

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Joseph Conrad is famous as a novelist in English literature; he started his literary career, however, as short story writer. As he spent most of his career as a writer, all his stories and novels are concerned with sea life. The autobiographical element is dominant in his works. Beside; he was a firm believer in 'values' such as fidelity, devotion to duty, solidarity and goodness of heart which found expression, in his works. The purpose of literary creations for him was not merely to entertain, but to catch and record the complex pattern of life as he saw it.

Chapter I throws light on short story as a form of literature. Chapter II deals with the life, the works and the criticism of Conrad. The chapter III contains the discussions on the interpretation of the stories in the collections Tales of Unrest (1898), Youth: A Narrative and Two other stories (1902) . and Typhoon and Other stories (1903) . Chapter IV discusses the stories in the collections A Set of Six (1908) and Twixt – Land and Sea-Tales (1912). Chapter V carries out the discussion of stories in Within the Tides –Tales(1915) and Tales of Hearsay (1925).

The dominant attraction of Conrad's mind was the firmness with which he held ideas after he had contemplated a sufficient number of facts or documents. He had a great experience of the life of normal men. He presents human beings not as separated from but as blended with Nature, the surroundings. Everything is related and harmonized in his works. This comprehensiveness of vision, this amplitude of outlook makes Conrad more than just a story-teller. Conrad's positive values have an

immediate, real 'human' context. His protagonists may find themselves thrust into situations where the code by which they regulate their conduct seems precarious, unlikely to defend them against; but at least in the situations which immediately confront them, their duty is clear and they can win a limited victory. Conrad is aware of man's shortcomings; but at the same time, he is profoundly in love with his capacities for grandeur, with his potential nobility.

Most of Conrad's short stories dramatize the problematic relation between the past and the present, between then and now. It may be Conrad's own sense of the past conflicting with his sense of the present disturbing his (the character's) sense of the present – the distinction is most often difficult to make. In some cases, the story does not involve the narrator himself, in "Falk", for example, the "I" of the story simply listens to a story told by someone else. In other instances, such as "The Secret Sharer", there is no specific audience and no specific occasion for the narrative even though the tale is told in first person. In each story, Conrad's purpose is to consider not only the so-called plot (that which usually takes place in the past), but also the varying degrees of obscurity, difficulty and loneliness that inevitably linger on into the present. We think we have passed out of the past, but the mere thought of that reconfirms its powers over us. Thus, the effect of the stories is to make solitude, in the context of the past continued in the present, into a universal phenomenon. As the present continues in its depressing inaction and the past has nothing to show but an embarrassing "secret action", each tale

actually intensifies its own atmosphere of horrified shame. Since Conrad, in the tales, keeps his authorial stance as a rescuer, the relation between the past and the present can be understood as an outcome of Conrad's wish to rescue meaning for the present out of the obscure past.

In the earliest group of short works, which begins in 1896 with "The Idiots" and ends in 1902 with "The End of the Tether", Conrad repeatedly manipulates the tale with philosophic ingenuity in order to discover what can finally be rescued. As ever, the answer is quite simply nothing. In the second group, which includes the stories up to and including "The Secret Sharer" (1910), the conclusion is more hopeful if contrived. Finally, with the works that end with "The Planter of Malata" (1914), there is again a following of into despair. Yet, in each of these groups, the relation between the past and the present is treated in profoundly dramatic terms, terms that are not simply fictional technique, but an important aspect of an analytic psychology of recollection under the pressures of shame and fear.

The stories in Tales of Unrest are experimental in nature. "Karain: a Memory" deals with the theme of Karain's transcendence and disillusionment. The story clearly suggests Karain's fall 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. But the real interest of the story does not lie so much in its plot as in Hervey's consciousness of himself and his life. In the story "The Lagoon", the subject of impulsive betrayal and permanent remorse is treated with greatest suggestiveness,

“An Outpost of Progress” is a tale of the Congo which directly challenged the fashionable imperialistic propaganda. “The Idiots” is based on fact, but such subjects are generally not handled by the writers.

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. All the stories are based on memory. The word ‘return’ occurs at critical moments in every story and in four of the five cases, no ‘return’, physical or metaphorical is possible.

The volume of stories Youth contains three stories, of which “Youth” is the shortest one. “Heart of Darkness” and “The End of the Tether” are not short stories but novellas. Youth, maturity and old age are represented in these three stories. These three stages are the theme of this entire collection of tales.

In the volume Typhoon and Other Stories, Conrad conveys exactly the right impression that he does not care about anything else but the sea. The characters appear as the sea acts upon them, Of the four stories, the first “Typhoon” is the most elaborate storm-piece. It is nothing but an account of a cargo steamer in a typhoon in the China Sea, with a subordinate study of her master, Captain MacWhirr, and of his behaviour in new and staggering circumstances. The remaining stories in the volume deal less directly with the sea, though through all of them runs the note of it, and over all of them broods the spirit of it. “Amy Foster” is a piece of true tragedy, the tragedy of attraction and misunderstanding.

“Falk” is a remarkable study of the psychology of Falk who is guilty of cannibalism. The concluding story “Tomorrow” is more commonplace both in idea and treatment.

All the stories in Conrad’s next volume A Set of Six are masterpieces and stand at an exceedingly high level of workmanship and literary value. The stories deal with the familiar themes of heroism, betrayal, guilt and illusion, and there is enough brutality and madness to match the somber moods of earlier collection. A Set of Six also studies the often incongruous opposing individuals. Feraud and D’Hubert in “The Duel”, Mr. X and the informer in “The Informer”, the Count and the young man in “Il Conde” – each of these pairs is the focus of an outcome, ‘military’, ‘pathetic’ or ‘ironic’, of a strange unity. The social and political history of civilized nations is the background of these stories. The transition in background from the wide expanses of water to the wide expanses of time was easily made by Conrad.

Conrad excels in his description of human beings subjected to some terrible fascination. ‘Studies in fascination’ would be the apt description of the three tales in the volume ‘Twixt-Land and Sea Tales.’ In “A Smile of Fortune”, the conditions of the test are significantly different, because, instead of judging his courage at sea, the young Captain is tested for sexual prowess and business skill on land. In “Freya of the Seven Isles”, we are presented with two frustrated lovers who are rivals for the affection of a girl. Variations of sexual theme appear in these stories while “The Secret Sharer” is a psychological masterpiece.

Two of the stories "The Planter of Malata" and "Because of the Dollars" in the collection Within the Tides(1925), further particularize Conrad's treatment of love. Other two stories are factual. "The Partner" tells us how the stories come into existence, while "The Inn of the Two Witches" tells us about the greedy nature of people and its consequences.

The four stories included in the last volume Tales of Hearsay (1925) are related with sea-life though they are not sea-tales. They deal with feelings of universal import. One notable thing about this volume is that Conrad's very first and last story is included in it.

The study of Conrad's short stories reveals the recurrence of certain themes which continued fascinating him throughout his life. As Conrad's own life was related with sea, sea-life is depicted in some stories and in many stories nostalgically remembered.

Conrad regards the romance of the sea as the most constant in its appeal, because it touches so nearly the uncertainty of human life and brings men face to face with a force that is mysterious, alluring and unconquerable. It represents the unknown and demands a humble affection and something of a shuddering worship. Conrad, with other sea-stories, has given this old subject a different outlook and a different method. He has seen it with a more subjective eye and realized the inner meanings of power in relation to individual temperament. Conrad is a writer who is so possessed with terror, the wonder and the beauty of the sea that he brings to his work a sense, as it were, of profound responsibility, a consciousness of vastness and of wide and sinister

horizons. And against this background move his characters – characters most faithfully observed, alive, full of nerve or smitten down by the fear of sudden and awful death. “Youth: A Narrative”, “Typhoon” and “The Secret Sharer” are the stories in which sea-element is most dominant.

The psychology of characters is depicted in minute detail by Conrad in so many stories. The reason why his stories are over-extended is that he tells his readers about every single thought that comes in the mind of his characters. The stories that deal mainly with the psychological developments of characters are –“Karain: A Memory”, “The Return”, “Falk : A Reminiscence”, “Tomorrow”, “The Warrior’s Soul”, “The Black Mate”, “The Idiots” and “Il Conde”.

Along with these two constant preoccupations, another dominant theme that recurs in Conrad’s stories is ‘love’. Love’ in Conrad is not the love of men and women in cities or in country places, nor is it the crude passion of the brute. It is a big and simple thing, primitive as ideal romance should be, knowing no civilized complications, comprehending no social interference. It sweeps through the lives of these sea-people, as a wind sweeps across and troubles the waters. “Freya of the Seven Isles”, “A Smile of Fortune”, “The Lagoon”, “Because of the Dollars” and “The Planter of Malata” are the stories that show so many shades of ‘love’.

Conrad always valued the importance of ‘values’ in human life. Solidarity, fidelity, devotion to duty are the ‘values’ repeatedly handled by Conrad in his short stories. There are some other peculiar themes treated by Conrad in his stories. Fidelity is the crux of Conrad’s artistic code as

well as of his moral code. And fidelity is also the theme upon which almost all his imaginative works pivot. "Prince Roman" and "The Warrior's Soul" deal with the patriotic spirit. In the two stories "The Partner" and "The Tale", Conrad has tried to focus on the process of story writing. Failure of marriage because of lack of communication between husband and wife is the theme of the stories "The Return" and "Amy Foster". The story "The Inn of the Two Witches" is based purely upon imagination, while "The Idiots" and "Tomorrow" have no particular theme or thought of put forth.

For some period, Conrad was interested in political themes. The novel Nostroma is the best example of it. The short stories written during this period such as "Gaspar Ruiz", "The Informer", "An Anarchist" and "The Dual" have political background and spirit along with bitter satire on anarchism.

Most of Conrad's short stories belong to the genre of the masculine adventure story in which violence, physical peril and natural disaster dictate the course of events. But instead of laying his emphasis on the violence, Conrad is preeminently concerned with man's response to the hazards of circumstance or to the unexplored vulnerability of his own nature. In the short story genre, in his preoccupation with the moral ramifications of experience, Conrad steps away from most of his contemporaries and moves toward the psychological discoveries of D.H.Lawrence and James Joyce. Conrad's short stories foreshadow the

characteristic Conradian technique in the spheres of themes, characters and narration, which reached its apex in excellence in his novels.
