

The Conradian Vision of Time

Marian Sebastian Lupu¹

Abstract: The study deals with the understanding of Conrad's use of temporal coordinates contextually in order to extrapolate a paradigm of Conrad's own intentions and aims behind each and every temporal variation in the unfolding of the action of the text. Therefore, the element of text is paramount in the analysis of Conrad's works due to the fact that tales, stories, novel-like confessions and every piece of writing make use of the concept in question to express ideas, feelings and so on. The textual analysis will consider the manner in which the elements of text as sentences, paragraphs, even a string of words interact to render the Conradian sense of time which shapes out a symbolic meaning of the artwork. What the research strives to express is pretty simple: to explain why Conrad chooses a complex and, at the same time, intricate temporal development in his works and to what purpose.

Keywords: Time, flashbacks, flash forwards, vision, omission

1. Introduction

Conrad, as a writer at the turn of the century, was preoccupied with the reality of his age, mainly with '*questions of power and dominance*' (Hewitt, x). Conrad began to write his texts when the imperial enterprise was at its zenith, and it is no wonder why *Almayer's Folly* (1895), his first novel, treats conflict between the colonizer and the colonized in the east. This line of writing is prolonged in his next novel, *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896), and it would have been explored further in *The Rescue*, the third novel in the Lingard trilogy, if the writer's severe crises of inspiration had not persisted along his writing career, and, as a consequence, postponed completion of the novel till late in 1920.² The writer's body of work deals with a global comprehension of the human activity in this particular period to delineate an anthropological record of human thought, perspective, essence up to

¹ PhD in progress, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Romania, Address: 11 Carol I Blvd, Iasi 700506, Romania, Tel.: +40 (232) 201000, Fax: +40 (232) 201201, Corresponding author: lupumariansebastian@yahoo.com.

² Biographer Frederick Karl treats the matter extensively in his work *Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives* (1979), especially in chapters 17, 18, and 19.

the 20th century and beyond. When Conrad postulates in his *Preface to The Nigger*¹ his intention to reach the humanity's innermost depths in order to illuminate on its gist, he means it to do in such a way as to reach symbolic status. In 'Heart of Darkness', as well as in other political situations, Conrad professes human activity as a constant reiteration of the same predicament: how one is to suppress another. This viewpoint is also valid for the individual in relation to nature: the eternal attempt of humanity to suppress it. When it comes to the individual alone, there is the same implication: the individual life is an alternation of illusion and despair. Consequently, Conrad impresses on his text a circular vision of time where individual agency is like subscribing to an already established pattern of behavior enacted by countless generations since the dawn of humanity. The question is whether to subscribe either to the position of the master, slave or to the secluded mystic.

2. Time

I would like to begin with an analogy between Bakhtin and Conrad based on their respective concerns with the nature of the novel form as a literary genre. Whereas Conrad finds in it the medium to express his life view, Bakhtin, the theoretician, in an essay entitled "Epic and Novel – Toward a Methodology for the Study of the Novel", states that the novel form has always been concerned with the depiction of, as Hegel would say, the *zeitgeist* or the spirit of the age which is constantly developing strictly in relation to the historical shift of ages. As a consequence, the narratives must adapt and adopt experiment in order to incorporate the historical variation. Society too changes as history changes, and the novel form with it (Bakhtin, 3-5). Conrad was well aware of narrative experiment as a means to adequately render what he really intended. As such, he variously employs the non-chronological presentation of the narrative with heavy use of retrospection, anticipation and even the delay or the supplanting of the climax to denouement. His works begin in the middle of events, and may end in the actual inception of the story as in the case of the Lingard trilogy. Hence, Conrad's chronology, as opposed to the norms of the linear presentation of his age, is a proof of his awareness that experiment may be the key to the actual rendering of the *zeitgeist* of his age.

¹ The scholars on Conrad unequivocally agree that the preface in question holds the writer's literary creed and his mission as an artist manufacturing art. He pictures art as the artist's endeavor to stick to truth, to depict life as it is and not as it should be: to evince the actual meaning of life, its reality and not its falsity, its vigour and not the ideal of it.

In his book, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1983) Genette distinguishes between *story time* (time of the story told), and *narrative time* (temporal horizon of the story-teller). Therefore, narrative time is dualistic, engaging two temporal perspectives at once (33-4). Genette also distinguishes between the temporal coordinates of the story proper and the time sequence of the actions by which the story is disclosed (35). Although each story has an initial, middle and end, the way it is unfold may take into account temporal digressions. Any violation of the chronological passage of time is termed by Genette as *anachrony* (35-6). The anachronies can be *subjective* (of the character), or *objective* (of the actual narrator) (39). The temporal digressions are referred to as *proleptic* (prophesized actions) and *analeptic* (returning to an already consummated action) (40). There can also be *ellipsis* which is used to accelerate the action of the story or descriptive pauses which decelerate it (43).

Now let us implement the theory in practice. In *Almayer's Folly* the narrative begins with "Kaspar! Makan!" (7), strange words for an ordinary English reader of the age for the words are in Dutch. After this calling we are presented with the main character's recollections of his more successful past, and only on page 12 we get the information that the words in Dutch are in fact of Almayer's wife calling him for dinner. This *anachrony*, an example of *analepsis*, is common for Conrad, a narrative technique used to make the reader involved in the actual meaning of the story. It is also used, beyond any shadow of a doubt, to confuse the reader, and make him reread certain previous paragraphs, even pages for a clarification of the writer's intention. Chapter one ends with Dain Maroola's arrival at Sambir and Almayer's eagerness to discuss with the Malay about the journey to the interior. Chapter two takes back the course of the previous chapter in what concerns Almayer's recollections of the past, but this time with an authorial intervention disclosing about the nature of Almayer's relationship to Lingard and his would be wife. The action reverts back to the narrative's present time informing about Almayer's unhappy marriage and love for his daughter, Nina. Chapter three constantly shifts from the actual narrative present to Nina's past education in Singapore. The end of chapter five presents Almayer's doubts as Dain arrives in Sambir with his wish to see Lakamba. Then, the narrative progresses relatively in the narrative present all the way through chapter twelve, the last, with an important exception in chapter eight when Taminah sheds light upon the supposed death of Dain in chapter seven. Between the discovery of a corpse in the river, the supposed Dain Maroola, and Taminah's revelation that the Malay lives, the reader is prone to

consider Dain's actual death. In other words, the unnamed narrator knows more than the reader and the former makes use of this drawback on behalf of the reader to create an aura of confusion, misleading the reader from pre-establishing a mental narrative course, and, hence, surprise is achieved. As we can see, the narrative time is based on digressions, fact which triggers momentary confusion until a final clarification.

The narrative time construed in *Almayer's Folly* is also recurrent in *An Outcast* which begins with the bohemian and careless life of Willems in Macassar, a life bathed in his illusions of becoming a successful merchant. In the same chapter the unnamed narrator employs *prolepsis* as a foreboding device when Willems's unscrupulous demeanour to the natives is contrasted with his *doctrine*, that scruples relinquish power; hence, his ideal is to achieve power and be unscrupulous (10). This fact foreshadows Willems's betrayal both of Hudig, by stealing money from the company, and of Lingard, by revealing the secret location of the old European sailor's trading post to Abdulla, the Arab commercial competitor. Willems betrays even himself when he falls into the arms of Aïssa, a symbol of primitivism, the condition which he mostly hates. Chapter two is dedicated to Lingard's adventures as a young sailor, and the third chapter continues Willems's story as a freshly sacked individual from Hudig's firm as a result of the discovery of his deed. The narrator omits the actual conversation between Hudig and Willems, and presents the latter as a truly devastated man whose ideals have vanished. Genette asserts that omissions are used to add dynamicity to the action (87-8), but my idea is that in respect to this particular omission, Conrad stresses more the psychological element in the character of Willems in that there is a huge gap between his life view before and after the actual implications of his deed. Willems, from the highest summits of illusions falls into the horrors of reality, fact which triggers inner despair, confusion, lack of control and certainty. In chapter four Willems is providentially saved by Lingard and taken to his secret trading post; chapter five evinces Babalatchi and Lakamba plotting against the European foes, and chapter six begins with a three months later leap in the middle of an ironic conversation between Almayer and Willems about the latter's recent jungle departures to see Aïssa. Chapter seven ends with the beginning of chapter six when Almayer laughs at Willems's requests for a gun as a petty excuse to roam the jungle for Aïssa.

An interesting chronological shift takes place in the form of a flash forward in part two of *An Outcast* where Abdulla, Willems, and the native Malays plot the assault on Sambir and Patalolo, the hated native leader, and part three where Almayer

recounts to Lingard the actual siege a month and a half later. The narrator omits the actual siege, and chooses Almayer as a teller of the event. This technique is also present in *Nostramo's* third part, *The Lighthouse*, chapter ten, for example, when Captain Mitchell confesses before a silent guest of the new and separated Sulaco, about the skirmish between an assembly of Barrios's army with Don Pepe's miners against Sotillo and Pedro's union. The previous chapter ends with *Nostramo's* arrival at Viola's inn and his uncertainty whether to go and notice Barrios of the imminent danger in Sulaco. The flash forward omits the actual skirmish, and is recounted years later by Captain Mitchell to occasional visitors. Hewitt in *English Fiction of the Early Modern Period* deems the omission¹ of the actual war as an *anticlimax of narration* which proves to be a *climax of realization* that human agency, politics included, is futile in the wider standpoint of historical time (45). In chapter ten Mitchell acts like a guide and introduces the reader in the whereabouts of the new Sulaco, disclosing about various characters and their decisive role in the faithful war. Moreover, the recurrent pattern of chronological leaps forward in order to pass from tension, disaster, and imminence of death to placidity may as well inform on the dual perspective of human existence suggested few pages earlier, illusion versus the horrors of reality.

In an attempt to explicate *Nostramo's* complex chronological structure, Robert Hampson in his essay "Joseph Conrad", acknowledges the temporal shifts in Conrad's work in question as a narrative means of dealing with the illustration of truths about humanity, and writes:

"The temporal dislocations prevent readers from losing themselves in the pleasures of narrative sequence and force them to engage with how the past becomes the present; how the present becomes the future; how individuals (and societies) are shaped by past experience." (304).

This quotation bears the same idea proposed by Bakhtin a few pages before which argues that the novel form, through narrative experiment, attempts to adjust its means in order to express the spirit, essence of a society in a certain temporal

¹ The most direct flash forward in Conrad's work can be found, I think, at the end of chapter five of *Typhoon* when the unnamed narrator reassures the reader that MacWhirr's fears of losing his ship are pointless for "*He was spared that annoyance.*" (69). In chapters three, four and five, the infamous storm seems to overtake the ship in its meshes, leading the crew to its death. Jukes is swept across the deck during the typhoon, sea waves encircle the ship, and even MacWhirr doubts about the eventual escape when, out of a sudden, the narrator diffuses all the accumulated tension in just one sentence, leaping the action to the safe destination in Fu-chau on a sunny and peaceful day. *Nostramo's* chapter ten has the same function, which is to let loose the accumulated tension.

framework. Cedric Watts in *Writers and Their Work: Joseph Conrad* (1994) compares *Nostromo* with 'Heart of Darkness' for both literary works aim at the status of prophecy enveloped in political dress (25). In other words, *Nostromo*, like 'Heart of Darkness', is built on flashbacks, flash forwards, omissions in order to evince that whatever happens in the past, in the present, and even in the future revolves around the same predicament: how one can subdue the other and take the greatest share in the social economy. Even captain Barrios mentions at some point in the narrative that if it were not for the salvation of Gould and his silver mine, Sulaco would not be worth the trouble of waging war against Pedro Montero (392).

An additional element in Conrad's work which aims at universality and morality is the narrative pause where, usually, an unnamed narrator discloses problems of humanity as a true moralist philosopher. In *Nostromo*, for example, in the third part, chapter five, Pedro Montero, the acclaimed and praised revolutionary of Costaguana, enters Sulaco as a true hero, and the narrator, momentarily, halts the chronological development with the following remark:

"...the easy massacre of an unsuspecting enemy evoked no feelings but those of gladness, pride, and admiration. Not perhaps that primitive men were more faithless than their descendants of today, but that they went straighter to their aim, and were more artless in their recognition of success as the only standard of morality." (319).

The narrator compares the primitive man with the man of the present and concludes that nothing has changed in terms of moral value and behavior: as long as *success* is assured *massacre* is allowed, and the hero worship is gained. It is undoubtedly clear that success stands in economic gains. Kurtz is a better example in this respect: he comes as a simple European in the middle of wilderness, and it is the actual massacre of the natives for ivory which makes him great. Otherwise, he would have been just a simple agent of imperialism as the General Manager or his uncle. Such meditative introspections require the reader a moment's pause for reflection: the narrative pauses as the one discussed presently tend to snatch the reader from the actual course of the narrative, very intricate indeed, and perceive the meaning of the whole text differently.

In 'Heart of Darkness' we encounter similar narrative pauses to make the reader reflect on the underlying meaning of the narrative proper. Marlow, in this case, recalls that the Belgian enterprise in Congo is nothing new but a reiteration of previous conquests, suppressions of the weak by the powerful, just like the Roman

conquest of Britain ages ago (9). The comparisons of the human behavior past and present in both cases function in order to achieve the prophetic value, to offer a perspective of the course of humanity in the future. What changes, Conrad seems to suggest, is the environment but the human essence cannot change; it is and will always be the same in its attempt to pose in the image of the absolute master, the Kurtz-like status of 'Heart of Darkness'.

Genette's narrative time, in comparison with the story time, requires a greater amount of time to be told because of the non-linear presentation of the former. The story time of *Almayer's Folly*, for example, would be like this: a European fails in his attempt to become rich in Sambir and, as a consequence, his marriage is shattered to pieces, his daughter leaves him, and he falls prey to madness when he comes to realize the oddity of reality. In fact, very few narratives match the story time in respect to chronology, and when they seem to achieve it, it is very hard to find the means to do so. Still, Genette mentions *isochrony*, the temporal synchronization between story time and narrative time, as a possible means in order to identify persistent examples of chronological synchrony in literature. As such, he identifies dialogue as a proper case of isochrony. Conrad makes scarce use of dialogue, and when he does, it is mostly employed to enhance character's traits. However, we find the use of dialogue in *Chance*, between the unnamed narrator, Powell, and Marlow, as a narrative means to introduce the story of Powell and Flora de Barral, among others. The inception presents the three characters, before the table of an inn, discussing upon sea duty tinged with moralistic undertones: Powell confesses about his first employment at sea aboard Captain Anthony's ship, *Ferndale*, whereas Marlow, based on Powell's recollection about Anthony, introduces his story about Flora de Barral, the would be wife of the captain. Ray, the editor of *Chance*, identifies Marlow in the position of a passive observer-informer who handles accounts of different characters such as Flora, and, consequently, Marlow goes "through seven different temporal levels in the course of the story, whose time-span covers some seventeen years, concluding in the dramatic present" (x). The first part of the narrative, *The Damsel*, is, most of the time, a retrospective rendering of Marlow's yarn about Flora's whereabouts except chapter one which is dedicated to Powell's narrative. Marlow's yarn in part two, *The Knight*, is based on Powell's account of Flora and Captain Anthony aboard *Ferndale*; the story is disclosed to Marlow sometime in the past, and Marlow, in the narrative present, reveals it to the unnamed narrator. Further, the two stories come to complete each other, but they do not follow one after the other; they are

rather entwined, thus, fragmenting the narrative course. The narrative fragmentation comes as a result of Marlow's character as an observer piecing together a narrative from various viewpoints, a narrative trace from *Lord Jim*. As such, the first chapter of the *The Damsel* centres upon Powell being hired aboard *Ferndale* by pure chance, and in chapter two, as Powell confesses that the captain of the ship is Anthony, Marlow interferes to state that he has known of him from the Fynes, and begins his narrative, thus interrupting Powell's. The second chapter, as well as the following five, attend Marlow's confessions about Flora de Barral's father as a prosperous financier and his sudden economic fall, the ill treatment of Flora on behalf of her governess and her relative, Charley, when they find out that the girl is in poverty due to the father's financial crash, and the meeting with the Fynes in the countryside reminiscing upon the not so romantic encounter between Anthony and Flora. Part two, *The Knight*, develops around Powell's experience at sea aboard *Ferndale* where he encounters the young couple and the Great de Barral. It is Marlow who confesses the story to the unnamed narrator and not Powell himself. In the last chapter, there is a flash forward to the narrative present which omits intrusion into the six years of Flora and Anthony's happiness as a married couple roaming the seas, happiness which ends with Flora as a widow and the captain fallen victim at duty. It is worth mentioning that, along the leaps forward and backward in time which fragment and postpone narrative progression, Marlow sheds light, for example, on how he comes to know certain details or to pass another moralistic, existential remark which defies historical chronology, and aims at adherence to universality. When Marlow is engaged in a conversation with Mrs Fyne in the Fynes cottage in the countryside about Flora's suicide attempt, he claims that "*Our mental conclusions depend so much on momentary physical sensations – don't they?*" (56) and "*A well-stocked intelligence weakens the impulse to action; an overstocked one leads gently to idiocy.*" (62). Whereas in the first quote Marlow hints to the way in which humans come to acknowledge the world, in the latter he, possibly alluding to Hamlet's elusive behavior, blames human knowledge as self-destructive. What Marlow achieves here is to totally disrupt the reader from the actual, fairly trivial, course of the narrative, and engage him in an existential meditation: how can the individual put one's intelligence to good use? Moreover, Conrad, purportedly, chooses a universally acclaimed existential case to allude to, *Hamlet*. There is no use pointing out Hamlet's existential complexity here; what it matters for the present study is to explore how Conrad's wrought scenes deal with the temporal dimensions in order to impress the reader with a different perspective on the world. Conrad, through Marlow, presents

the reader with a specific sense of scenery, temporal flow and, now and then, he addresses a philosophical question or asserts a subjective impression which invites the reader to shift places from a simple reader to a sympathizer of a different life view. Additionally, the reader passes from the narrative time to, actually, a Platonic world of ideas which requires no time frame to exist.

The complex chronological structure of *Chance* can only be found in the already approached *Nostramo* and *Lord Jim*. Whereas in *Nostramo* there is a central narrating consciousness, although not fully reliable (Watts, 1994, 27), in *Lord Jim* Marlow also pieces together information from various sources to reconstruct the story of Jim, a young, adventurous sailor whose main concern is to fit in society's traditional norms. In May 1901, after the recent release of *Lord Jim* on the market, a certain American reviewer of the *Critic* journal compared the narrative structure of the novel with a spider weaving its web as follows:

'Imagine a fat, furry spider with green head and shining points for eyes, busily at work, some dewy morning, on a marvellous web,—and you have the plot of Lord Jim. It spins itself away, out of nothing, with side tracks leading, apparently, nowhere, and cross tracks that start back and begin anew and end once more— sometimes on the verge of nowhere, and sometimes in the centre of the plot itself;—and all with an air of irresponsible intentness and a businesslike run at the end that sets the structure trembling on gossamer threads. The completed web is a marvel of workmanship, built with a foresight and a careless ease that suggests instinct rather than art. But the real plot interest is too subtle for the instinct theory to cover. The psychologic study of a romantic youth who meets fear and is conquered offers problems that are not solved by instinctive skill in plot.' (Sherry, 2005, p. 95).

The reviewer was stunned by *Lord Jim*'s intricate narrative structure which follows no rule, builds itself out of chaos, and, eventually, accumulates around a certain predicament which, apparently, offers no solution but various undertakings which may lead to further confusion. In other words, the complex narrative structure works to highlight complex problems about the human nature, problems which defy time, which have always stuck to the individual, and cannot be resolved. My theory is that what Conrad intends to in *Lord Jim* is to pose the human condition as an antithesis to human intended activity which aims at improvement. Put differently, humanity runs away from its own truth when it comes to existence by dreaming of individual elevation.

Like *Chance*, *Lord Jim* is split in two parts: the former deals with Jim's life and the Patna event, while the latter reminisces upon Jim's hopes of a fresh start in Patusan. Like *Chance*, *Lord Jim* is a series of accounts on behalf of various characters about a certain Jim, and pieced together by Marlow before an audience. Like *Chance*, *Lord Jim* incorporates dialogue as a spur for Marlow's interest upon Jim's story; it is the meeting between Jim and Marlow at the trial, and the eventual dialogue between the two characters which allow the emergence of the story of Jim. And, like *Chance*, *Lord Jim* makes heavy use of *anachronies*. The story begins with an unnamed narrator presenting Jim, an ordinary seaman who is tormented by a certain *fact* from the past (10). Prolepsis is made use of from the very beginning; Jim strives to hide his condition and hopes to surpass it. In the first four chapters the narrator discloses about the incompatibility between Jim's expectancies from life at sea and reality. Chapters two and three only stress the discrepancy further. The inception fits the romance-adventure stories so popular at the turn of the century, with Jim's illusions to succeed as a famous and wondrous sailor. The romantic atmosphere is very ephemeral since chapter one warns about Jim's failure to plunge into adventure as a little boy out of fear (10-3). Conrad manages to dazzle the reader since in chapter three Jim is presented aboard *Patna* meditating upon sea life, and in chapter four there is a trial in an eastern port, a month later, where Jim, confounded, is questioned about the ship's accident. The narrator hints that Marlow's story which begins in chapter five is an experience whose implications surpass the temporal barriers (31). This air of eternal truth coming out of the past is reiterated in Marlow's other tales, 'Youth' and 'Heart of Darkness', whose unnamed narrators make similar suggestions. Marlow takes the course of the narrative all the way through chapter thirteen, disclosing about his dialogues with Jim, Brierly, Brierly's chief mate on Ossa, Mr Jones, the queer chief engineer of *Patna*, and the French lieutenant about the *Patna* event. Whereas chapter four introduces the trial scene and the actual narrative present of Jim's story, chapters five to thirteen resemble flashbacks before the trial. We can see how the unnamed narrator introduces flash forwards in the first four chapters, and Marlow, as a narrative counter balance, comes with a long flash back from chapters five to thirteen, squeezing the main narrative present in between, that is chapter four. We must also consider the omissions and confusions persisting through the narrative as Brierly's unexplained but alluded to sympathy with Jim and his deed. There are also momentary pauses which penetrate through the course of the story under the form of moral teachings or philosophical monologues on behalf of Marlow who, on witnessing Jim's confession, acknowledges that Jim's experience

helps him peer deeper into the human gist (75). In other words, any experience, a past action with a moral value attached, is a life contingency which illuminates on the true path one has to choose. Conrad does not choose at random his characters and settings where to insert his teachings of life, but they are backed in the context, an experience. Furthermore, the teaching may, or may not, allude to other great works of art, i.e. *Hamlet*, to gain confidence and justification.

Chapter fourteen re-establishes Jim's narrative present time informing about the decisions of the jury on Jim's case as a fugitive of duty at sea, and Marlow, concluding the *Patna* event in his own moralistic way, states "*The real significance of crime is in its being a breach of faith with the community of mankind.*" (121). Marlow's insight concerning this respective line triggers the reader's attention that what follows is a continuous rejection of Jim by the European comrades for the pact has been broken. Seen from another perspective, Jim is an outcast who struggles in vain to gain the trust of the community once it has been deceived. Marlow decides to help Jim with work at various old acquaintances by way of letters of recommendation, and after a six months leap forward in time (chapter eighteen), Marlow receives letters from the *cynical* old friend that Jim has abandoned work at a rice-mill (143-4), an itinerary that Jim reiterates at Blake & Egström and the Yucker Brothers. Then, the narrative progresses with Jim's adventures in Patusan, his love affair with Jewel, and praise from the natives, an apparently happy ending. But Marlow foreshadows the unfortunate ending of the romance in chapter twenty-eight in the image of a grave which lingers in a mix with the image of a distressed woman mourning at the head of it (209). The actual death of Jim takes place only in chapter forty-five, the last. Marlow's actual story before the audience ends in chapter thirty-five when he bids farewell to Jim for the last time on the shores of Patusan. The next ten chapters reminisce upon Jim's eventual death caused by Brown, a sea pirate in search for plunder. An unnamed narrator, supposedly the one who actually begins *Lord Jim*, makes it clear that the actions of the ten chapters are disclosed by Marlow to a *privileged man* (254) two years after Marlow's own confession to the audience. To make it clearer, the first thirty-five chapters, chapters one to four excluded, present Marlow spreading the words of Jim's unfinished story before a certain audience, the narrative which frames Jim's story. The last ten chapters, thirty-six to forty-five, take place two years after when a former member of the audience, isolated in his shadowy room, receives letters from Marlow containing the last piece of the puzzle which finishes Jim's story. The events leading to Jim's death, as well as his actual death, are

disclosed to Marlow in a meeting with Brown in Bangkok, and with Stein and Jewel respectively. The narrative technique of replacing Marlow himself, the narrating consciousness in the present, with a certain member of the audience who is tasked with the mission of reading, two years later, the ending of Jim's story about past events is brilliantly disposed in such a way that the actual event of reading takes place in three temporal instances at once. It is evident why Conrad chooses this technical experiment, that is, to give a symbolic aura to Jim's experience, to single out a particular event which becomes valid for any individual past, present and future: it is to make the reader acknowledge that existence is an alternation between illusion, fueled by hope of the better, and the odd nature of humanity, its cruel reality that constantly signals of the inability to supplant the cursed, Sisyphian human nature.

Whereas *Lord Jim* ends under the form of letters read by a certain member of the audience, *Under Western Eyes* is an account of a certain English professor of languages who undertakes to read the journal of Razumov about events in the Russian space in the past. The editor to *Under Western Eyes*, Boris Ford, gives a brief but illuminating introspection into the chronology of the novel. He notes the remarkable disposition of the time sequence whose narrative present emerges in part two of the novel; the actual narrative begins with a retrospection of six months on the turbulent life of Razumov under the tsarist Russia. Ford explains further that part one, chronologically, connects with part four, and part two resonates with part three. Ford also states that the professor acts as an observer who shapes out Razumov's story (23-5). *Under Western Eyes* serves as another brilliant example of Conrad's intricate and experimental narrative chronology, everything for "the psychology of Russia itself" as he admits in the *Author's Note* (49). Conrad's goal here is to dissect and analyse the individual mind and demeanour in politically oppressive conditions.

The novel begins with the professor's firm statement that his story is a reading from the *documentary evidence*, or a journal belonging to a certain Russian (55). Conrad intends and achieves in *Lord Jim* and *Under Western Eyes* the merging of the three instances of time rendered at once by coming up with a member of the audience who reads from Marlow's letters Jim's final moments of life, and with a professor of languages presenting Razumov's yarn: the purpose is to merge the threefold instances of time into a single perspective upon a predicament of humanity prone to betrayal under severe conditions of life. Part one is dedicated to Razumov's betrayal of Haldin, and ends with a question of Mikulin, *Where to?*,

which resonates with part four, chapter one. Part four continues the dialogue between Razumov and Mikulin about the former's future prospects, and it is only here when the reader is informed about Razumov's role as a secret spy in parts two and three whereas he is in Geneva, Switzerland. The following chapters of part four focus upon Razumov's torments and the eventual confession, once again indirectly, by way of a letter to Natalia Haldin. At the end of the novel, the professor sheds light on how he has got the journal he is reading from, a circular motion in time.

3. Conclusion

Now, we can discern a chronological pattern recurrent in Conrad's work; linear temporal progression is very scarce, whereas anachronies dominate the picture. There are flashbacks, flash forwards, narrative pauses and ellipses which complicate the narrative meaning but they all serve to illustrate anthropological undertakings in a certain historical time frame, and to identify the patterns of behavior, mental or physical, which have remained unaltered along the course of history: human nature is prone to evil. Conrad suggests that, contrary to his epoch where technological improvements were the means of future progression and truth, humanity's truth lies in the past. Past stores human life contingencies, and it is past which keeps reiterating in each present and future human agency, that is, exploitation of the weak by the rich, betrayal of one's consciousness, illusion and disillusion. In his work Conrad endeavours to create a paradigm of life as it is and, now and then, offers visions into the cruelties of reality.

4. Acknowledgements

"This work was supported by the European Social Fund in Romania, under the responsibility of the Managing Authority for the Sectorial Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 2007-2013 [grant POSDRU/CPP 107/DMI 1.5/S/78342]".

5. Bibliography

Bakhtin, Mikhail (1981). *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press.

- Conrad, Joseph (2011). *Almayer's Folly*. Ed. John Lester. *Almayer's Folly & The Rover*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd.
- Conrad, Joseph (2002). *An Outcast of the Islands*. Ed. J.H. Stape. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Conrad, Joseph (1990). *Chance: A Tale in Two Parts*. Ed. Martin Ray. Oxford, NY, Oxford University Press.
- Conrad, Joseph (1994). *Heart of Darkness*. London: Penguin.
- Conrad, Joseph (1994). *Lord Jim*. London: Penguin.
- Conrad, Joseph (1994). *Nostramo*. London: Penguin.
- Conrad, Joseph (1967). *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*. Ed. A. J. Hoppé. *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus', Typhoon, The Shadow-Line*. London: Aldine Press, [1945].
- Conrad, Joseph (1998). *Typhoon*. Ed. Keith Carabine. *Three Sea Stories: "Typhoon", "Falk", and The Shadow Line*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited.
- Conrad, Joseph (1989). *Under Western Eyes*. London: Ed. Boris Ford, Penguin.
- Genette, Gérard (1983). *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Ed. Johathan Culler. Trans. Jane E. Lewin. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Hampson, Robert (2009). 'Joseph Conrad.' Ed. Adrian Poole. *The Cambridge Companion to English Novelists*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Hewitt, Douglas (1988). *English Fiction of the Early Modern Period 1890-1940*. London, New York: Longman.
- Karl, Frederick (1979). *Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Sherry, Norman (ed). (2005). *Joseph Conrad: The Critical Heritage*. London: Taylor & Francis e-Library.
- Watts, Cedric T. (1994). *Writers and Their Work: Joseph Conrad*. Exeter: Northcote House Publishers.