100] Then comes a 'burst of lightning' as if 'flashed into a cavern' and once again the dark clouds hang over the ship, and the great rush of waters caused by the wind isolates each individual from the other. Conrad describes:

"In an instant the men lost touch of each other. This is the disintegrating power of a great wind: it isolates one from one's kind."[101]

But the ship moves on like a 'for-itself' and the novelist describes her miserable condition:

"She was like a living creature thrown to the rage of a mob: hustled terribly, struck at, borne up, flung down, leaped upon."[102]

As a result, a "profound trouble"[103] enters into the souls of Captain MacWhirr and Jukes, the chief mate. But they do not lose hope, "Keep on hammering,...builders . . . good men..."[104] But the intense darkness further isolates them: "Captain MacWhirr removed his arm from Jukes' shoulders, and thereby ceased to exist for his mate, so dark it was."[105]

In such a solitary state, Conrad describes Jukes' unique individual experience. His sense of "profound discomfort existed side by side with an incredible disposition to somnolence, as though he had been buffeted and worried into drowsiness."[106] He is oppressed by the power of the wind that:

"would get hold of his head and try to shake it off his shoulders; his clothes, full of water, were as heavy as lead, cold and dripping like an armour of melting ice: he shivered—it lasted a long time; and with his hands closed hard on his hold, he was letting himself

sink slowly into the depths of bodily misery. His mind became concentrated upon himself in an aimless, idle way, and when something pushed lightly at the back of his knees he nearly, as the saying is, jumped out of his skin."[107]

The long stress of a gale gives rise to an "interminably culminating catastrophe", and the novelist observes:

"There is a bodily fatigue in the mere holding on to existence within the excessive tumult; a searching and insidious fatigue that penetrates deep into a man's breast to cast down and sadden his heart, which is incorrigible, and of all the gifts of the earth—even before life itself—aspires to peace."[108]

Jukes feels benumbed. But in a moment of crisis he detects the tone of deep concern in the voice of Captain MacWhirr. The universe has been so cruel to *Nan-Shan* that "the wind had thrown its weight on the ship, trying to pin her down amongst the seas."[109] Jukes observes, "She was no longer struggling intelligently. It was the beginning of the end." The note of busy concern in the Captain's voice sickens Jukes "like an exhibition of blind and pernicious folly."[110]

But the novelist shows that even in a long and exhausting voyage, Captain MacWhirr, struggling against the merciless and furious universe, is courageous enough not to lose his head. Even in "the solitude and pitch darkness of the cabin," he says half aloud to himself, "I shouldn't like to lose her."[111] But the journey is so depressing and nauseating that once again he is isolated even from his own existence:

"He sat unseen, apart from the sea, from his ship, isolated, as if withdrawn from the very current of his own existence, where such freaks as talking to himself surely had no place."[112]

He too realizes the unreason of existence and seems to be "surrendering to a strange sensation of weariness he was not enlightened enough to recognize for the fatigue of mental stress."[113] Yet he is not hopeless; he continues to steer carefully and even the "hurricane, with its power to madden the sea" finds "this taciturn man"[114] in its path. This man ultimately declares in a tone of vexation before "the renewed wrath of winds,"[115] "I wouldn't like to lose her."[116] Conrad thus glorifies human worth and dignity in Captain MacWhirr.

Amy Foster is a story of a stranger observed closely and described by Kennedy, a country doctor who lives in Colebrook on the shores of Eastbay. The protagonist is a "castaway,"[117] a poor emigrant from Central Europe bound for America. He has been

described as a strange-looking man "so different from the mankind around" him that he appears to be "a woodland creature."[118] Introducing the tragic story of this ship-wrecked man, "the most innocent of adventurers cast out by the sea", the doctor refers to those who "suffered violent death or else slavery, passing through years of precarious existence with people to whom their strangeness was an object of suspicion, dislike or fear."[119] He further comments:

"It is indeed hard upon a man to find himself a lost stranger, helpless, incomprehensible, and of a mysterious origin, in some obscure corner of the earth."[120]

Yanko Goorall, as he is called, is a 'lost stranger' who "did not know the name of his ship";[121] "he did not even know that ships had names."[122] Kennedy describes how Yanko "beheld the sea" from the top of Talfourd Hill and "his eyes roamed afar, lost in an air of wild surprise, as though he had never seen such a sight before."[123] The very emigrant ship in which he is hustled at the mouth of the Elbe is a suffocating place where he loses "touch with his only companion,"[124] and an awful "sickness"[125] overcomes him making him neglect even his prayers. Besides, "It seemed always to be night in that place."[126]

After the ship-wreck he comes out of this darkness but he faces all the more darkness in the outside world where he always feels himself an alien. The doctor describes his utter loneliness:

"No doubt he must have been abominably seasick and abominably unhappy—this soft and passionate adventurer, taken thus out of his knowledge, and feeling bitterly as he lay in his imigrant bunk his utter loneliness; for his was a highly sensitive nature."[127]

Conrad, having placed Yanko in such an isolated and strange situation as this, remarks that even a kind-hearted man like him is, in the eyes of society, a man with "a voice crying piercingly strange words in the night," a "horrid-looking man,"[128] a "funny tramp."[129] The tragedy of this man is that he is trying "to get in touch with someone"[130] to feel less lonely, but everywhere he is treated as a stranger. Perchance he comes across Amy Foster whose "heart was of the kindest" and "she was tender to every living creature."[131] Amy seems to be sympathetic towards this man. But Yanko is shut up in wood-lodge by Smith to whom he appears "a wandering and probably dangerous maniac."[132] Having been deprived of his freedom, Yanko faces insufferable existential loneliness. The doctor says about him,

"And I dare say the man inside had been very near to insanity on that night. Before his excitement collapsed and he became

unconscious he was throwing himself violently about in the dark, rolling on some dirty sacks, and biting his fists with rage, cold, hunger, amazement, and despair."[133]

Yanko feels the unreason of his existence because the wood-lodge where he is imprisoned "presented the horrible aspect of a dungeon."[134] The novelist says that the hero finds some relief when Amy Foster appears to him "with the aureole of an angel of life"[135] and gives him half a loaf of white bread to eat. Thus he is brought back again "with the pale of human relations with his new surroundings."[136] Though sheltered by Mr. Swaffer and having come in contact with a strange community, he continues to be an 'outsider' who "could talk to no one, and had no hope of ever understanding anybody."[137] His foreignness is described:

"He didn't know where he was. Somewhere very far from his mountains—somewhere over the water. Was this America, he wondered?"[138]

But still he is looking for life. Then comes a time of temporary relief when Amy willingly unites herself with him and they have a son. Ironically enough, Yanko is overjoyed, but somehow Amy is not wholly happy with him. Domestic differences arise and Amy's disgust with this man increases. She fails to understand the language which he speaks. He falls ill and in his illness he becomes all the more strange and fearful to Amy. Burning with fever he asks her for 'water' but she remains still because "his passionate remonstrances only increased her fear of that strange man."[139] His existential isolation is complete when she simply opens the door and runs out with the child in her arms, leaving him to die fevered and thirsty. The doctor observes that Yanko expires miserably asking the Maker, "Why?" and ironically uttering the word "Merciful!"[140]

In the first phase of his writing career ending with *Amy Foster* (1903), Joseph Conrad's novels and tales contain vague but unmistakable suggestions about the existence of man in a hostile universe. In these works man is generally seen as an ironic accident—inadequate, aimless and thwarted. Essentially a solitary, he is a 'lost stranger' in an incomprehensible, dangerous and apparently meaningless universe. A few of his characters, however, have glimpses of some meaning and value even in the midst of their bitter realization of the unreason, illogically and futility of existence. In the second phase, Conrad's vision acquires new dimensions, and the theme of a chaotic and merciless universe impinging upon the consciousness of a sensitive man in moments of solitude and suffering is raised to the level of existential revolt. This outcome of his matured vision will be studied in the chapter that follows.

Notes and References

1. Mary Warnoch, *Existentialism* (London, O.U.P., 1970), p. 93.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
3. "It is the possession of this emptiness in himself which makes it possible for a Being-for-itself both to perceive the world and also to act in it, determining his own course of action by reference to an imagined future. His freedom is defined in terms of his own potentiality." *Ibid.*
4. G. Jean Aubry, *Life and Letters*, Vol. I, p. 222. (*Italic* mine).
5. Joseph Conrad, *A Personal Record*, p. 92.
6. Wilson Follett, *Joseph Conrad: A Study* (New York, Russell and Russell, 1966), p. 42.
7. Joseph Conrad, *An Outcast of the Islands*, p. 271.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 272. 9. *Ibid.* 10. *Ibid.*, p. 282.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 327. 12. *Ibid.* 13. *Ibid.*, p. 328.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 339. 15. *Ibid* 16. *Ibid.*, p. 34
17. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, tr. Robert Baldick (Penguin Books, 1965), p. 223.
18. Joseph Conrad, "Karain: a Memory," p. 4.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 6. 20. *Ibid.* 21. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 23. 23. *Ibid.*, pp. 23-4. 24. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 27-8. 26. *Ibid.*, p. 28. 27. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 34. 29. *Ibid.*
30. Joseph Conrad, "An Outpost of Progress," p. 133.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 156. 32. *Ibid.* 33. *Ibid.* 34. p. 160.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 163. 36. *Ibid.*, 164. 37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*, p. 166. 39. *Ibid.* 40. *Ibid.* 41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.* 43. *Ibid.* 44. *Ibid.*, p. 167. 45. *Ibid.*, p. 168.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 169. 47. Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, p. 12.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 82. 49. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 77. 51. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
52. Joseph Conrad, "The Shadow Line," *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' and Other Stories* (London, Dent, Everyman's Library, 1964), p. 290.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 290. 54. *Ibid.*
55. Joseph Conrad, "The Shadow Line," p. 290.

56. *Ibid.* 57. *Ibid.* 58. Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, p. 61.
59. Albert J. Guerard, "Sympathy and Judgement in Lord Jim," (Editor's title) *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Lord Jim*, ed. Robert K. Kuehn (New Jersey, Prentice Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, 1969), p. 91.
60. Dorothy Van Ghent, *The English Novel: Form and Function* (New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1953), p. 236.
61. Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, p. 279.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 306.
63. Joseph Conrad, "Youth: A Narrative," *Youth—A Narrative and Two Other Stories* (London, J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1923), p. 11.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 10. 65. *Ibid.* 66. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
67. Joseph Conrad, "Youth: A Narrative," p. 11.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 13. 69. *Ibid.*, p. 24. 70. *Ibid.*
71. Joseph Conrad, "Heart of Darkness," p. 123.
72. *Ibid.* 73. *Ibid.* 74. *Ibid.* 75. *Ibid.*
76. *Ibid.*, p. 124.
77. Murray, Krieger, *The Tragic Vision* (New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p. 158.
78. Joseph Conrad, "Heart of Darkness," p. 124.
79. *Ibid.* 80. *Ibid.* 81. *Ibid.*, p. 126. 82. *Ibid.*
83. *Ibid.* 84. *Ibid.*, p. 134. 85. *Ibid.* 86. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
87. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
88. "At the core of Jasper's ontology, we find an outlook similar to the idea that reverse is the essential factor in every human project. Sartre has the same conviction and for him, life is not only a much-handicapped undertaking, but also always an abortive one. Both men have in their minds the hallucinating picture which Kafka paints of this universe of reverses in *The Castle* and in *The Trial*. It represents life as an interminable and exhausting journey, every step of which takes us further away from the goal we are aiming at." Emmanuel Maunier, *Existentialist Philosophy*, p. 91.
89. Joseph Conrad, "Heart of Darkness," p. 146.
90. *Ibid.* 91. *Ibid.*, p. 188.
92. *Ibid.* 93. *Ibid.*
94. Joseph Conrad, "Typhoon," *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' and Typhoon* (London and Toronto, J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1923), p. 22. 95. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
96. Joseph Conrad, "Typhoon," p. 26.
97. *Ibid.*, p. 29. 98. *Ibid.*, p. 39. 99. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
100. *Ibid.* 101. *Ibid.* 102. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

103. *Ibid.* 104. *Ibid.*, p. 48. 105. *Ibid.*
106. *Ibid.* 107. *Ibid.* 108. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
109. *Ibid.*, p. 53. 110. *Ibid.* 111. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
112. *Ibid.* 113. *Ibid.* 114. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
115. *Ibid.* 116. *Ibid.*
117. Joseph Conrad, "Amy Foster," *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' and Typhoon*, p. 111.
118. *Ibid.* 119. *Ibid.*, p. 113. 120. *Ibid.*
121. *Ibid.* 122. *Ibid.*
123. Joseph Conrad, "Amy Foster," p. 113.
124. *Ibid.*, p. 114. 125. *Ibid.* 126. *Ibid.*
127. *Ibid.*, p. 118. 128. *Ibid.* 129. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
130. *Ibid.*, p. 119. 131. *Ibid.*, p. 109. 132. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
133. *Ibid.* 134. *Ibid.*, p. 124. 135. *Ibid.*
136. *Ibid.*, p. 125. 137. *Ibid.*, p. 129. 138. *Ibid.*
139. *Ibid.*, p. 140. 140. *Ibid.*, p. 141.

CHAPTER VI
The Revolt

ALBERT Camus in the 'Introduction' to his famous philosophical work *The Rebel* writes:

"Rebellion arises from the spectacle of the irrational coupled with an unjust and incomprehensible condition. But its blind impetus clamours for order in the midst of chaos, and for unity in the very heart of the ephemeral."[1]

This kind of rebellion is a characteristic feature of the contemporary existentialist writings. Discussing the nature of revolt Herbert Read remarks that it has changed radically in our times and in Camus "it is a metaphysical revolt, the revolt of man against the conditions of life, against creation itself."[2] In such a revolt the idea of the 'absurd' is basic and man faces two main problems: murder and suicide. Camus "proposes to follow, into the realm of murder and revolt, a mode of thinking that began with suicide and the idea of the absurd."[3] Thus both suicide and murder are closely linked with the concept of the absurd and hence permissible because man is an unhappy consciousness, he is a being "who refuses to be what he is."[4] In an absurd situation he exercises his 'freedom' through destruction either of himself or of others. For him there is nothing right or wrong, good or bad. These irrational acts of violence and senseless revolt constitute some of the important themes of modern existential writings. But in "every act of solitary self-destruction," the man "who kills himself in solitude still recognizes a value."[5] In his utter hopelessness and helplessness in averting the absurdity of life, man destroys himself, and yet discovers some glimpses of meaning in it which itself is a kind of self-fulfilment.

In the light of the foregoing, the present chapter studies certain aspects of existential revolt in the works of Joseph Conrad. Though this theme of revolt becomes insistent in his later works, it was also expressed in a few of his early writings.

The Idiots is one of the *Tales of Unrest* dealing with Jean-Pierre's irrational revolt against his wife Susan out of anguish and desperation which gives rise to counter-revolt in the form of her killing her husband in self-defence. Both find themselves in an absurd situation which has arisen due to their four idiot-children who "were an

offence to the sunshine, a reproach to empty heaven, a blight on the concentrated and purposeful vigour of the wild landscape."[6] Jean-Pierre, after retirement from military service, returns home and brings about major changes in his farm. But now with idiot-children, he sees no future in the farm. The narrator describes Jean-Pierre "striding on the crests of rises, lonely and high upon the grey curtain of drifting clouds, as if he had been pacing along the very edge of the universe."[7] When he looks at the vast and promising land he is filled with darkness and despair and suffers from the painful consciousness of being alone in this world. The narrator says:

"And it seemed to him that to a man worse than childless there was no promise in the fertility of fields that from him the earth escaped, defied him, frowned at him like the clouds, sombre and hurried above his head. Having to face alone his own fields, he felt the inferiority of man who passes away before the clod that remains."[8]

Jean-Pierre's 'groundless' existence and lonely situation are responsible for his violent attempt to kill his wife as if she alone was to blame for the birth of their idiot-children. But his attempt is foiled by Susan who pierces the hollow of his throat with her scissors and runs out. From this moment she is overpowered by mental anguish reflected symbolically in the outside world:

"The darkness came from the hills, flowed over the coast, put out the red fires of sunset, and went on to seaward pursuing the retiring tide. The wind dropped with the sun, leaving a maddened sea and a devastated sky."[9]

Susan has a number of hallucinations of her murdered husband, "a familiar face with fixed eyes and an open mouth."[10] Near the sea she stands isolated:

"She felt strangely calm. . . . She peered into the smooth obscurity near her. She was alone. There was nothing there; nothing near her, either living or dead."[11]

She attempts suicide. But she overcomes this idea on realizing that "This place was too big and too empty to die in."[12] Moreover, before she dies she must explain her guilt to the 'gentleman in black clothes' as to "how it happened."[13] While returning home she is again struck by the vision of her husband as if she is being pursued by him. Even when she sees Millot (one of the sea-weed gatherers who watches her actions out of curiosity and sympathy), she finds the reflection of her husband. Consequently her fearful consciousness is heightened. She trembles and finds herself wholly caught in the existentlal trap:

"There was no escape, no peace, no hope. She looked round

despairingly. Suddenly the whole shadowy coast, the blurred islets, the heaven itself, swayed about twice, then came to a rest."[14]

She closes her eyes and shouts: "Can't you wait till I am dead!"[15] But well before her death, while explaining her guilt to her mother, she had already discovered in herself the eternal and universal atheistic rebel: "There's no mercy in heaven—no justice. No!"[16]

Murder and suicide are again dealt with in *An Outpost of Progress*. Kayerts and Carlier find it difficult to live in Central Africa in the absence of 'civilization'. In the uncongenial surroundings a time comes when they have to face the problem of bare existence. They do not get proper food, because in the station nothing is available but only rice and coffee without sugar. One day Carlier asks for some sugar which Kayerts, the chief, refuses to supply because he has kept it in reserve for the days of sickness. This refusal proves the last straw for the frayed nerves of Carlier who was already sick of the situation in which he was placed. The two quarrel and separate. Though Kayerts is struck by a "surprising flash of violent emotion within him, as if in the presence of something undreamt of, dangerous, and final,"[17] Carlier too revolts against Kayerts by calling names. Kayerts' sense of dignity is wounded and they come into violent collision. Carlier furiously pounces upon Kayerts with a view to killing him, but during the fight Carlier is killed. Carlier's death deeply unnerves Kayerts who suffers from hallucination and guilty conscience:

"He found life more terrible and difficult than death. He had shot an unarmed man."[18]

The moment of Carlier's death proves to be a turning point in the life of Kayerts who has now acquired "a feeling of exhausting serenity," a "repose in the conviction that life had no more secrets for him."[19] In his 'new wisdom' "he seemed to have broken loose from himself altogether."[20] Now he thinks: "He knew! He was at peace; he was familiar with the highest wisdom!"[21] He further imagines that he is being called "so that justice could be done,"[22] and at last the only exit he can find from this situation is through self-punishment. He sees "a cross-shaped stain, upon the shifting purity of the mist,"[23] and feeling that he is stumbling towards it, he hangs himself. Thus even his suicide is a kind of self-fulfilment, an acknowledgment of certain values, the realization of which gives him a 'lucidity' and 'repose', and which are symbolized in the vision of the cross seen by him at the end. We feel that death has fully redeemed his guilt.

The story of Jim is that of a conscientious young ship's officer who loses, in the moment of danger, his honour by abandoning his

ship with eight hundred pilgrims aboard—"an unwilled reflex of cowardice."[24] In such a moment of disaster and self-betrayal Jim's irrational act is inexplicable even to himself and he expresses his death-wish. "I wished I could die,"[25] he cries. But suddenly he is able to overcome this 'nausea' and he survives. His lonely search for 'manhood' leads him further to a remote primitive land Patusan where, with his integrity and self-assertion, he becomes the 'Lord' of a small community. In order to fill up his 'inner void' and gain redemption he serves humanity with sincerity, love and responsibility.

The end of Jim, which can be described as a revolt against himself, comes when another white man Gentleman Brown appears with his evil gang. The presence of Brown disturbs the peace and order of Jim's life by reminding him of his own guilt. Jim fears lest the whole community which he has built and of which he has won confidence and faith, should perish due to the evil intentions of Brown. Jim's sense of responsibility is shaken; his awareness that he is "responsible for every life in the land,"[26] makes him restless. Talking to Jewel, his beloved, he says that there is no sleep "while our people are in danger."[27] Moreover, he is fully conscious that Brown, the evil incarnate, can go to any possible extent of mercilessness and destruction, for "Men act badly sometimes without being much worse than others."[28] He makes honest efforts to persuade Brown to leave the land but the irony is that instead of appreciating and reciprocating Jim's goodness, Brown kills Jim's friend Dain Waris and many others. The deceived Jim is stunned. He is unable to understand the logic of Brown's senseless act. Jim now is a 'lost' man. His realization is that

"He had retreated from one world, for a small matter of an impulsive jump, and now the other, the work of his own hands, had fallen in ruins upon his head."[29]

His life becomes miserable since "Everything was gone" and moreover, "Loneliness was closing on him."[30] He loses his courage and sense of purpose in life: " 'Fight! what for?' he asked . . . 'I have no life, he said."[31] He decides "to prove his power in another way,"[32] by exercising his freedom to die honourably and 'unreconciled' with evil. He comes forward "ready and unarmed"[33] and faces the shot coming from Doramin with pride and dignity: "the white man [Jim] sent right and left at all those faces a proud and unflinching glance."[34] Jim's tragic quest allows no nobler form of self-fulfilment or a more honourable return to the community, and thus it leads him to a form of self-sacrifice:

"In the absurd world one act has no more meaning than any

other, except the act of dying, a form of fulfilment as well as destruction."[35]

One is also reminded of Dostoevsky's Kirillov, an "existential martyr" who "affirms his identity by destroying it."[36] The words of Camus' Clamence also seem to be applicable to Jim's ultimate realization and his choice of self-sacrifice:

"Men are never convinced of your reasons, of your sincerity, of the seriousness of your sufferings, except by your death. So long as you are alive, your case is doubtful; you have a right only to their scepticism.... But you kill yourself and what does it matter whether or not they believe you? ... In order to cease being a doubtful case, one has to cease being, that's all."[37]

Thus we see that Conrad's Jim chooses to revolt against himself and to die in order to cease being a 'doubtful' case. Thus Jim seems to be in the line of the existential heroes of Dostoevsky and Camus.

In the second phase, with the maturing of Conrad's vision, the depiction of the theme of revolt becomes more powerful, as in the portrayal of the abnormal psychology of Decoud in *Nostromo* and of Mrs. Verloc in *The Secret Agent*. The political factor also now enters to give new dimension to the themes of solitude, guilt, violence and revolt.

In the lighter loaded with silver both Nostromo and Decoud reach a universe of blackness where they feel entirely cut off from the rest of the world. Nostromo remains obsessed with the silver, while Decoud feels abandoned in a terrible solitude and his past experiences in Sulaco drop away from him:

"The solitude could almost be felt. And when the breeze ceased, the blackness seemed to weigh upon Decoud like a stone."[38]

The image of blackness like a stone makes the darkness appear to be of unbearable weight. Decoud feels wholly crushed by his own consciousness of solitude and blackness. No action or movement seems possible to him, and thus overpowered by the consciousness of this weight, he asks Nostromo if the lighter is at all moving. Nostromo replies: "Not so fast as a crawling beetle tangled in the grass."

"and his [Nostromo] voice seemed deadened by the thick veil of obscurity that felt warm and hopeless all about them. There were long periods when he made no sound, invisible and inaudible as if he had mysteriously stepped out of the lighter."[39]

Nostromo's reference to the 'crawling beetle tangled in the grass' also expresses his sense of being overwhelmed with the burden of existence which restrains his freedom of action. Thus both of

them are caught in a nightmarish *impasse* where their human powers are reduced to the level of those of an insect trapped by nature. Decoud too is conscious of the futility and powerlessness of all human actions. He is left alone in the world where the meanings of voices are obscure, and all hope is foolish. His sense of loneliness is heightened when it seems to him that Nostromo 'mysteriously stepped out of the lighter'.

Decoud, a "victim of disillusioned weariness,"[40] undergoes unbearable and unavoidable anguish, and feels unfit "to grapple with himself single-handed."[41] Conrad describes Decoud's existential solitariness:

"Solitude from mere outward condition of existence becomes very swiftly a state of soul in which the affections of irony and scepticism have no place. It takes possession of the mind, and drives forth the thought into the exile of utter unbelief. After three days of waiting for the sight of some human face, Decoud caught himself entertaining a doubt of his own individuality."[42]

Solitude makes him doubt his own 'individuality' and thus he becomes a stranger to himself. Conrad lays stress on the fact that the illusions of the idealist are as disastrous as the doubts of the sceptic:

"In our activity alone do we find the sustaining illusion of an independent existence as against the whole scheme of things of which we form a helpless part."[43]

But Decoud being a 'clear-sighted' man cannot delude himself by attempting to avert the absurdity of life through action. He realizes the unreason of existence, and loses "all belief in the reality of his action past and to come."[44] To him every action seems 'senseless' and 'meaningless':

"Sleeplessness had robbed his will of all energy, for he had not slept seven hours in the seven days. His sadness was the sadness of a sceptical mind. He beheld the universe as a succession of incomprehensible images. . . . And all exertion seemed senseless."[45]

Decoud further falls into the existential void: "the solitude appeared like a great void, and the silence of the gulf like a tense, thin cord to which he hung suspended by both hands."[46] Thus Decoud, in the "merciless solitude"[47] of the Placid Gulf, experiences the absurd and exercises his choice of suicide, thinking probably that it could have some value or meaning in a meaningless existence. This experience[48] and choice[49] are an inalienable part of the existential revolt.

In *The Secret Agent* the theme of revolt is associated with Winnie Verloc's stabbing of her husband followed by the 'impenet-

rable mystery' of her suicide. Verloc uses his brother-in-law Stevie as a prepared victim in an attempt to blow up the Greenwich observatory. Stevie's death comes as a shocking blow to Mrs. Verloc, his most 'devoted sister'. As a result, she is lost in boundless astonishment and despair. She is restless and violent; she seems to be tearing off her own skin and keeps "perfect immobility" of her pose which expresses "the agitation of rage and despair, all the potential violence of tragic passions, better than any shallow display of shrieks; with the beating of a distracted head against the walls, could have done."[50] She develops a deep repugnance for her husband. She says, "I don't want to look at you as long as I live."[51] Her separation from Stevie isolates her from her husband and suddenly she is thrown totally upon herself. As a 'free' woman she stands "released from all earthly ties."[52] In such a moment of isolation Conrad describes her 'freedom':

"She had her freedom. Her contract with existence, as represented by that man standing over there, was at an end. She was a free woman."[53]

But the most tragic aspect of her existential dilemma is that as a 'free woman' she does not know how to use her freedom:

"She had thrown open the window of the bedroom either with the intention of screaming Murder! Help! or of throwing herself out. For she did not exactly know what use to make of her freedom. Her personality seemed to have been torn into two pieces, whose mental operations did not adjust themselves very well to each other."[54]

Possibly, she desires to exist within the Sartrean states of her mutually destructing beings to maintain a 'free' yet rock-like consciousness, to live within the world but outside of death. Her quest functions within the existential vocabulary, its dramatic pattern, and its tragic finale. As Sartre would explain it, she tries to push her freedom to a form of self-fulfilment; she desires to be both in and out of the world. Consequently, she becomes so self-involved that the delicate balance between consciousness and reality gives way to an extreme form of *dementia.* But instead of throwing herself out of the window, she tries to run out. Having been checked by her husband, she falls a victim to murderous thoughts and like a self-alienated solitary, she sits still "under her black veil, in her own house, like a masked and mysterious visitor of impenetrable intentions."[55] In such a mental state "her wits no longer disconnected, were working under the control of her will."[56] She is haunted by the vision of Stevie's "mangled limbs"[57] and "decapitated head"[58] and she is almost maddened. Consequently, she revolts violently

against her husband and suddenly stabs him to death. After this murder, though she enjoys the "perfection of freedom,"[59] she is fearful of the 'gallows'. She is struck by the idea that she should throw herself into the river.[60] When she gets out, she suffers from a terrible forlornness: "She was alone in London: and the whole town...was sunk in a hopeless night, rested at the bottom of a black abyss from which no unaided woman could hope to scramble out."[61] Suddenly, Comrade Ossipon appears before her "like a radiant messenger of life."[62] The false assurances held out by him give her momentary relief. But ultimately when she is deserted by him, Winnie Verloc once again must have found herself in an existential situation of revolt in which suicide was the only choice.

Thus in Conrad the theme of revolt finds treatment on various levels. When man experiences the 'absurd' in life and its utter unreason, he begins to revolt against the existing codes of morality, social values, religion and ultimately against self. In moments of solitude and despair, some of Conrad's characters choose self-destruction, while at the same time, they seem to discover some positive value or meaning in terms of self-fulfilment. With his treatment of solitude, guilt, hallucination and violence in its extreme forms of murder and suicide, Conrad seems to be discovering an atheistic existentialist in himself. These themes were later developed by Sartre and Camus to depict the existential revolt of man.

Notes and References

1. Albert Camus, "Introduction," *The Rebel*, tr. Anthony Bower (Penguin Books, 1973), p. 16.
2. Herbert Read, "Foreword," *The Rebel*, pp. 7-8.
3. Albert Camus, "Introduction," *The Rebel*, pp. 12-3.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 17. 5. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
6. Joseph Conrad, "The Idiots," *Tales of Unrest*, p. 83.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 101. 8. *Ibid.*, p. 102. 9. *Ibid.*, pp. 103-04.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 113. 11. *Ibid.*, 117. 12. *Ibid.* 13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, p. 121. 15. *Ibid.* 16. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
17. Josesh Conrad, "An Outpost of Progress," p. 160.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 165. 19. *Ibid.*, p. 166. 20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, p. 167. 22. *Ibid.*, p. 168. 23. *Ibid.*, p. 169.
24. Alan Friedman, "*The Novel*," *The Twentieth Century Mind*, ed. C.B. Cox and A.E. Dyson (Oxford University, 1972), p. 423.
25. Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, p. 82.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 291. 27. *Ibid.* 28. *Ibid.* p. 291.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 301. 30. *Ibid.* 31. *Ibld.*, p. 302.
32. *Ibid.* 33. *Ibid.*, p. 306. 34. *Ibid.*, p. 306.
35. Richard Lehan, "Existentialism in Recent American Fiction: The Demonic Quest," *Recent American Fiction, Some Critical Views*, ed. Joseph J. Waldmeir (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1963), p. 65. 36. *Ibid.*
37. Albert Camus, *The Fall*, tr. Justin O'Brien (Penguin Books, 1968), pp. 55-6. 38. Joseph Conrad, *Nostromo*, p. 221.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 221. 40. *Ibid.*, p. 412. 41. *Ibid.*, p. 408.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 408-09. 43. *Ibid.*, p. 409. 44. *Ibid.*
45. *Ibid.* 46. *Ibid.*, pp. 409-10. 47. *Ibid.*, p. 411.
48. "This feeling of estrangement between a man and his life, which sometimes ends in suicide, is the most elementary way of experiencing the absurd." John Cruickshank, *Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt*, p. 46.
49. "If the world is irremediably absurd, and if one is a strnnger to oneself as well as to other people and to material things, then to commit suicide is to behave as though such action itself could have value or meaning in a meaningless existence." *Ibid.*, pp. 60-1. 50. Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, p. 174.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 190. 52. *Ibid.*, p. 204. 53. *Ibid.*
54. *Ibid.*, p. 206. 55. *Ibid.*, p. 207. 56. *Ibid.*, p. 211.
57. *Ibid.* 58. *Ibid.* 59. *Ibid.*, p. 213. 60. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 218. 62. *Ibid.*

Conclusion

JOSEPH CONRAD'S writing career covered a crucial period of transition in English literary history. Virginia Woolf described it so tellingly, "On or about December 1910 human nature changed." On the political horizon too the relative peace of the Victorians was replaced by new conflicts and tensions ultimately resulting in a global conflagration involving almost all the major powers. A new consciousness and a new sensibility were dawning in the West and an awareness of the human dilemma resulting in anguish and despair was reflected in the philosophical and literary works of existential thinkers and writers.

But a few sensitive souls were able to vibrate to the new moods even before the new age had actually arrived. Dostoevsky, Kafka and Conrad were among those who anticipated many of the themes and awarenesses of the post-war years—"the nihilism, the vacuity, the despair, and deathly mechanization and depersonification of the existing man in our time."[1] Conrad's works, as we have seen, exhibit the typical modern consciousness. He seems to believe that the extraordinary singularity of each individual makes his problem and his way unique and that any deviation made by him with a view to conforming to a pre-established pattern is a betrayal of his own self. This peculiar separateness of man is a theme which was developed many years later by Sartre and Camus. This personal morality represents a turning away from religious or social morality in order to live in sincerity with oneself.

In Conrad's early works, man is generally shown to be a 'being-for-itself' characterized by a typical subjective awareness and power of transcendence. But, as he moves forward, he perceives the existential reality and is stripped of all illusions of life—love, hope, glory and power. For him the traditional values prove to be inadequate, if not completely meaningless: only the existentialist values like 'individual dignity', 'freedom of choice' and quest for identity have any significance. Conrad has also described man's miserable plight, his sense of 'nothingness' in a 'God-forsaken' universe—purposeless, mysterious and incomprehensible. Thus, the

1. Arturo B. Follico, *Art and Extentialism* (N. J., Prentice-Hall, Inc.. 1962), p. 130.

strange fascination of Conrad's works lies in the fact that if he arouses in us a sense of immediate relatedness, of strong, if uneasy, identification, it is because of the profound quality of his awareness of loss, estrangement, guilt and anxiety. Conrad provides no facile solution to man's plight; but his hero, even in his isolation, disillusionment and death, is shown to have discovered some positive values of life like love, nobility, dignity and the necessity of being true to one's own self.

Though partly foreshadowed in his early works, the political vision of the later Conrad too, distilled in some of his greatest works in the form of what may perhaps be called his philosophy of revolution, is a glorification of the individual *praxis*, which in these works is harmonized with Conrad's anti-capitalist attitude. In this, Conrad seems to be anticipating Sartre's 'political existentialism'. He also anticipates Sartre and Camus in his depiction of another relevant theme—the theme of revolt by an individual placed in a hostile and chaotic universe and asserting his existence *pour-soi* through murder and suicide.

Conrad's existential stance is in the line of thinkers and writers from Nietzsche to Camus. His works contain some of the important features of Nietzschean philosophy—the glorification of the human will, the rejection of reason and the exercise of 'freedom' in a godless universe, underlining the fact that each individual is a law unto himself. At the same time, Conrad treated many of the problems and themes that preoccupied thinkers and writers like Sartre and Camus—the problem of identity, the nature of good and evil, the source of values in a godless world, and the possibility and meaning of action in an ethical vacuum. A highly sensitive and thoughtful man, Conrad was fascinated and puzzled by the problems that tease us out of thought. Like Mitya in *The Brothers Karamazov* he was 'one of those who don't want millions, but an answer to their questions.' But he was not a formal thinker or philosopher rationalizing on human experience or codifying a pattern of norms or values of human behaviour. He was rather a prophet who, spinning his yarns of sea-life, was able to anticipate the mood of a later generation and give it an expression which has the permanence and universality of great art. He is one of *us* not only in his fictional technique, so often praised, but also in his understanding of the human predicament. He is one of the creators of the twentieth-century novel; he is also one of the precursors of modern existentialism.

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Index

THE DIVIDED MIND: Studies in Defoe and Richardson

Sudesh Vaid

THE FIRST major novelists in England, Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson, have a female protagonist in four of their novels: Defoe in *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, Richardson in *Pamela* and *Clarissa*. The fact that the heroines function within and at times, against the values of a patriarchal society makes it important to read the novels in terms of the dominant values of the society, particularly in so far as they relate to the role, status, and function of women. It is necessary also for us to view the novels in terms of the basis of male-female relationship within a patriarchal society. Kate Millet describes this relationship as a political one in her study titled *Sexual Politics*. In her definition of this relationship and in her exposition of how patriarchy institutionalizes the subordinate position of women, Millet provides us with an insight that is of particular relevance in understanding the dynamics of male-female relationships in patriarchy and in the novels of Defoe and Richardson. I will give first a summary of Millet's chapter "Theory of Sexual Politics" and then discuss the main thesis of my study, namely, (1) that seen from the perspective of the politics of sex and from their own attitudes towards women, Defoe and Richardson are ambivalent in their "feminism", and (2) their ambivalence affects the shape and structure of their novels.

STUDIES IN SHELLEY *by* M.M. Bhalla

Edited by Francine Ellison Krishna with an Introduction by A.G. Stock

'It is difficult nowadays to write about Shelley without either attacking or (a different, insidious form of attack) trying to excuse him for not conforming to contemporary standpoints. He was a thinker whose theme was man, and it is easy to assume that anyone who thinks differently from ourselves on the perennial theme must think confusedly. But modern thought about man tends to be schizophrenic; since the beginning of the nineteenth century a gulf has opened between the outer and the inner world. On one side are those who think sociologically, for whom everything else in man is a by-product of his social relations and material well-being; on the other the transcendentalists who seem to tell us that a man is an individual immortal spirit, concerned with timeless values of which the temporal world can never be anything but a distorting mirror. Since Shelley thought on both planes and we have lost the link between them, we think of him as a man of two minds, with now one and now the other in possession, veering from the subjective trance of *Alastor* to the revolutionary fervour of *The Revolt of Islam* unaware of an inherent contradiction; as if the schizophrenia were his and not our own.

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