THE LITERARY BACKGROUND OF JOSEPH CONRAD'S FICTION

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Abstract: The present study presents and analyses the formative literary influences that Joseph Conrad underwent through his vast reading,grouping them into: Older Literary Influences (the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, Neoclassicism) , Romantic Literary Influences, Victorian Literary Influences, French Literary Influences (Realism, Naturalism, Symbolism), Modernist Influences

Keywords: *Romantic, Victorian, Naturalism, Symbolism, Modernist*

As Marek Pacukiewicz wrote,"Conrad's reluctance to acknowledge the creative aspect of imagination is quite surprising - reminiscences, it would seem, are in themselves a certain string of variations on the subject of reality."[1] Reminiscences and variations on given themes are his predilect topics. Like Shakespeare among other Elizabethan playwrights once, Conrad had a certain tendency of re-creating books from borrowed elements that had somehow impressed him. But, as Najder and Watt remarked, he could never be accused of plagiarism. Even when lifting sentences and scenes, Conrad changed their character, inserted them within new structures. Michael John DiSanto remarked that in *Almayer's Folly* he rewrote parts of *Madame Bovary*, in *Heart of Darkness* he rewrote parts of Stevenson's *The Beach of Falesá* and of Kipling*'s The Man Who Would Be God*, in *The Secret Agent* he rewrote Dickens's *Bleak House*, *Nostromo* has been viewed as a replica of *Middlemarch,* in *Under Wester Eyes* he rewrote parts of *Crime and Punishment* to correct Dostoevsky (whom he disliked) .[2] *Victory* was noted to contain a rewriting of parts of Maupassant's *Fort Comme la Mort* and Villiers de Saint-Adam's *Axël ,* in "A Smile of Fortune" Conrad rewrote parts of Maupassant's *Les Soeurs Rondoli,* in *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* parts of *Salammbô,* in *The Rover* and *Amy Foster* parts of Hugo's *Les Travailleurs de la Mer* and *An Outcast of the Islands* recalls Loti's *Pêcheur d'Islande* . The continuing list would take pages. According to Ford Madox Ford, Conrad "could suddenly produce an incident from the life of Lord Shaftesbury and work it into *Nostromo*: which was the political history of an imagined South American Republic. That was one of the secrets of his greatness." [3] I will try to demonstrate through listing and analysing the literary influences that he underwent, how this awesome, unbelievably vast and complicated process took place.

Conrad hated literary labels such as trends. He maintained that each author has an

[1] Pacukiewicz , Marek. *Cultural Aspects of Joseph Conrad's Autobiography*. *On the Digressive Structure of Some Reminiscences*, in *Yearbook of Conrad's Studies*, vol. vii, 2012, p. 69-83
[2] DiSanto, Michael John. *Under Western Eyes: The Novel as Criticism*, 2009
[3] Ford, Ford Madox, *Thus to Revisit*,1921, p.13

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unregimentable individuality, on which critics artificially and forecedly try to stick an '-ism' label. His exasperation with literary categorization was powerfully expressed in his essay on *Books* (1905), reclaiming " liberty of imagination" as " the most precious possession of a novelist" and castigating "the fettering dogmas of some romantic, realistic or naturalistic creed" as an "absurdity" , "a weakness of inferior minds when it is not the cunning device of those who, uncertain of their talent, would seek to add luster to it by the authority of a school"[4]At other times, he was ironically jocular about his being labelled:"But then, you see, I have been called romantic. Well, that can't be helped. But stay, I seem to remember that I have been called a realist, also. And as that charge, too, can be made out, let us try to live up to it, at whatever cost, for a change."[5]However, for the sake of a practical temptative classification, one can try to group the multiple literary influences that Conrad underwent through his extremely vast readings, temptatively labelled as older literary influences, Romantic influences, Victorian influences, French influences and modernist influences.

Conrad underwent multiple literary influences, especially French, but also Polish, British and American. His first contact with the English language was by means of reading, in a self-teaching effort, when he was twenty-one. Until then he had been speaking Polish and French and reading extensively in both.

Actually, Conrad's vast and multiple literary influences, beside his philosophical readings, transformed the passionate reader that he was into an alembic combining various literary influences that his original creative genius turned into mosaic-like fictions that could be ascribed exclusively to none of the literary trends of the age. Conrad was aware of his modernity, and asserted it, while justifying his relatively late public success: "I am long in my development.What of that? [...]I am modern, and I would rather recall Wagner the musician and Rodin the sculptor who both had to starve a little in their day."[6]

Romantic Literary Influences

Conrad was an avid reader of Polish Romantic literature. "Gustav Morf was the first to attempt to link him to a Polish background, an idea which, as Frederick Karl notes, has become increasingly influential."[7] In 1947 F.R.Leavis saw him as 'a cosmopolitan of French culture', however since the 1960s, critics have been writing about his 'double image' and 'dual identity' - Polish and English, and Cedric Watts (1982) defined him by the concept of 'janiformity' (Janus-like personality) (H2). He loved Adam Mickiewicz's poetry and prose. He actually bore the name of *Konrad Wallenrod*,[8] Mickiewicz's hero. "For a Pole, the name Konrad symbolizes the anti-Russian fighter and resister" (*W N C* 6). There is also another Konrad in Mickiewicz, in *The Forefathers.* Both Konrads are Byronic heroes fighting for the Poles' freedom. Conrad's personal favourite Romantic poet was Slowacki, writing in the same line as Mickiewicz. Conrad's "nostalgic celebration of of the civilization of his homeland; and the steady insistence on the patriotic values of courage, tenacity, honour, responsibility and abnegation gives Conrad's fiction a heroic note very rare in twentieth-century literature."[9] A typical Romantic Polish genre originating in folk oral tradition, practiced by both Mickiewicz and Slowacki,

[4] Conrad, Joseph. Notes on Life and Letters , p.6, hereafter cited as NLL
[5] Conrad, Joseph, A Personal Record, p. 42, hereafter cited as PR
[6] Jean-Aubry Gerard (ed.), *Joseph Conrad: Life and Leters*,London 1927, Letter to Blackwood, 31May 1902
[7] Hervouet, Yves. *The French Face of Joseph Conrad*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 1, hereafter cited as H.
[8] "Some Polish Literary Motifs in the Works of Joseph Conrad", *Slavic and East European Journal*, 10, 1966, p. 429, qtd. in Hervouet p. 268
[9] Watt, Ian, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, p.7, hereafter cited as WNC

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was "gaweda", or "the nobleman's tale", which seems to have influenced the structure of Conrad's fictions:" a loose, informal narrative, told by a speaker in the manner of reminiscing. It is often involved and full of digressions. Little attention is paid to chronology. At first, seemingly unimportant details and fragmentary episodes come into the fore, then gradually a coherent picture emerges. By the time the speaker finishes, everything has fallen in place."[10]Romanticism is the marking sign of most of the Conradian fiction of the sea and ships, including *The Mirror of the Sea*, *Notes on Life and Letters*, and all his nautical and exotic fiction. The relationships of his characters to the sea and ships, their behaviour in storms and under other dramatic circumstances, their ethics and passions are typically Romantic, mirroring Conrad's own Polish chivalric structure of mind and the influence of the great French, British and American Romantics. *The Mirror of the Sea*, with plenty of pages on the sea and ships, was his friend John Galsworthy's favourite among all Conradian works.

Victor Hugo's *The Toilers of the Sea* is a work translated into Polish by Conrad's father, which influenced little Conrad in his choice of reading and later in his choice of a career at sea. "Since the age of five", he had been "a great reader" . By the age of ten, he had already read much of "Victor Hugo and other romantics", in Polish and in French. For instance, he had already read *Gil Blas* and Cervantes's *Don Quixote* in an abridged translation, as he mentions in *A Personal Record* (*P R* 42). Walter Scott's historical novels were among the first books that the boy Conrad avidly read either in Polish or in French translation. The challenge of English Romanticism (Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley) was to create in literature a way of attaining the kind of truth that could not be found in science. Conrad in his Preface states that artistic truth is "in that part of our being which is not dependent on wisdom" (meaning contemplation, inner truths disconnected from contingent facts), presupposing that the artist and the reader resonate in the perception of these truths. (*W N C* 79). The Poet of *Lyrical Ballads* "binds together by passion and by knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time." (*W P* 396) Watt goes on to quote Conrad's Preface, mentioning how the artist speaks "to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation - and to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts"(*WN C* 80). Conrad uses the word "solidarity" , which not only denotes the human community bonds, but also the humans' "latent feeling of fellowship with all creation."[11] 'Solidarity' means to Conrad a different thing from Wordsworth's sympathy binding together humans in permanent brotherhood and in identification with nature. Conrad speaks about "latent feeling of fellowship with all creation", therefore a possible but not actual fellowship. Moreover, Conrad speaks about the "invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts". The term "invincible" sends to a threat, which makes solidarity temporary, existing in distress. Then, in an oxymoron, he speaks of "knitting together the loneliness of innumerable hearts". For a sailman, like Conrad, danger may come from elemental nature, which totally changes the relationship mankind's relationship to it, in opposition to Wordsworth's Preface. Actually, for Conrad, nature is hostile, as, for instance, the sea in storm scenes in "Youth", *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, "Typhoon", *The Shadow-Line*. The sea is a sublime but wicked force, towards which sailors' feelings are ambivalent. Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* speaks of death on board bringing about a dead wind and stopping the ship and so does Shakespeare's *Pericles*. There is a similar situation in *The Nigger of the Narcissus* and *The Shadow-Line*. The death-in-life atmosphere in the life boat in *Lord Jim* is also reminiscent of Coleridge's poem.

[10] Busza, Andrzej, "Conrad's Literary Background and Some Illustrations of the Influence of Polish Literature on His Work", *Antemurale*, Rome, 1966, No. X, p. 208

[11] Conrad, Joseph. *Preface to The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*,(1897), p. 2, Dent's Collected Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad, London: Dent, 1945

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A Romantic text announcing ecocritical views, Wordsworth's *Daffodils* referred to "that inward eye which is the bliss of solitude". Conrad's *Preface* to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* and *A Familiar Preface* to *A Personal Record* refers to a similar seeing, with its two denotations, both perception and insight. In the *Preface* to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, Conrad wrote: "My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written work, to make you hear, to make you feel - it is, before all, to make you see."[12]

Nautical fiction, as a distinct genre, was first pioneered by James Fenimore Cooper and Frederick Marryat at the beginning of the nineteenth century, both influential for Conrad's boyhood years. They were decisive in the choice of his career, as he confessed in *A Personal Record* and in *Notes on Life and Letters.* Enjoying a tremendous success in his time, Frederick Marryat, a well-known author of novels for children, caused his interest for sea journeys and Far East settings. Conrad analyses his works in *Notes on Life and Letters:Tales of the Sea* (1898), remarking that the sea was to him "not an element", but "a stage where was displayed an exhibition of valour", and that "no two of fiction influenced so many lives and gave to so many the initial impulse towards a glorious or a useful career." (*N L L* 26)

André Gide wrote about the great similarities between Conrad's and Alfred de Vigny's lives and frames of mind. In 1835, Vigny had published three tales under the title *Servitude et grandeur militaire.* It is precisely there that he spoke of " the sentiment of Honour , which keeps its vigil in us like the last lamp in a devastated temple." that Gide mentioned to Conrad. Gide , whose favourite among Conrad's novels was *Lord Jim*, quoted this line in his letter to Conrad stating that it would be to de Vigny and "to him alone, if I were to establish your kinship"[13].Conrad wrote of his father's admiration for the author of *Chatterton*, which Apollo Korzeniowski translated into Polish and to which he also wrote an eloquent preface on "the poet's deep humanity and his ideals of noble stoicism"(p. ix). In his later years, Conrad confessed himself: "if my mind took a tinge from anything, it was from French Romanticism, perhaps" (*L L* II, p 289). Jean-Aubry, like Gide, noted "several points of contact" between Vigny and Conrad. Both were romantics without illusions, lonely, stoic, conscious of the evil in the world, humankind lovers, believers in the ethics of pity. Vigny thought that man was the victim of fate. In *The Rescue*, D'Alcacer quotes Vigny: he "did not examine his heart, but some lines of a French poet came into his mind, to the effect that in all times those who fought with an unjust heaven had possessed the secret admiration and the love of men."(346)

Victorian Literary Influences

At the time when he published *Almayer's Folly*, Conrad confessed to be reading Trollope, but the influences he underwent in the writing of that novel were those of Scott, Dickens, Marryat and Thackeray, and undoubtedly, Flaubert. (*W N C* 48)

Dickens had been one of his favourite authors since early childhood. One can note Dickens's influence in the caricature portraits in *Almayer's Folly*, *An Outcast of the Islands* , "Heart of Darkness" *The Secret Agent* and *Nostromo*. His descriptions of urban settings are also Dickensian (like *Hard Times* and *The Bleak House*). In the line of Dickens's eccentrics, Conrad achieved fine brief, sometimes ironical, portraits of secondary characters. His caricatures and eccentrics' portraits also show the influence of Robert Louis Stevenson. Conrad expressed his admiration of Stevenson's *The Beach of Falesá* and *The Ebb-Tide.* Both are stories in exotic settings, and contain megalomaniac heroes who manipulate the other characters, taking advantage of circumstances and of their geographical isolation, to exercise domination over

[12] Conrad, Joseph. *Preface* to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* 1897; Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1984 hereafter cited as *P N N*, p.xiv

[13] Gide, André. "Joseph Conrad" in Stallman, R.W. ed., *The Art of Joseph Conrad: A Critical Symposium*, East Lansing, Michigan, 1960, p.9

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others. Conrad is supposed to have inspired from Stevenson's characters and plots for his *Heart of Darkness.* Stevenson's exotic settings are parallelled in his Malayan novels *Almayer's Folly, An Outcast of the Islands* and *The Rescue* and his stories "The Lagoon","Karain".

Conrad had read Walter Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* (1885) one month before writing the Preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*, and Pater's ideas were very much talked on at the end of the century. There is a key resemblance between the Preface and Pater's book. Conrad spoke about "the magic suggestiveness of music, which is the art of arts," which may have been understood by his readers as echoing Pater's phrase "all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music."[14]In the Preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*, he wrote that the artist " cannot be faithful to anyone of the temporary formulas of his craft"; these formulas - "Realism, Romanticism, Naturalism, even the unofficial sentimentalism" - all contain an "enduring part" which is true, but once the artist has learned from them, he has a long task to do on his own. In the artist's "uneasy solitude", Conrad goes on, "even the supreme cry of Art for Art[...] loses the exciting ring of its apparent immorality[...] and is heard only as a whisper, often incomprehensible, but at times faintly encouraging" (*P N N*). Echoing Pater's views, Conrad wrote that art recovers "a passing phase of life[...]from the remorseless rush of time" which was an idea similar to Pater's aesthetics, where art 's supreme value is to give lasting expression to momentary experience. Thus Marius thinks that "what is secure in our existence is but the sharp apex of the present moment between two hypothetical eternities, and all that is real in our experience [is]but a series of fleeting impressions."[15] In the Preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* , Conrad quotes from memory ideas from Schopenhauer's aesthetics, either recollected from the German philosopher or from Pater, Maupassant or Anatole France, who were all Schopenhauer's enthusiastic readers.

Conrad's contemporary and neighbour H.G.Wells, the author of the most famous science fiction novels in English -*The Time Machine* (1895), *The Invisible Man* (1897), *The War of the Worlds* (1898)- wrote in his essay "On Extinction"(1893): "There is, therefore, no guarantee in scientific knowledge of man's permanence or permanent ascendancy"[16]. Wells was Conrad's *Almayer's Folly* reviewer, and later they became friends. The essay on extinction may have influenced Conrad's "Heart of Darkness". Likewise *The War of the Worlds* may have influenced Conrad's *The Inheritors*.

French Literary Influences (Realism, Naturalism, Symbolism)

Conrad was an English novelist with an extensive knowledge of French literature, who consulted and memorized French novelists's texts to use them as models. He confessed that he did not dare to write fiction in French, because it was a much more rigorous literary language, and one had to be a genius like Anatole France to manage it: English was more permissive and open to linguistic creativity. "To write in French you have to know it. English is so plastic - if you haven't got a word you need, you can make it, but to write in French you have to be an artist like Anatole France."[17] He differentiated from the start the French novel from the English, preferring the former as a conscious creation work done observing the exigencies of craft, and not as an unordered outpouring of emotions. He did not have the self-assertion to publish literary criticism and in his only critical essay, "A Glance at Two Books" (1904), which was published posthumously, he stated:" The national English novelist seldom regards his work - the exercise of his Art - as an achievement of active life by which he will produce certain

[14] Pater, Walter. "The School of Giorgione", *Studies in the Renaissance*,1877, London, 1920, p. 135
[15] Pater, Walter. *Marius the Epicurean*, 1885, rev. ed. 1892, London, 1939, p. 110
[16] Wells, H.G., "On Extinction", Chambers's Journal 10, (30 September 1893) 623-4, quoted in Griffith
[17] Davidson, Jo. *Between Sittings: An Informal Autobiography*,New York: The Dial Press, 1951, p. 118

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deffinite effects upon the emotions of his readers, but simply as an instinctive, often unreasoned, outpouring of his own emotions. He does not go about building up his book with a precise intention and a steady mind. It never occurs to him that a book is a deed, that the writing of it is an enterprise as much as the conquest of a colony. He has no such clear conception of his craft."[18] He was a thorough conoisseur of French prose and a fairly good one of French poetry. He therefore considered the exemplary novelists to be French, and specifically chose Balzac, Stendhal, Flaubert and Maupassant to be his models. "What is cried out from every page[...] is that the literary influence of France is overwhelming over the style, the construction of sentences, the cadence, the paragraph or the building up of the effects"[19].

Balzac certainly impressed him when he wrote that "among the French, Balzac was the most incomparable creator of life" , and one could learn from him the art of characterization (H 333). Arthur Symons noted : "Conrad learnt from Balzac the method of doubling or trebling the interest by setting action within action" (H 334) and R.L. Mégroz mentioned that Symons called this technique "Balzac's Chinese boxes", and found it in "The Anarchist" and "in *Chance* at its furthest development in a Conrad novel" (H 334).

Conrad departed from the Victorian tradition of the intrusive author in favour of Flaubert's attitude of narrative impersonality and emotional impassibility towards his creation, the model novelist towards which Conrad's début book aspired."The artist must be in his work like God in His creation, invisible and almighty."[20] although he did not overtly admit any influence of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Hugh Walpole wrote to Conrad in 1916 about "the unmistakable" influence of "the author of *Madame Bovary*" on *Almayer's Folly*. Conrad responded with a denial of Flaubert's influence, pretending that he had read *Madame Bovary* after having finished writing his *Almayer's Folly*, although he admitted that other novels by Flaubert, such as *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* and *L'Éducation sentimentale* had influenced him more than *Madame Bovary*.[21] His preference for *La tentation de Saint Antoine* indicates his interest in a work on ascetism and the perception of evil. On other occasions he confessed that he had read Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* at least twice since 1892. "I don't think I learned anything from him. What he did for me was to open my eyes and arouse my emulation. One can learn something from Balzac, but what could one learn from Flaubert? He compels admiration". Although Conrad never recognised it openly, Gustave Flaubert's search for "le mot juste" and his omniscient point of view were influential for his first novel, *Almayer's Folly*, the fruit of three years of writing efforts: "we are at least continuously aware, like in Conrad's work generally, that every compositional unit, from the basic structure to the cadence of each phrase, has been carefully and consciously fashioned." (*W N C* 49) And he adopted Flaubert's ideal of artistic completeness in the rendering of a single unified theme" instead of "the multiple plot of the Victorian three-decker novel" (*W N C* 53). Speaking about Flaubert, Conrad expressed his great admiration for his ability of "rendering concrete things and visual impressions. I thought him marvellous in that respect."[22] The skill to render visual impressions which he might have apprenticed with Flaubert appears in the initial scene of Almayer watching the stormy river carrying an uprooted tree to the ocean, and in Almayer covering Nina's footprints with sandhills like "graves" to erase her memory. Also, many critics, Watt included, consider Almayer "a Borneo Bovary" (*W N C* 49). They have found similarities between Emma Bovary's longing for getting away from her provincial life and Almayer's wish to escape from Borneo to the liberty of the ocean and western civilization, also between Emma's obsession with love and Almayer obsession with the gold treasure. Critics have recognised in the tableau of Lakamba

[18] Conrad, Joseph. *Last Essays*,1912, hereafter cited as *L E*, p. 132
[19] Ford, F. M. *Thus to Revisit*, 1921, p.13, qtd in Hervouet, *The French Face of Joseph ConradCUP*1990, p. 2
[20] Flaubert, Gustave. *Correspondence*. Paris, 1926-1933, vol. 4, p.164
[21] Conrad, Joseph. *Collected Letters*, Letter to Hugh Walpole, 1916
[22] Jean-Aubry, Gerard. *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters*, II, Letter to Walpole,1896, p. 206

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listening and Babalatchi turning the hand-organ, the scene of the blind man's song in *Madame Bovary*, "that brilliant forestatement of Emma's squalid destiny"[23] Distancing himself at times from Flaubert, Conrad searched to please a wider, less intelectuallist circle of readers, and he adopted a romantic and exotic vision in some parts of the novel that did not concern Almayer's drama and the result was a composite of Flaubertian novel and exotic romance. Later, he freed himself from the French master's influence to adopt a different personal narrative technique, under Maupassant's influence, and a different point of view in the Marlow series of fiction.

Conrad was influenced by a number of naturalist writers, such as Guy de Maupassant, Émile Zola, Alphonse Daudet, the American Stephen Crane. Conrad's close friendship with Stephen Crane, the American naturalist author of *The Red Badge of Courage*, led to precious intellectual exchanges in their long talks about Balzac and other masters and was the source of warm reciprocal support, although young Crane did not survive very long after coming to Europe. (*N L L* 30).

Norman Sherry quoted Conrad saying that he "studied Zola to some purpose"[24]The passage describing survival of the fittest in the vegetal world in the scene of Nina and Dain's date in boats under the savage plants' canopy has been interpreted by Sherry as naturalistic. Ian Watt considers that the passage rather recalls Th. Hardy's post-Darwinian pessimism than Zola. R.M.Spensley has noted Zolaesque influences mirroring *Pot-Bouille*[25] and "The Last Cab"[26] in the talk about the cab-horse between Stevie and the cabman in *The Secret Agent*. Chaikin has remarked typically Zolaesque scepticism and anticlericalism in "The Idiots"[27]

Conrad had many "personal affinities" with Guy de Maupassant, "another aristocrat, sceptic, orphan, depressive, even a would-be suicide" (*W N C* 49). At his literary début, he studied Maupassant intensively. He confessed his enthusiastic admiration for and careful preoccupation with the study of Maupassant's naturalism pushed to physiologism, narrating in a detached and simple style. Conrad admired him so much that he confessed once in a letter to Poradowska, "I am afraid I am too much under the influence of Maupassant"[28],"I have studied *Pierre et Jean* - thought, method, and everything,with the deepest despair. It looks like nothing at all, but as a mechanism it is so complicated that it makes me tear my hair out" [29] The latter's ability to show how minor incidents change human lives, bringing about random development of biographies, was present in Conrad's *Chance, Victory, Lord Jim*, "The End of the Tether", "The Partner", *The Rescue, Nostromo, The Secret Agent*, "The Idiots", "An Outpost of Progress"and many other works. His literary friends wrote that Conrad would tell by heart whole pages by Maupassant (Ford Madox Ford, *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance*, 1924, 36), and Jessie Conrad's memories mention his enthusiasm for Maupassant at the receiving of each of the French master's newly issued books, whereas Symons mentions that he permanently had a volume by Maupassant on his writing table for consultation, as he used to have one by Flaubert at his writer's career beginning. [30]*Bel-Ami*'s influence was present in many scenes and passages of *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*, among which the Donkin and Wait scene resulting in the latter's death. The theme of the double appears in Maupassant's *Le Horla* and in Conrad's *The Secret Sharer*, Gentleman Brown in *Lord Jim.* The theme of "fixed ideas" , which , according to the French writer, "leave the gnawing tenacity of incurable diseases"(H 248) is common to both Maupassant *(La ficelle; L'Épreuve; Madame Hermet)*and Conrad*(Lord Jim, Nostromo, "*The Duel*"*). Conrad's naturalistic disturbing stories on psychic

[23] Guerard, Albert. *Conrad the Novelist*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958, pp.70-89
[24] Sherry,Norman, ed., *Conrad: The Critical Heritage*, London, 1973, p. 52
[25] Spensley, R.M. "Zola and the Influence of Pot Bouille on The Secret Agent", Conradiana, 11, 1979, p. 185;
[26] Spensley, R.M. Zola and Conrad,Paris: Gallimard, 1964, IV.
[27] Chaikin, Milton. "Zola and Conrad's "The Idiots" , *Studies in Philology*, 52, 1955, p. 503.
[28] Gee, J. and P. Sturm, *Letters of Joseph Conrad to Marguerite Poradowska*, 1890-1920, New Haven, 1940.
[29] Rapin, René, *Lettres de Joseph Conrad à Marguerite Poradowska*, 1966, 146-47
[30] Symons, A. *A Conrad Memorial Library, The Collection of George T. Keating*, 1929, p.80

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dramas ("The Idiots", "An Outpost of Progress", "Falk") recall Maupassant's influence. "A Smile of Fortune" has similarities to *Les Soeurs Rondoli*, and *Victory* to *Fort comme la Mort*. The sexual psychology expressed in *Victory* was tributary to Maupassant, according to Paul Kirschner.[31] *The Secret Agent* particularly uses Maupassant's "ironic treatment" .[32] Although full of death scenes, the novel can be considered a black humour comedy,[33] with characters acting like puppets or automata , "in a wry, ironic humour, verging on the grotesque."[34]

Conrad repeatedly expressed an enthusiastic admiration for the power and style of the French writer in his *Notes on Life and Letters*, writing of the French master's "consummate simplicity", "austerity of his talent"; "facts and again facts are his unique concern" (*N L L* 13), "his determinism, barren of praise, blame and consolation" (*N L L* 14).

"Maupassant was a true and dutiful lover of our earth. [...] The earth had for him a compelling charm. He looks upon her august and furrowed face with the fierce insight of real passion." (*N L L* 16). Conrad expressed the same love for the earth in such characters as Renouard ("The Planter of Malata"), Bacadou and his mother-in-law ("The Idiots"), Yanko Goorall ("Amy Foster").

Another possible influence on Conrad's Preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* was Maupassant's essay"*Le Roman.*" In his Preface , Conrad wrote that "fiction[...]must be[...]like all art, the appeal of one temperament to all the other innumerable temperaments"*P N N* 2) He meant by "temperament" sensitivity, while Maupassant's used "temperament" with a sense more like medieval "humors"[35]. Maupassant's detached cruel irony of style and structure is most apparent in Conrad's two earliest published short stories, "The Idiots" and "An Outpost of Progress". Later , Flaubert's impassibility and Maupassant mordant irony were mitigated in Conrad by the more sentimental irony of Alphonse Daudet, one of Conrad's favourite authors, whose anecdotal stories and caricature characters influenced him in writing "The Black Mate", "an expansion of a wry anecdote"[36] "told from an ironic and yet sympathetic point of view" (*W N C* 48), being "glad of the joys of the commonplace people in a commonplace way[...]Their fate is poignant, it is intensely interesting, and of not the slightest consequence" (*N L L* 23). Ford Madox Ford reproached to Conrad that *Almayer's Folly* "was written too much in the style of Alphonse Daudet" (Ford16), but Conrad was never a highbrow intellectualist writer and he was not ashame of enjoying Daudet's writings. He confessed "having read all his books under every sky"[37] and would have liked to send him one of his works with a autograph, but was too shy to do it. Conrad was also familiar with the nineteenth century French Symbolist poetry. He had read Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Rimbaud. He knew Rimbaud's lines of *Une saison en enfer* by heart: "I happen to know Rimbaud's verses" (*C L* II p. 162). Watt states that "Heart of Darkness" is based on a symbolic quest, and one cannot mistake the parallel between Rimbaud and Kurtz (*W N C*). As Edward Said remarked, Baudelaire was quoted in the title of *The Mirror of the Sea*: "Homme libre, toujours tu chériras la mer!/ La mer est ton miroir". Also, the metaphor of 'the temple' referring to 'nature' in *Correspondances*, appears in "A Smile of Fortune" (1910).[38] The concept of 'homo duplex' seems also to have been inspired to Conrad by Baudelaire in his journal *Mon coeur mis à nu*: "deux postulations simultanées, l'une vers Dieu, l'autre vers Satan", and was expressed in Stein's diagnosing the human's predicament: "He wants to be saint and he wants to be a devil" (*L J* 213)

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[31] ibid.
[32] Baines, J . *Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography*. (1960) , London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1969. p. 331
[33] ibid.
[34] Kirchner, Paul. *The Psychologist as Artist*, Edinburgh, 1968, p. 30
[35] *Guy de Maupassant, Oeuvres complètes* ,Paris, 1909, vol. 21. pp.ix-xvi
[36] "Conrad's First Story", in *Studies in Short Fiction* 2 ,1965, pp. 164-69
[37] Gee, John and Paul Sturm, tr. and ed., *Letters of Joseph Conrad to Marguerite Poradowska*, 1890-1920, p. 91
[38] Conrad, J. *Collected Letters*, Letter to Arthur Symons, 29 August 1908.

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In a letter of 1918, Conrad stated: "A work of art is very seldom limited to one exclusive meaning and not necessarily tending to a definite conclusion. And this is the reason that the nearer it approaches art, the more it acquires a symbolic character."[39] Even before starting writing "Heart of Darkness", Conrad displayed striking similarities with the Symbolists, especially with Mallarmé: "How fine it could be [...] if the idea had a substance and words a magic power, if the invisible could be snared into a shape"[40] Conrad's wish sounds almost like a Symbolist prayer (H 240).

Modernist Influences

Being both senior by a quarter of a century to the high-modernists Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, James and Conrad were the prominent early modernists in English literature, part of the literary community which gathered south of London in 1900. Both James and Conrad turned away from the French influence they showed in their début writings to different personal approaches to fiction, distancing from the impersonal, omniscient point of view of the Flaubertian novel. Conrad changed his mentor to James."James wrote of Conrad at length and was treated with 'almost oriental politeness' in return" by his avowed "greatest disciple". James was the only person whom he addressed to calling him "dear master"[41]. He saw the prospectus for James's *The Wings of the Dove*.When asked about his opinion of James, Conrad pointed to his shelf full of James's works. In "Henry James - An Appreciation"(1905), he enthusiastically portrayed James as "the historian of fine consciences" who "dealt with the most delicate shades of emotion" (*N L L* 17)

One can approach Henry James's influence on Conrad in the themes of the exile, of the clashing between two cultures. Several critics have suggested that Conrad was influenced in his choice of Marlow as the narrator of *Youth*, *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* by James's *The Spoils of Poynton* and *What Maisie Knew*. The technique of using an uninvolved but observant narrator, a "sensitive central intelligence," to explore other characters' life and moral issues is employed frequently in James's fiction. James's use of point of view distances his characters from the author, who can react impartially to them by using a central uninvolved narrator's voice as a zero centre gathering all the characters' variants of truth, with almost perfect self-effacing objectivity.

However, James's narrators of zero-involvement, centres of perspective such as Maisie and Fleda Vetch, may have influenced Conrad's technique only as a starting point. Conrad applied the oblique narrative with radical modifications, taking it much further than James: "Where James was content with subtlety in itself, the thing 'done' Conrad wanted to explain the thing - whatever it was - quite down to its ethical basis."The reason for this difference lies probably in Conrad's first-hand experiences versus James's "just literary" mystification. "James was absorbed in the exquisite ingenuities of his craft; Conrad in his search for the very essence of truth."[42]Marlow's multifarious character benefits of an extraordinary fluidity, being able to act different parts in the novel, as a narrator-actor. Whereas James only half dramatizes and his narrators are uninvolved, Conrad's Marlow and other narrators are wholly involved in the dramatizing in an impressionist technique which expresses subjective knowledge of the story. "Heart of Darkness" was a story about the difficulty of telling a story, in the light of both the Impressionist and Symbolist doctrines (*W N C* 211). Conrad wrote to Garnett that he used Marlow "to be saved trouble" and "he came natural"[43] to be used in his plural parts, with an

[39] Jean-Aubry,G. *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters*. Letter to Barrett Clark, 4 May 1918
[40] *Collected Letters*, II, Letter to Ford Madox Ford, p. 119
[41] Dupee, F.W., *Henry James*, London 1951, p. 281
[42] Swinnerton, F. *The Georgian Literary Scene,1910-1935*, London: Dent 1938 pp. 129-130.
[43] Conrad, J. *Letters to Edward Garnett*, xxx

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"eclectic insouciance" (*W N C* 214) that could only irritate the overcareful designing writer that was Henry James. Marlow was created because he helped Conrad to express opinions in a text that would otherwise have remained lacking in comments and in moralizing, like Flaubert's. James did not like either Marlow, "that preposterous master mariner", or "Heart of Darkness". He criticized Marlow's "mixing himself with the narrative" and "the infinite pluralism of Marlow's narrative functions," but this was, according to Watt,"only a myopic resistance to the technique of "Heart of Darkness" that only James's invariable veneration for his own methods can explain." (*W N C* 206).

Another Jamesian influence is the open ending, a choice much closer to the nature of things and life than traditional definite retributive endings had been (in Conrad's own opinion expressed in *Notes on Life and Letters:* "Henry James- An Appreciation". Conrad wrote of "Perhaps the only true desire of mankind, coming thus to light in its hours of leisure, is to be set at rest. One is never set at rest by Mr. Henry James's novels. His books end as an episode in life ends. You remain with the sense of the life still going on". (*N L L* 19). Conrad paid tribute to James's artistic integrity: "In the body of Mr. Henry James's work there is no suggestion of finality, nowhere a hint of surrender, or even of mere probability of surrender, to his own victorious achievement in that field where he is master". In this respect, Conrad seems to have followed the master's example literally, because his fictions leave room for the reader to continue the story or wonder about the real ending (*N L L* 18).

Conrad's novels that Henry James acclaimed were *Chance* and *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* , which he called "the very finest and strongest picture of the sea and sea life that our language possesses - the masterpiece in a whole great class."[44] However, James's modernist influence was the first, but not the only one that Conrad underwent. André Gide and Marcel Proust were other such influences. Gide was enthusiastic about Conrad's fiction, and their friendship lasted to Conrad's death, when Gide wrote an impressive article about him. Conrad expressed his admiration for *L'Immoraliste* (1902) and for the volume of criticism *Prétextes* (1903). In 1919, he wrote to Gide that he was deeply impressed by his *Journal sans dates* and he confessed to having reread *Les Caves de Vatican* "always with the same interest, but with an increasing admiration at each new reading."[45] In Yves Hervouet's opinion, Conrad was the first person, except for Ortega y Gasset, to assess "with great insight the qualities, the place, the scope, the weaknesses of Marcel Proust's work" (232) . He first read him in 1913, at the issue of the first volume of *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913). He confessed once: "I've lately read nothing but Marcel Proust" (*L L* II p. 287). This review has tried to evince the enormous scope of the literary influences that were stored and made use of in the alembic of Conrad's unmistakably unique fiction. Coming back to Ford's remark quoted at the start, one can trust him for havinge apprehended best Conrad's gift (Ford 13). Conrad's imagination was original, not necessarily in inventing totally new elements of plot and setting, but in its 'esemplastic' , in Coleridge's term, quality (*Biographia Literaria* Ch. 10), by which he assembled 'disparate and unlikely' material (in T.S. Eliot's description) assimilated in his mind from immense readings, into new designs. He could borrow and store elements that he would process in his uniquely personal patterns. He did not imitate, but continued his masters (Hervouet 232). He was right to say: "I don't resemble anybody."[46] Watt expressed it briefly: "In a sense, Conrad is the lest derivative of writers; he wrote very little that could be possibly be mistaken for the work of anyone else" (*W N C* 42).

[44] James, Henry. The British Library, Ashley Ms.4792, 26 June 1902
[45] *Lettres Françaises*, 165-6
[46] Letter to Pinker, July 1907 (Collected Letters vol. 2)

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