

A Structuralist Analysis of Conradian Narrative in *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*

LIU Dan^{1,*}

¹School of English Studies, Dalian University of Foreign Languages, China

*Corresponding author.

Address: 6 Xiduan, Lvshun Nanlu, Lvshun, Dalian, 116044 Liaoning, China

Email: doreen_ld@163.com

Received 13 October 2011; accepted 3 December 2011

Abstract

Conrad, as a novelist, not only endeavored to delve into human being's mental world and innate nature, but also laid enormous stress on the form of fiction and the innovation of writing techniques. *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*, an important landmark at the beginning of Conrad's major phase, is Conrad's first experiment in methods of descriptive rendering. Besides, the whole story is told by the crewman-narrator but there is evidently a combination of authorial and personal narrative. Moreover, the intricate interaction of changes in perspective and distance, which often attracted attention and interest from critics and readers alike, serve to enhance the thematics of solidarity and work ethic and the aesthetic value of this novel.

Key words: Conradian narrative; Perspective and distance; The use of FID; Prolepsis

LIU Dan (2011). A Structuralist Analysis of Conradian Narrative in *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 3(3), 72-78. Available from: URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/j.sll.1923156320110303.125>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/j.sll.1923156320110303.125>

INTRODUCTION

Joseph Conrad who was born in Poland and began his writing career at the age of thirty-seven is undoubtedly a unique literary figure in English literary world. Almost all his works are based on his personal experience,

supplemented by his readings, but still he was creative and inventive in his own way. In his lifetime, his reputation chiefly lay in the romantic, exotic nature of his tales set in remote lands and seas, in the exciting episodes of his tales and his skill at appealing narration. However, since his death in 1924, Conrad has frequently been praised for the "modernity" of his works of fiction in that he showed enormous interest in exploring human consciousness and employing extensive symbols and images. Meantime, Conrad is also labeled as "impressionist" by some critics because of his outspoken artistic faith in his famous preface and his actual use of various techniques which produce the impressionistic effect.

At any rate, no one can deny Conrad's literary achievements, especially in his careful psychological analysis of his major characters, in his superb portrayal of individual characters, and maybe most importantly in his bold attempt to challenge the traditional form of fiction writing. With the rising influence of New Criticism, Conrad's works became a popular resort and their forms, instead of content, come to the foreground in the analyses made by the critics.

1. CONRAD'S VIEWS ON NOVEL WRITING

"The Preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*", written in 1897 by Joseph Conrad himself, has long been accorded classic status by dozens of anthologists. The basic terms of Conrad's attitude towards writing was set by the problem of literature's social value to mankind at large or what kind of truth was embodied in literature. He was convinced that the artist tried to find the terms of his appeal within himself and due to the inward faculty shared by human beings readers could respond to this artistic appeal. As Conrad stated, the artist "speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty, and pain; 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, to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity – the dead to the living and the living to the unborn (Conrad, p.11-12).

In the preface, Conrad also turned to how literary works could reach the temperament. Here, he drew the deduction that the artist must be determined to pursue the aim of art and as Conrad put it in his most frequently quoted words, “My task...is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel – it is, before all, to make you see” (Conrad, p.13). The word “see” indicates narratives should emphasize showing rather than telling. The artist not only needs to make the reader see the visual impression, but also tries to make the reader see the point, the ideas, in Conrad’s words, “that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask”. What the artist has to make us see is a “passing phase of life” before it falls to oblivion. As Ford has written, Conrad and he agreed that the general effect of a novel must be the general effect that life made on mankind, which could not be produced by just narrating but by rendering impressions (Ford, p.192-194).

2. REVIEW OF NARRATOLOGICAL THEORIES

From the very beginning of its birth; structuralism has engaged itself in exploring the general grammar of all narratives by analyzing the inner structure of literary texts. In contrast to traditional approaches of literary criticism, Structuralist Narratology has diverted its attention from the extrinsic factors to the intrinsic factors and also put forth efforts to inquire into the structural patterns of literary texts.

American narratologist, G. Prince, in terms of research subject, divided narratologists into three types (Prince, p.524-527). The first are those narratologists directly influenced by Russian Formalist, V. Propp; the second type is represented by G. Genette and Stanzel who focus on the different ways of narrating events on the level of “discourse” such as analepsis or prolepsis, the employment of perspective etc.; the third is the combination of the first two, represented by Prince himself and S. Chatman. They believe both the structure of events and the narrative discourse are very important, so they paid due attention to both the formal properties of narrative and different narratives with regard to “discourse”.

One of the outstanding structuralist narratologists, Gerard Genette, refined the Russian Formalist distinction between “story” and “plot” by dividing narrative into three levels: story (histoire), discourse (recit), and narration. These dimensions of narrative are related to three aspects, which Genette derives from the three qualities of the verb: tense, mood, and voice. Besides, Genette, in his

most famous work, *Narrative Discourse*, discussed in detail narrative time, tempo, frequency, mood, distance, narrative of words, narrative of thoughts, perspective, focalizations, voice, level, person, narrative situations, the narratee and implied author or reader. This comprehensive and systematic study of internal factors of narrative offers a series of frequently quoted typology and facilitates our classification of different narratives.

Among all the internal factors, perspective is obviously the most studied category in modern literary criticism. Many theorists realized “person” was not enough to distinguish different narrative effects so “point of view” was introduced and further developed into “perspective”. When we come to a narrative work, not only who speaks or narrates matters but also whose stance or point of view is taken tells a lot. Among various classifications of perspectives, the most inclusive one should be N. Friedman’s. He proposed eight types in “Point of View in Fiction”: (1) editorial omniscience (2) neutral omniscience (3) first-person observer-character narrative (4) first-person hero narrative (5) multiple selective omniscience (6) selective omniscience (7) “dramatized” narrative (8) “camera eye” (Friedman, 118-131). This classification appeared to be too detailed so Genette put forward his tripartition: non-focalized narrative (zero focalization), where the omniscient narrator is outside the story; internal focalization, with the focal character in the story, including narrative with point of view, reflector, selective omniscience, restriction of field or “vision with”; external focalization, with the focus situated at a point in the dogmatic universe chosen by the narrator, outside every character (Genette, p.65-66). However, Genette’s classification is still not satisfactory. According to Shen Dan, we can discriminate 4 types of perspective: zero-perspective (i.e., omniscient narrative); internal perspective, including selective omniscience, multiple selective omniscience and multifold internal perspective; first-person external perspective, referring to the perspective of the first person “I” recalling the past and that of the first-person observer-character whose observing position is at the verge of the story; third-person external perspective, including dramatized narrative and camera eye (Shen, p.203).

In addition to person and perspective, mode or distance (in Genette’s words) is another element worth considering. distance in time and space also needs to be taken into account. On the whole, distance is a modal category that denotes, essentially, the relation between the narrator and the author. Different sorts of distance can introduce different thematic meaning and is related to different narrative methods.

Time, as an intrinsic dimension of all narrative, is another significant element in the analysis of literary texts. A simple change of tenses will certainly make a difference. Genette uses two primary technical terms

- analepsis and prolepsis, with the former referring to information or episodes introduced into the narrative's present time which refer to its past and the latter referring to anticipations of some future event, similarly introduced into the narrative's present. Analepsis is familiar enough from the way characters are developed in most fictions by reference to their past. While prolepsis is in some ways more interesting, especially when the narrator uses it as a form of implicit commentary. For Genette, prolepsis and analepsis are variants of "anachrony", which indicates the different types of discordance between the two orderings of story and plot.

Person, perspective, mode or distance, and narrative time are the main aspects of narrative works so they will become my major focuses in my analysis of Conrad's novel, *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*.

3. NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE NIGGER OF THE 'NARCISSUS'

Almayer's Folly, Conrad's first novel, is a highly finished one, but still remains an introductory, experimental work. When we come to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*, Conrad's first mature piece of work, we can certainly recognize the fictional achievement especially in the narrative method of the novella. With a close reading, we can note the narrative variations of perspective and distance.

The romantic tenor of *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* is related to the search for a narrative perspective, in which Conrad was engaged at the time of its writing. While Conrad's first two novels, *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands*, were written in third-person narrative so as to portray extreme cases of isolation, in *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* Conrad experimented for the first time with a first-person narrator, who comes into sight only occasionally in the story, to present the ship's crew and their relationship with James Wait, the sick nigger who at last dies and is buried at sea. As Ian Watt observed, *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* inherits and develops further Conrad's descriptive method and the intellectual attitudes towards the natural world, with more precise "visual presentation" and his stress on the determining power of the natural environment, especially the sea (Watt, p.94). In this novel, Conrad took up the theme of solidarity, the basis of which is human's unending confrontation of the natural environment.

The plot of this novel runs through a complete voyage from Bombay to London. The whole novel consists of five chapters. In Chapter one, the 'Narcissus' is preparing for sail. In Chapter Two, sailing on the sea, the crew is disturbed by the presence of the sick nigger. In Chapter Three, passing around the Cape of Good Hope, the ship is confronted with a bad storm and the crew is fighting against it. In Chapter four, the crew, after the storm, are stirred up by Donkin and almost have a mutiny against the

officers for the sake of Wait. In Chapter Five, Wait dies and the ship gets ashore, with the crew disbanded.

In Chapter One, as most researchers observed, authorial narrative predominates, giving straightforward account of the ship and her crew. However, already in Chapter One, there are a few narrative variations. The pronominal references to the crew are obviously "they" or "he", but on Page 18, the parenthetical comment, "(as we had calculated from his papers)" about Singleton's age actually hints the existence of a personal narrator. In addition, on Page 17, the description of the oldest sailor, Singleton, reading Bulwer Lytton's novel, doesn't limit itself to authorial account, but extends to appreciative characterization, from which we can realize the nature of the narrator who not only tells a story but also raises questions to reflect on and even generalizes (Lothe, p.88). Hence, as early as in Chapter One, we see a trait of the mixture of different narrative perspectives – somewhat "omniscient" and limited. If Singleton is considered the focal point of the first chapter, as "the representative of a disappearing generation of seaman" whose ethic and virtue are admired by the authorial narrator, James Wait is certainly the climatic point. Though the introduction of this central hero is mainly authorial account, offering factual information, we can't miss the proleptic elements in it and the employment of Free Indirect Discourse (FID), known as an effective technique for rendering a character's thought in their own idiom but not necessarily, while maintaining the third-person reference and the basic tense of narration. The proleptic element is indicated by the prefiguration of the "nigger's" sway over the crew of the narcissus through the description of Wait's appearance, especially his "pervasive, echoing voice and also, more explicitly, through the mention of the cook's later words about his initial impression of Wait, "Afterwards, when talking about that voyage, he used to say: 'The poor fellow had scared me. I thought I had seen the devil.' (p.27)" The overt emphasis on the crew's reaction to the nigger arouses our attention to the dominant position the nigger who represents the fear of death rather than death itself and prepares us for the surfacing of the first-person voice, the crewman-narrator. When we come to Conrad's use of FID, we find the first striking example soon after the entry of James Wait – "He stopped short. The folly around him was confounded. He was right as ever, and as ever ready to forgive. The disdainful tones had ceased, and, breathing heavily, he stood still, surrounded by all these white men (p.26)." Apparently this passage reveals the authorial narrator enters Wait's consciousness by means of FID. First, the use of "these" tells us the words belong to Wait's thought. Second, as we have already noticed, the narrator is in line with the crew other than the nigger, so the narrator is unlikely to agree that "the folly around him was confounded". Whereas, "the disdainful tones" should be attributed to the narrator instead of James

Wait who doesn't look down upon himself. Therefore, the combination of authorial narrative and FID is quite obvious here. But we should also notice the example here is most likely to be Wait's non-verbalized consciousness which suggests Wait's attitudes and mental process (Hawthorn, p.18).

In the first half of Chapter Two, authorial narrative still prevails at the beginning of the voyage. It covers the description of the 'Narcissus', nature, especially the sea, the crew and their relationship. As the passage implies, "the ship, a fragment detached from the earth, went on lonely and swift like a small planet." This passage fills us with a deepening sense of man's lonely voyage towards unknown future. Besides, the harmony and peace at sea doesn't promise a smooth sail with the proleptic phrase "on her lived timid truth and audacious lies" indicating the possibility of change of weather at any moment. Hence, the descriptive narratives also remind us of the approaching storm and the problems aboard the *Narcissus*.

James Wait who initially impresses the crew as a potential threat appears as well a member of the crew in the latter part of Chapter Two. We can see, though the nigger's existence threatens the peaceful life aboard, there is a subtle and special alliance between the crew and Jimmy – "He seemed to hasten the retreat of departing light by his very presence; the setting sun dipped sharply, as though fleeing before our nigger(p.39)". With the change of pronominal reference into "our", the authorial narrative situation gives way to personal narrative situation. However, we should note the narrative variations, here and also throughout the novella, are variations of perspectives and distance more than of voice. I agree with Watt that the whole novel is told by an unnamed and uncharacterized narrator. When he pauses to generalize about the experience as a whole, it's appropriate to pronounce in a distant and elevated voice. But when he exhibits the personal experience and feelings of the crew, he is justified to employ a closer and intimate voice. So, in terms of the shift into "our", "we" or "us", we can take it as the point where the authorial narrator identifies himself as one of the crew and thus becomes personal. In later texts, it's not uncommon personal perspective disappears and the authorial seems reappear. According to Lothe, the identification of the personal narrator with the crew helps the dramatization of the novella's concern with human solidarity, both when away from land and in times of crisis (p.92). The two examples of this narrative function are the oppositions established between Donkin and we (p.43) and between we and Singleton (p.45).

In addition to the introduction of the personal narrative, in Chapter Two, we also witness a new function of FID. It not only seems to express an individual consciousness but also can convey collective attitude or belief. "Was he a reality – or was he a sham – this ever-expected visitor of Jimmy's? We hesitated between pity and mistrust, while,

on the slightest provocation, he shook before our eyes the bones of his bothersome and infamous skeleton (p.40)." With the use of FID, the passage gives a free expression of the crew's attitude. Observing Jimmy's inescapable presence and being constantly reminded of the real or pretended approach of death, the men of the 'Narcissus' abandon their customary unaffected ways and become a group of pensive, unsettled individuals. If there is no FID to help, the crew would never express their personal or collective views as such.

What's more, proleptic element is also noticeable. Belfast, the emotional Irishman, expresses the crew's oscillations of attitude when he alternates between compassionate tears for Wait and a rage to "knock his ugly black head off". His stealing of the officers' Sunday fruit pie for Jimmy disturbs the peace and mutual confidence on the 'Narcissus', as the text puts it: "Such stealing in a merchant ship is difficult to check, and may be taken as a declaration by men of their dislike for their officers. It is a bad symptom. It may end in God knows what trouble (p.42)." This event foreshadows what happens later. For instance, the members of the forecabin refuse to obey Mr. Baker's order of cleaning the forecabin for the sake of Jimmy. The crew's pity for Jimmy is conspicuously hostile to the solidarity of the whole ship and the order of the ship. The "bad symptom" even evolves into a mutiny later in Chapter Four.

As the central section, Chapter Three presents the monstrous gale and the exciting experience of the crew during the storm, with the rescue of Wait at the climax. In the first two chapters, the narrator is never identified and just remains an anonymous member of the group with no particular role in the plot. However, in this chapter, the narrator not only functions as an acute observer but also actively participates in the rescue of Wait from his cabin during the storm, which makes the episode more engrossing and credible. Here, we can find far more complicated modulation between "us" and "them" when referring to the crew. It's not a rare case when we find "we" and "they" appear in the same paragraph in this chapter. Therefore, it's necessary to pay closer attention to this elaborate variation. Still, personal pronouns are good indicators of the text's overall narrative variations of perspective and distance.

From the very beginning of Chapter Three, in the first paragraph, "they" (Line 5) and "we" (Line 21) both refer to the crew, which appears to be confusing. "We", the first-person pronoun, vary from time to time in terms of the members included. This results from the changed role of the narrator who now is a participant. So the group where the narrator belongs or whom he works with will be referred to as "we". For example, the five of the crew who rescue Jimmy includes the narrator so they are, most of the time, referred to as "we". However, when we come to the other pronoun, "they", the case is not that simple.

“They” can be considered as the indicator of authorial narrative. However, the narrative voice is really hard to discern. Moreover, we should realize though almost the whole chapter is a kind of personal recollection by a crewman who was there during the storm, involved in the action, there is a new modulation of distance introduced between our crewman-narrator and the other members of the crew, with the appearance of a new “they”. Hence, “they” may signal the narrator’s personal recollections of the actions of the other members of the crew as he saw them aboard the *Narcissus*. In other words, the narrator’s recollections are those of an observer, instead of an active participant, in which case, “we” would be employed. All in all, this complicated narrative variation is not very rewarding with regard to its thematic importance as far as Lothe is concerned (p.93). In my view, Conrad’s minute distinction of narrative perspective and distance here is worth noting, but not genuinely worthwhile on his part. In addition, in the latter part of Chapter Three, the narration of Cook’s venturesome job of making hot coffee during the storm is followed by a proleptic paragraph:

He had done it somehow. Afterwards Archie declared that the thing was ‘meeraculous’. For many days we wondered, and it was the one ever-interesting subject of conversation to the end of the voyage. We asked the cook, in fine weather, how he felt ... We inquired, in the north-east trade and on serene evenings ... We suggested ... and we did our best to conceal our admiration under the wit of fine irony ... Like many benefactors of humanity, the cook took himself too seriously, and reaped the reward of irreverence. We were not ungrateful, however. He remained heroic. (p.75-76)

This passage immediately reveals the crew’s reaction to the cook’s “miraculous” deed, which helps to establish the cook’s status and clarify the crew’s attitude towards him. Besides, this paragraph also implies what happens later between the cook and Jimmy due to the apparent emphasis on the cook’s firmer belief in his holy task of saving others’ souls.

Chapter Four, with an opening similar to that of Chapter Two, begins with authorial narrative about the ship and the crew after the storm. Then on Page 87, “us” reappears and personal narrative gives full play to the crew’s mentality. Here, Donkin jumps to the foreground and he figures initially as the embodiment of the crew’s latent discontents. Obviously, the crew maintains a reasonable distance from Donkin, a rationally critical stance towards his conduct in the first three chapters, i.e., the voyage before and during the storm. They acquiesce, for example, in first mate’s beating of Donkin who is lazy and unruly (p.43-44), and also help Mr. Baker stop Donkin’s insolent protests against authority during the storm (p.70). However, after the storm, the crew changes their view of the rebel and Donkin’s claims for their rights and merits. This change of heart towards Donkin is best expressed through the crew-narrator’s personal narration. At the same time, Donkin who wears mostly

Wait’s clothing takes on the role of “high priest to Wait’s divinity” (Land, p.57). As Lothe observed, there is a special relationship between them, which might be termed as a “curious combination of alliance and opposition” (Lothe, p.94). In the rest of this chapter, the narrator turns into authorial, narrating the crew’s unrest and the process of the mutiny, which, in my view, is the real climax of the story since it’s the result of the development of the central conflict around the central figure. Though we suffer from the ambiguity of the narrator’s degree of involvement, we still can be aware of his attitude. It seems that the narrator is seeking a more detached perspective than before by using “they”. The reason might be that the narrator doesn’t agree with the sailor’s resentment towards the officers and aims to understand the causes of the crew’s unrest and detect the latent reason of the accelerating conflict.

In this chapter, though limited perspective exists most of time, we still can find the authorial narrative breaking through its legitimate capacity when the crew-member narrator reveals the minds of some individuals. This mixture of authorial narrative with FID, if not confusing, is at least unique. For the first time, Singleton’s inner thoughts are revealed fully:

He had never given a thought to his mortal self. He lived unscathed, as though he had been indestructible, surrendering to all the temptations, weathering many gales. He had panted in sunshine, shivered in the cold; suffered hunger, thirst, debauch; passed through many trials – known all the furies. Old! It seemed to him he was broken at last. And like a man bound treacherously while he sleeps, he woke up fettered by the long chain of disregarded years... Old! He moved his arms, shook his head, felt his limbs. Getting old... and then? (p.87)

This passage certainly is Singleton’s represented thoughts. It tells Singleton’s painful, reflective act and reveals the other aspect of Singleton in addition to his admitted “practical wisdom”.

What’s more, Wait’s non-linguistic consciousness is explored through FID, as shown in the following passage:

He was cheered by the rattling of blocks, reassured by the stir and murmur of the watch, soothed by the slow yawn of some sleepy and weary seaman settling himself deliberately for a snooze on the planks. Life seemed an indestructible thing. It went on in darkness, in sunshine, in sleep; tireless, it hovered affectionately round the imposture of his ready death. It was bright, like the twisted flare of lightning, and more full of surprises than the dark night. It made him safe, and the calm of its over-powering darkness was as precious as its restless and dangerous light. (p.91)

It’s easy to take this passage as the authorial narrator’s comment if the reader is not careful or hasn’t realized Jimmy’s moribund condition. In fact, we know that Wait is pretending to be shamming so as to deceive himself and avoid facing death. Therefore, the above belongs to Wait’s private thoughts. It’s he who thinks life seems to be indestructible. Hence, for a second-time reader, it’s evident that the passage deals with the self-deceptive nature of Wait’s thoughts.

In addition to this example, we can find another on Page 97 and 98, which tells about Jimmy's thirst and his semi-conscious dream related to his thirst. In this section, we can find something different. In the previous examples, most of the time the use of FID is to represent Wait's non-verbalized thoughts, but here we see some verbal thought: "Jimmy reached out for the mug. Not a drop. He put it back gently with a faint sigh – and closed his eyes. He thought: That lunatic Belfast will bring me some water if I ask. Fool. I am very thirsty (p.97)." Hawthorn considered the use of represented thought in "Not a drop", due to its ambiguity as to the exact form taken by Wait's thoughts, is as much effective than the explicit verbal thought beginning, "That lunatic Belfast" (Hawthorn, p.19).

Again, in Chapter Four, we see more examples of FID designed to present a collective consciousness, rather than individual ones.

We remembered our danger, our toil – and conveniently forgot our horrible scare. We decried our officers – who had done nothing – and listened to the fascinating Donkin. His care for our rights, his disinterested concern for our dignity, were not discouraged by the invariable contumely of our words, by disdain of our looks. Our contempt for him was unbounded – and we could not but listen with interest to that consummate artist. He told us we were good men – a 'bloomin' condemned lot of good men'. Who thanked us? Who took any notice of our wrongs? Didn't we lead a 'dorg's loife for two poun' ten a month?' 'Did we think that miserable pay enough to compensate us for the risk to our lives and for the loss of our clothes?' 'We've lost every rag!' he cried. (p.88)

This quoted passage is extremely successful in its use of different narrative techniques. The reported speech, direct speech and represented speech are mixed together to present Donkin's speech, with different narrative distance between the narrator and Donkin. The use of FID at the beginning of this passage helps to render the crew's collective consciousness to which the narrator surely belongs but from which he has now distanced himself. The crew, at that time, believed the officers have done nothing and find Donkin "fascinating", which appears to be quite ironic. Meantime, the reported speech and direct speech of Donkin at the end of the passage both stress the present scene and the presence of the narrator and increase the dramatic effect of Donkin's words.

Chapter Four, with various narrative techniques, successfully presents the thematic climax – the mutiny. After the failure of the mutiny, which results in Wait's confinement and Donkin's ostracism, order and discipline gain upper hand. So in Chapter Five, the crew's general reaction amounts to no more than tacit shame, and their delusions about Jimmy do not abate. The opening of Chapter Five is rather authorial in that it contains thoughts on sea and a reflection which is obvious authorial in regard to the effects of Wait's influence. Then "we" reappears and reintroduces the personal narrative. Whereas, from the personal narrator's limited perspective, we ultimately find inappropriate omniscience, especially in the scene

of Donkin's final visit to Jimmy's cabin before his death. Jimmy's funeral is presented in authorial narrative but how Jimmy's death affects the crew is given in personal narrative. The variation of perspective is very complex and "I" even appears at the end of the novel, when the crew get the pay and part each other.

These great variations of both authorial and personal narrative are to a certain extent reasonable, but still not desirable. The transitions are quite conspicuous and abrupt so that the reader will lose faith in the reality of the narrative and even suspect the narrator's reliability and authority. In addition, "I" is employed after the ship finishes its voyage and the narrator has to leave alone. We can understand Conrad's purpose of further distancing the narrator from the crew. However, this narrator, with the act of being personified, loses his privilege and mysteriousness, which also leaves the technical problems open to the readers. Though Lothe argues the use of "I" is of substantial thematic importance in underlying the disruption of the crew once ashore and therefore loss of solidarity, I still don't agree with this sudden change of pronouns at the end.

In the last chapter, the "trouble" is solved through Wait's death. The scene dealing with Wait's death is not lacking in the authorial omniscience. With FID's use, both Wait's and Donkin's thought are conveyed to us. Besides, the narrative takes constantly changing perspectives with the demand of different scenes. For example, in the scene before Jimmy's death, the narrative is alternating between the personal narrator who here possesses unbelievable omniscient capability and the conflicting two individuals. This elastic nature of narrative perspective and also distance endows the narrative with an all-round picture of the happenings and the mental activities of the characters.

Based on the above analyses, a summary of the narrative variations and narrative techniques is viable. *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* tells the story of the journey of the 'Narcissus' from Bombay to London. In particular, it focuses on the problems that arise en route from a storm and from the demoralizing presence on board of a dying West Indian sailor, James Wait. The whole story is a combination of authorial and personal narrative. As far as I'm concerned, to admit dual voice exists is rather misleading. In fact, as we have noted, there is only one narrative voice, that of the crewman-narrator who ultimately refers to himself as "I" in the story's ending part. This narrator is unnamed and also uncharacterized so he is mystified and able to oscillate between omniscience and limited perspective without attracting the reader's attention. The novel is so engrossing, which should attribute to the intricate interaction of changes in perspective and distance. Lothe listed six narrative variations by referring to variation of personal pronouns:

1. I: personal recollection of a crewman who was there, involved in the action aboard the 'Narcissus', but who is now left alone after the completion of the voyage.

2. We: personal recollection by a crewman who was there, involved in the action during the voyage.
3. They: (a) personal recollection by a crewman who was there, involved in the action, but who is now recalling the actions of others as he saw them;
(b) personal recollection by a crewman seeking a detached perspective
(c) detachment of a reflective, authorial narrator
(d) reduced attitudinal distance with narrator as lyric voice (Lothe, p.97)

This systematization is very detailed and elaborate. In the novel, the narrative, in general, is told by the narrator as character and as a detached recollector. There is no clear transition most of the time, so the reader has to be alert enough to recognize it. As for Conrad, narrative method is always amenable to his concern expressed in the novel. Here, the human solidarity is examined through a special group, the crew of the 'Narcissus', who are isolated after going to sea. In order to serve this purpose, Conrad chose to use the combination of authorial and personal perspective, which justified itself because the collective consciousness and the value of solidarity are successfully conveyed by using "we" to describe the crew's activities and mentality and because the authorial perspective is effective in describing the ship and the crew at sea. Moreover, the varying attitudinal distance deserves noting. The crewman-narrator doesn't always identify himself with all the crew and he is free to detach himself from it and reintegrate himself into it, which could be considered the charm of this unique narrative technique.

Besides, within the novel, we observed so many examples of Free Indirect Discourse which inconspicuously enter the minds of individuals and even the crew as a whole. The use of FID not only enables the author to reveal the character's thoughts naturally but also produces an ironic effect sometimes.

In addition, in this novel, we see a few instances of the use of prolepsis, which interrupts the novel's present time and offer some "news" or "commentary" from the future. This technique helps to leave deeper impression on the reader and give prominence to certain significant events.

On the whole, Conrad's exceptional narrative method serves the thematics of solidarity and work ethic well. The intensive variations of the narrative perspective and distance enhance the thematic value and the aesthetic value of this novel.

CONCLUSION

Conradian narrative is quite complex and a full understanding of it usually requires repeated reading. His works, in common with those of other major writers, are rich in meaning and demand individual interpretation on the part of readers. Nevertheless, Conrad's fictional content is not complete without the consideration of its presentation.

As Conrad's 1896 Preface to *the Nigger of the*

'Narcissus' indicates, Conrad's aesthetic credo is closely related to his aim in writing – by rescuing a fragment and giving it a shape and form, "to make the reader see". Conrad throughout his writing career never ceased to realize this aim. From his works, we can sense his painstaking efforts to make us experience the vitality and the dynamism of seen things. So we may conclude Conrad's primary mode, although he is a writer, is oral, and his ambition is to move towards visual.

Notably, Conrad is interested in exploring the individual or collective psychology through various means, among which FID is the most effective one. As we have observed, by this means, Conrad enters and moves out of the individual mind conveniently and unobtrusively. More importantly, with the help of FID, Conrad was able to reveal not only individual's nonverbal consciousness but also collective consciousness as showed in *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*.

In conclusion, Conrad was a great writer who presented an original fiction world to us in an ingenious way. The various narrative strategies are employed to enhance the central thematics of the works, render individual experiences more verisimilitude and increase the reader's involvement. Undeniably, Conrad has made enormous contributions to the art of writing and various aspects of his narrative strategies are precursors of those techniques employed by later Modernist writers. In this sense, Conrad was a real artist who dare challenge the old tradition and take the initiative to make changes both in the composition of the novel and in the ideological structure of the whole narrative. Whatever we might label Conrad as, we all have to recognize his talent for writing.

REFERENCES

- Booth, Wayne C. (1987). *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (2nd ed). Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books.
- Conrad, Joseph (1986). *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*. London, UK: Penguin Books.
- Ford, Ford Madox (1989). *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance*. New York: The Ecco Press.
- Friedman, N. (1967). Point of View in Fiction. In Stevick, P. (Ed.), *The Theory of the Novel*. New York: The Free Press.
- Genette, Gerard (1980). *Narrative Discourse*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Hawthorn, Jeremy (1990). *Joseph Conrad: Narrative Technique and Ideological Commitment*. London: Arnold.
- Lothe, Jakob (1989). *Conrad's Narrative Method*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.
- Prince, G. (1994). *Narratology*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins UP.
- SHEN, Dan. (1998). *Narratology and the Stylistics of Fiction*. Beijing, China: Beijing UP.
- Watt, Ian. (1979). *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.