

A Study of Chinese Box Structures in Conrad's Short Stories after *Typhoon and Other Stories*

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1. Introduction

It could be generally argued that Conrad's short stories have received less critical attention compared with his novels. Although there have been a considerable amount on individual works, only a few studies have been devoted to his short stories as a whole, and even monographs that deal with Conrad exclusively tend to omit many of his short stories. As in his novels, critical evaluations of the short stories vary with each of the works. Whereas some of the less appreciated texts have been often dismissed simply as potboilers or failures, works like 'The Secret Sharer' have been regarded as no less great than his major novels.

On the other hand, however, unlike in his novels it seems to be comparatively difficult to locate the period in which Conrad was successful in producing his finer short stories. For example, in his first collection, *Tales of Unrest* (1898), stories like 'Karain: a Memory' and 'An Outpost of Progress', which are often seen as examples of Conrad's best short stories, coexist with works like 'The Idiots', which is considered to be a piece of derivative juvenilia, and 'The Return', whose poor handling of its matrimonial subject is notorious. Moreover, *A Set of Six* (1908) is anything but a collection of masterpieces despite the fact that the short stories collected in it were written during the period in which Conrad produced his best novels like *Nostromo* (1904) and *The Secret Agent* (1907), and some critics have to some extent set high valuations on 'The Warrior's Soul' (1917) and 'The Tale' (1917), even though they were written after the publication of *Within the Tides* (1915), which has been viewed as the worst of Conrad's collections. It might not be very meaningful, therefore, to dwell on trying to understand Conrad's career in short stories in an orderly way, but it seems nevertheless that on the whole we can roughly generalise that the short stories written during the first half of his career tend to be more appreciated by critics. Fraser argues in his survey of Conrad's short fiction that the publication of "To-morrow" in August 1902 "marks the beginning of a period in which Conrad's shorter fiction became less experimental in form and subject, and seemed more deliberately conceived 'with the needs of a magazine' in mind" (34-35), and Hawthorn states that "the best of Conrad's shorter fiction is written before 1910—with one signal exception: *The Shadow-Line*" (xxxiii). There are actually only limited numbers of short stories in the latter half of Conrad's career that are highly valued by critics, and although it is difficult to specifically define when his short stories began to "decline", we can understand that there is a rough consensus among critics as to the vicissitudes of Conrad's career in this area.

Now what I intend in the present study is not to challenge that common view. Rather, I aim here to examine a certain kind of narrative strategy in short stories that Conrad seems to have

devised during that critically unpopular phase, namely the latter half of his career. Although this is not an attempt to enhance the status of the short stories written in that period, I hope I can present a new look at a certain technical aspect of those works. For convenience's sake I define "the latter half of his career" as after the publication of *Typhoon and Other Stories* (1903), and I shall focus on his short stories that employ Chinese box structures "in which a first-person narrator (who is sometimes the member of a group) introduces, comments on and encloses another's tale" (Carabine, viii).

This kind of form, together with the one in which a first-person narrator retrospectively narrates his experience in younger days, appears recurrently throughout his entire work and has attracted much critical attention. Lothe, Hawthorn and Phelan point out: "[Conrad] often involves multiple agents in the narrative transmission. Such transmissions involve experiments with narrative frames and embedding as well as with audiences", and argue that "[he] often employs sharp disjunction between fabula (the chronological sequence of events) and sjužet (the order of appearance of those events in the narrative text)" (2). Given the fact that according to the terminology of Tomashevski fabula means "the raw material of narrative fiction" or "what happened" and sjužet "the aesthetic rearrangement of that material" or "how the story is relayed to the reader" (Onega 265; Golden 97), we could say that considering Conrad's works with the Chinese box structures in terms of the relation between "what is narrated" and "how it is narrated" bears much relevance. In fact, in analysing the wavering narrators in 'Karain: a Memory', Erdinast-Vulcan contends that "[as] in the best of Conrad's fiction, the focus of the text is not on its ostensible 'kernel'—i.e. the protagonist's story of brotherhood, betrayal, and guilt—but on the dynamics of storytelling" (62), and Said similarly remarks that Conrad's fiction is "great for its presentation, not only for what it [is] representing" (90), and that "Conrad's virtuosic skill in narrative management, which reached its apex in *Chance*, is always as important as—and usually more interesting and important—any information the tale conveys" (101), both showing their keen attention to how events are narrated in Conrad's works.

Bearing such perspectives in mind, in the following pages I would like to pick out two short stories written in the latter half of Conrad's career, 'An Anarchist' (1905) and 'Because of the Dollars' (1915), both of which employ Chinese box structures, and observe how stories are narrated in them. Particular attention will be paid to the way in which the narrators display a certain kind of emotional commitment to the events and persons in the works. As will be shown, this distinctive mode of narrative performativity is both complex and highly crafted.

2. 'An Anarchist'

'An Anarchist', set in the South American cattle estate of a famous meat-extract manufacturing company, B. O. S., relates the story of an engineer named Paul who is exploited by Harry Gee, the manager of the cattle station. Some years earlier, when he worked in Paris, Paul became terribly drunk one day in a bar and, suddenly getting depressed by the thought of social injustice and inequality, shouted "Vive l'anarchie! Death to the capitalists!" (82) out of righteous indignation and was arrested because of that. After becoming free he kept being rejected by employers as a dangerous person and was driven to join a group of anarchists even

though he had no interest in their political ideology. Thus he became involved in a bank robbery with them and subsequently imprisoned in an island fortress near the cattle estate. After a bloody prison break, in which he killed two anarchists responsible for his arrest, he reached the cattle estate and became enslaved by the greedy manager who forces him to work with no salary by spreading rumours to the people around there that Paul is a dangerous anarchist and thereby making it impossible for him to escape.

'An Anarchist' has not been popular among critics, and when it is occasionally mentioned, critical interest tends to be focused on its form, rather than on Paul's episode itself. In fact, as Graver argues, the story is "merely pathetic, not nearly as engrossing as the truly savage predicaments of Winnie Verloc or Yanko Goorall", and what Paul experiences is "purely circumstantial" (134). Paul "never displays any consciousness of ideology", and we "get little sense of what he did to himself or how his ideas about life are changed by his experience" (134). Although Paul's innocence and extreme good-nature remind us of Stevie in *The Secret Agent*, he lacks the power to arouse what might be termed novelistic interest in readers' minds which Stevie has, and, as critics' attitudes towards the work suggest, the melodramatic episode of Paul does not seem to have much literary value in itself.

In my view, the only element to be appreciated as to Paul's story itself is the phrase "I deny nothing" that he utters as many as five times during his conversation with the manager and the narrator. This rather awkward repetition of the phrase has never been mentioned by critics to my knowledge, but we should notice that it foregrounds the only point where Paul "denies" something. Before he killed the two anarchists in the boat, he thought about the fate of himself and people like him "with warm hearts and weak heads", and he recounts to the narrator what he felt then: "[a] black rage came to me—the rage of extreme intoxication—but not against the injustice of society. Oh, no!" (89). Here he unmistakably "denies" that he felt righteous indignation, which endears him to readers because it suggests that he still cannot help feeling righteous indignation against social injustice even after being relentlessly persecuted for sympathising with poor people. It is certain that this touching outburst of Paul contributes greatly to readers' sympathy with him, but, given the overall weakness mentioned earlier, Paul's story itself remains unappealing as the centre of the work, after all.

In contrast to this, the Chinese box structure that conveys Paul's episode is highly elaborate and requires much critical attention. The whole story of 'An Anarchist' is transmitted to readers by an anonymous lepidopterist who visited the cattle estate to collect an extremely rare butterfly that lives only there. One day he is introduced to Paul by the manager who boasts about how he had enslaved the engineer, and, as he frequents Paul's workplace and listens to his painful story, the narrator comes to sympathise with his unfortunate fate. At first sight it seems to be an ordinary kind of frame structure that introduces the interior narrative, but what is conspicuous about it is that the first four paragraphs of the work are spent in delineating B. O. S., the famous meat-extract manufacturing company, in a highly ironical way, which appears to have nothing to do with Paul's story. He describes the pamphlets of the company as "written in a sickly enthusiastic style", and calls the corporate performance shown there "statistics of slaughter and bloodshed" (76). From the biting irony detected in sentences like "the nourishment [of their products] is offered to you not only highly concentrated, but already half digested. Such

apparently is the love that Limited Company bears to its fellowmen—even as the love of the father and mother penguin for their hungry fledglings” or “[as] far as I can remember they make no promise of everlasting youth to the users of B. O. S., nor yet have they claimed the power of raising the dead for their estimable products. Why this austere reserve, I wonder?” (76), we see that the narrator’s negative view on the company almost amounts to hostility.

It is obvious from the way he deplores the advertisement of B. O. S. that the narrator regards the company as a symbol of capitalist greed. He visibly despises the manager, who charges him “two dollars per diem for the hospitality of the B. O. S. Co., Ltd. (capital L1,500.000, fully paid up)” because he cannot charge “anything less in justice to [his] company” (77). When the manager indignantly remarks as to anarchism: “that subversive sanguinary rot of doing away with all law and order in the world makes my blood boil. It’s simply cutting the ground from under the feet of every decent, respectable, hard-working person” (81), the narrator answers coldly, showing that he has penetrated the manager’s hypocritical presumptuousness.

The question that needs to be considered is how this antagonism of the narrator towards capitalism is connected with the story of Paul’s downfall, and the answer is, rather surprisingly, explicitly provided by the narrator himself. After he presents his negative view on B. O. S. and its advertisement, spending the opening four paragraphs, he explains: “I have been at some pains to bring out distinctly this statement about myself in view of the story which follows” (76). Here he makes it clear that the meticulous description of B. O. S. at the opening of the work was meant to set up, in preparation for Paul’s story, a viewpoint that is antagonistic to capitalist society and sympathetic to Paul who has been victimised by it, as it were, and this is quite extraordinary, I should say, because it is as good as a declaration of how he will conduct the narration of Paul’s story. In fact, in the story of Paul that follows he never criticises Paul, whose imprudence and impulsiveness, for example, do deserve criticism, and his attitude is always kind and understanding, making a striking contrast with his scathing attitude towards B. O. S. It is certain that his position concerning Paul’s predicament and capitalist society is rather partial.

Here what I would like to call attention to is the way this sympathetic narration of the anonymous lepidopterist in ‘An Anarchist’ *makes up for* the lack of literary value which the melodramatic episode of Paul suffers from. Genuinely innocent and thoughtless, Paul is devoid of complexity as a character, and considering the fact that his experience is “purely circumstantial” and that there is little to moralise upon in it, it is likely that if the story of his ruin had been detachedly narrated by an omniscient narrator, it would have become much less readable. It is precisely because of the empathy and esteem shown by the frame narrator that Paul’s story deserves to be read, and this becomes clear when we compare the work with ‘Amy Foster’ (1901), one of Conrad’s most famous early short stories which is collected in *Typhoon and Other Tales*. It relates a tragedy that takes place around Yanko Goorall, an emigrant from Central Europe bound to America who is shipwrecked on the shore of England. After being ill-treated by the locals because of his inability to speak English and outlandish behaviour, he falls in love with Amy Foster, a local girl who had shown him kindness, and marries her. At first their married life looks happy, but after their baby is born, Amy comes to hate the alien character of Yanko, and becomes wary of her son being infected with his father’s native culture. Finally, when he falls seriously ill and talks deliriously in his mother tongue, she gets frightened and runs

away with her baby, leaving her husband to die in an outside puddle. Obviously Yanko represents a considerable amount of biographical elements of Conrad himself, who is said to have talked in Polish when he was delirious with fever, and 'Amy Foster' has attracted much critical attention as a work that reflects Conrad's sense of estrangement as a foreigner, as well as an incisive analysis of an unbridgeable chasm between different cultures.

'Amy Foster' has thus been regarded by many critics as one of Conrad's best short stories, but what must be noted here is the fact that most of the literary value the work enjoys seems to derive from the compelling episode of Yanko's tragedy itself. The story is conveyed to readers through a Chinese box structure that looks similar to its equivalent in 'An Anarchist', but actually it functions in quite an orthodox way, so to speak, as it supports Yanko's story supplementally. Indeed, there have been some criticism of the conventionality of the frame narration of 'Amy Foster' that becomes clear when it is compared with those in works like *Heart of Darkness*,¹ and, as Middleton's remark that it is "a miniature of the major fiction" with "a simplified version of the techniques [Conrad] was using in his more self-consciously artistic works" (59) suggests, we could consider that 'Amy Foster' is a work that deals with an extraordinary episode of Yanko through narrative techniques that are comparatively conventional by the standard of Conrad's highly ingenious technical experimentations, and this makes a striking contrast with 'An Anarchist' where the exceedingly elaborate frame narration supports a central episode that hardly seems to have much literary value in itself. Whereas in 'Amy Foster' Yanko's torment is undoubtedly the centre of the work both in name and reality, in 'An Anarchist' it seems as if the central episode of Paul's downfall is not appealing enough to be presented to readers without the support of the narrator's sympathetic commitment, and I think here we can extract a certain kind of structural pattern in which the narrators' evaluations of the persons and the events in the stories sustain the merely anecdotal materials. This pattern can be observed in virtually all the short stories after *Typhoon and Other Stories* with the form in which first-person narrators recount a story of somebody else they know personally, and Conrad's narrative strategy there seems to be stage-managing the frame narration, as it were, so that readers will be convinced that the episode is worth narrating to them. As to this Said seems to support my view when he argues that "[there] is unusual attention paid to the motivation of the stories being told—evidence of a felt need to justify in some way the telling of a story" (90). In fact, in those works Conrad sometimes even seems to be intent on the act of justifying his narration itself rather than on striving to enrich the episodes and make them truly worth narrating to readers.

Admittedly, this strategy Conrad employed in his mid-to-late career short stories is quite peculiar because it is premised on the idea that a certain kind of evaluation performed by the frame narration can enhance the apparent value of the narrated episodes, even if they essentially lack literary value in themselves. With regard to this Lucas, in his study of 'The Brute', a purely anecdotal potboiler with an elaborate narrative framework, makes an extremely important remark: "[the] question that needs to be tackled is whether this sophisticated technique is wasted on a story of little significant content" (69). This question undoubtedly applies also to 'An Anarchist' and, although it is certain that Conrad has developed a brand-new kind of strategy to present stories there, it cannot be unproblematically regarded as a positive development. In fact,

this new narrative strategy Conrad seems to have devised after *Typhoon and Other Stories* does not make the short stories written in that period better than the earlier ones with more standard devices. Although in 'An Anarchist' the sympathetic narration by the anonymous frame narrator does succeed in making the episode of Paul more worthwhile than if it were narrated otherwise, its poor quality cannot be changed essentially, and no matter how elaborately it is delivered to readers, the story of Paul's downfall can never be as gripping as works like 'Amy Foster', whose simpler formal structure is more than counterbalanced by their much more compelling contents. This narrative strategy naturally has its limitations, and Lucas's conclusion that "even if the story's content were deficient, it would be worth reading because of its narrative structure" (69) seems to need some qualification. Additionally, as far as 'An Anarchist' is concerned, the narrative framework and the central episode are not necessarily connected very smoothly. It requires a certain amount of critical awareness for readers to notice the strategic connection between the narrator's ironical description of B. O. S. and Paul's episode, and the sentence I have quoted earlier in which the narrator makes explicit his own intention in the depiction of B. O. S. is somewhat awkward as it displays Conrad's technical methodology in the work rather crudely. In the following pages I would like to take up another short story written in the latter half of Conrad's career, 'Because of the Dollars', and apply the same analytical procedure as in this section as to Conrad's narrative methodology in order to examine how it specifically works in that tale. I will also try to consider the background against which Conrad came to devise that rather peculiar strategy to create short stories. As will be demonstrated, in the story the evaluation performed by the narrator takes the form of a similar emotional commitment to that deployed in 'An Anarchist'.

3. 'Because of the Dollars'

'Because of the Dollars', a by-product of *Victory* (1915), was written in 1914 and collected in *Within the Tides*, one of the least known of Conrad's volumes. Set in Malay Archipelago as in many of Conrad's other works, it relates a tragic event that took place around Captain Davidson, who also appears in *Victory* as the reporter of events. Davidson undertakes the job of collecting old dollars from traders in the region to exchange them for new issue notes, and it happens that three villains get wind of his dollar-collecting trip and weave a plot to rob him. They learn that Davidson will go around to the out-of-the-way house of a seedy loafer named Bamtz, who lives with a reformed prostitute called Laughing Anne, Davidson's old acquaintance, and wait for him there. Warned in time by Anne, Davidson succeeds in foiling their plot, but the leader of the ruffians, a diabolic Frenchman without hands, recognises Anne's betrayal and kills her with an iron weight tied to his stump before he is shot by Davidson. After the event Davidson decides to support Anne's young son, but his wife suspects that he must be the father of the child and refuses to take charge of him. The event triggers the breakdown of their relationship and Mrs. Davidson ends up abandoning him.

Seen as "an obvious pendant to *Victory*" (Graver 172), 'Because of the Dollars' has drawn little critical attention like the other tales collected in *Within the Tides*. Indeed, the entire work hangs on the characterisation of Davidson who is "a really GOOD man" with a "thoroughly

humane” nature (130, 131). He is too innocent and good-natured to imagine the malice of other people, and it is precisely out of his extreme goodness that he decides to help Bamtz and Laughing Anne who have been deserted by the world. Juxtaposed with other major Conradian characters who more or less have difficulty coming to terms with their internal darkness and excessive self-consciousness, the “[GOOD] man” Davidson’s characterisation in ‘Because of the Dollars’ is, we could say, surely exceptional.

The point that must be considered here, however, is that Davidson is not only “really [GOOD]” but also *obtuse*. Although this aspect of Davidson has been little discussed by critics, I believe that it is an important viewpoint in considering the story. There are actually plenty of descriptions that indicate his obtuseness in the text. When Davidson arrives at Bamtz’s house and looks through the window into the room where the four men are talking about their plot in whispers, his feeling is described using his own words: “Davidson ... didn’t like it. He didn’t like it at all” (148), simple diction which clearly expresses his lack of intelligence. He is very slow in taking Anne’s warning because he lacks imagination and cannot believe the ruffians’ wicked intention, and when he foils their surprise attack and repels them on his boat, he does not pursue them, having no idea what they will do next. Given that Anne is virtually the only person who could have exposed their plot to Davidson, and that the villains were visibly astonished to find that Davidson had already escaped from the sleeping quarters of the boat, it is obvious, as a logical consequence, that they will kill Anne for her betrayal. Nevertheless, Davidson does not see this for a while and it is after the Frenchman yells: “‘It’s that woman!—it’s that woman that has sold us’” (156) as he runs to Bamtz’s house that he realises that Anne is in danger. When we read the passage “[he] perceived with dismay that the stratagem of his defence had given Anne away. He did not hesitate a moment. It was for him to save her now” (157), we cannot help feeling that Davidson’s reaction to the situation is delayed and rather beside the point. When he finds Anne’s body with its head crushed by the Frenchman’s iron weight, he does feel remorse but what he thinks is simply that “she [has] died for him” (158). He never realises that this happened because he was so obtuse as not to think of protecting Anne from being killed in revenge. If he had shot the Frenchman on the boat, for example, Anne would have evaded being killed, and the reason he did not do that is not so much because he was too good to kill a person as because he simply did not think of what a dangerous situation Anne was in. Graver argues that “on the basis of the facts reported in the story, the captain is more obviously a victim of other people’s malice and plain bad luck than of a notable failure of character” (173), but his obtuseness and thoughtlessness do deserve, I think, to be criticised in some way, though the punishment actually given to him in the work is of course disproportionately severe.

What this indicates is the fact that Davidson, like Paul in ‘An Anarchist’, is incapable of arousing interest or sympathy by himself, and that his story needs some kind of justification for being told to readers despite its protagonist’s unattractiveness as a character. In *Typhoon*, Conrad’s earlier short story dealing with a drama of sailors, there appears a Captain MacWhirr, a comical figure with absolute good-nature and simple mind who is in a way similar to Davidson. Although at first other characters and even readers see him rather mockingly, through their desperate struggle against the typhoon Captain MacWhirr’s resolute and competent behaviour gradually earns respect from the other crewmen, and there is a dramatic scene between him and

Jukes, the first mate, in which Captain MacWhirr takes on a certain kind of dignity and ceases to be an object of laughter (67-69). This is probably one of the scenes we most appreciate in the work, and I think it is largely due to this dramatic enhancement of his status, as it were, that makes *Typhoon* a captivating story. In 'Because of the Dollars', in contrast to this, there is no such moment where readers' interest in Davidson's personality mounts so much that his obtuseness comes to seem trivial. Instead, he remains a potential object of criticism or even of pity to the end, mostly due to his obtuseness, and the story of the villains' attack and his mishandling of it seems to have "little literary merit" in itself, as Peters remarks (108). Consequently, just as in 'An Anarchist' the limited potential of the narrated event to engage readers needed to be assisted by the narrator's emotional commitment to its protagonist, in 'Because of the Dollars' it is necessary to present Davidson's characterisation as "a really GOOD man" with some kind of support so that readers will receive him sympathetically and Conrad can thereby "evade the charge of writing a potboiler" (Billy 140). In other words, Davidson's obtuseness, which is the flip side of his supposedly absolute virtue, needs to be toned down to some extent in order to make the story worthy of narration to readers, so to speak.

It is Hollis, the narrator of the story, who plays this role. The tale is introduced by an anonymous frame narrator who is walking in an Eastern harbour with his friend Hollis, and when they come across Davidson, Hollis states: "That's a good man. I don't mean good in the sense of smart or skilful in his trade. I mean a really GOOD man" (130), and starts recounting the tragedy that took place around Davidson. The frame narrator in effect disappears from the rest of the text, and Hollis, who had also appeared in the early short story, 'Karain: a Memory', becomes the virtual narrator of the story. What is notable about Hollis is that he takes sides with Davidson and defends him from the accusation made by his wife. This is quite important because Mrs. Davidson is the only character in the work who sees Davidson critically. When Davidson decides to go and help Bamtz and Anne, she has "a presentiment of some misfortune" (146) and disagrees with the plan, and when he persists in going despite her warning, "[prompted] by his sensitive humanity", she gets sulky and drives him to sleep on board that night. After he gets back with Anne's son and gives an awkward explanation, Mrs. Davidson suspects that he is Davidson and Anne's child and comes to look askance at her husband. Finally she leaves her husband with their little daughter and spoils his smile which would have survived "had he been less of a good fellow" (163).

Hollis's position is consistent throughout the work in denying Mrs. Davidson's criticism of her husband, disparaging her for it, and leading readers to see Davidson sympathetically. For example, in the scene where she gets sulky before Davidson's departure, Hollis asserts that "for all her angelic profile, she [is] a very stupidly obstinate girl" (146), and when Davidson asks his wife to take charge of Anne's son, Hollis states that "[he] did not know that her heart was about the size of a parched pea, and had the proportional amount of warmth; and that her faculty of compassion was mainly directed to herself. ... She was a fool of the silent, hopeless kind" (160). Hollis seems to believe that Davidson is a victim of his unworthy wife and that it is his duty to defend Davidson from her; Schwarz points out that "[for] Hollis, his friend Davidson has become synonymous with virtue" (28). Here what Graver argues as to the narrative framework of 'Freya of the Seven Isles' (1912) seems also to apply to 'Because of the Dollars'. That is to

say, Hollis is a moral reflector “controlling the reader’s response” (165) to Davidson and his story. It is certain that this “superfluous defence of Davidson’s character” (Billy 184) conducted by Hollis functions as a form of stage-management to make Davidson and his story appear more worthwhile, just like the sympathetic narration of the anonymous lepidopterist did in ‘An Anarchist’. Here we can again identify Conrad’s primary narrative strategy, as was also evident in the short stories that I have discussed in the previous section.

What must be noted here, however, is that Hollis’s antagonism towards Mrs. Davidson obviously derives from his personal misogyny, and that his defence of Davidson is highly partial. Earlier in the work when Hollis introduces Mrs. Davidson, he makes a significant remark about the seamen in the region: “[o]urs, as you remember, was a bachelor crowd; in spirit anyhow, if not absolutely in fact. There might have been a few wives in existence, but if so they were invisible, distant, never alluded to. For what would have been the good? Davidson alone was visibly married” (134). Here homosocial solidarity among the seamen’s community is explicitly depicted, and it is suggested that there existed a certain kind of tension between the bachelor community and Mrs. Davidson. When Hollis says: “[most] of us were fetched by her white, swan-like neck, by that drooping, innocent profile. There was a lot of latent devotion to Davidson’s wife hereabouts at that time, I can tell you. But my idea is that she repaid it by a profound suspicion of the sort of men we were; a mistrust which extended—I fancied—to her very husband at times. And I thought then she was jealous of him in a way” (135), we see that Hollis’s harsh attitude towards Mrs. Davidson and his sympathy with her husband are motivated by his strong homosociality.

In fact, if we quit empathising with Davidson, which would be against Hollis’s will, and read the text detachedly, we see that part of Mrs. Davidson’s reaction to the series of events is justifiable. When Davidson decides to go to Bamtz’s house out of his goodness, for instance, it is at least understandable that as a wife she should be wary and disagree with the plan, and her premonition is not necessarily “unreasonable” (160), as Hollis puts it. Moreover, given the fact that Davidson at first explained to her that Anne’s son is just an orphan whose parents he is greatly obliged to, and that he told her the truth after she heard from Davidson’s acquaintance that a woman named Laughing Anne is involved, it is in a sense natural for her to be sceptical about his explanation. Nonetheless, critics seem to have basically followed Hollis’s judgment of Mrs. Davidson. Hampson points out “her narrowness and lack of generosity” (97), and Schwarz mentions her “astigmatic, narrow puritanism” (28). I am not trying to say that these views are mistaken. Actually she does have cold-hearted and narrow-minded aspects, and as it is indisputable that on the whole she is a disagreeable woman to many readers, Hollis’s judgment is not necessarily wrong. Nevertheless, I think that Mrs. Davidson is at least not as mean a woman as Hollis asserts, and we should not overlook the fact that his criticism of her cannot be taken at face value.

Consequently, we need to consider whether this partiality of Hollis ironises and undermines his defence of Davidson and thereby frustrates Conrad’s narrative strategy to make Davidson’s story appear more worthwhile. Since Hollis’s untenable misogyny inevitably prevents readers from fully approving of his assertion about Davidson and his wife, it is certain that Conrad is less than fully successful in his attempt to engage readers through Hollis’s defence of Davidson.

However, it could be not less convincingly argued that it is precisely because Hollis takes sides with Davidson in such an extremely subjective way that Davidson's story is transmitted to readers as something lively. As I have argued earlier, the narrated content itself fails to engage readers who discern Davidson's obtuseness. Hollis's strong emotional commitment to Davidson invites such readers to condone his lack of attraction and thereby become interested in his story. Hollis's intense homosociality, I would argue, functions as a device to give power to his strong identification with Davidson, as it were. The partiality of Hollis's narration, therefore, has a double-edged effect. It could be construed as an effective contrivance to enhance the apparent value of Davidson's story, whereas it also has the potential for undermining its own credibility.

4. Conclusion

I have discussed two short stories, 'An Anarchist' and 'Because of the Dollars', which were written in the latter half of Conrad's career, and examined the way a certain kind of evaluation performed by the frame narration functions as a device to make the narrated contents appear more worthwhile than they really are. Although in the two stories that narrative strategy does not seem to be entirely successful, its very idiosyncrasy attracts much attention. A thorough study of the background against which Conrad came to employ that peculiar narrative strategy in short stories would be beyond the scope of this paper, but one clue is provided by Graver's study on the process of Conrad's revision of 'Freya of the Seven Isles', a melodramatic romance narrated through a Chinese box structure just like the works I have discussed here. He examines the alterations Conrad made in revising the magazine version of the work into book form, and classifies them into five categories. The revision is mainly devoted to enriching the narrative framework as well as the psychology of the characters, and this tells us, according to Graver, that Conrad attempted "to give the frail magazine version something of the elaborate structure which he used in his best early work" (165). Although this is not enough to make an induction from, we could at least hypothesise that the peculiar relation between the narrated content and the narrative framework observed in Conrad's mid-to-late career short stories suggests his ambivalence between the financial need for popularity and his hope of maintaining the artistic value of his works. It is well known that Conrad chronically suffered from money problems due to his relative lack of popularity, notwithstanding the critics' high valuations, and that he kept changing his style in order to be accepted by general readers. Given the fact that Conrad states that 'Because of the Dollars' is an instance of "prostituting his intellect" (CL5 322) to please the readers of the *Metropolitan*, the popular magazine in which the work was published, we could presume that the peculiar way in which the elaborate narrative frameworks support the narrated episodes that might in themselves be regarded as mere shallow melodramas without much literary value reflects Conrad's desperate measure to reconcile attracting general readers and retaining the artistic value of his works as much as possible. This is only a hypothesis, but it seems to me that it convincingly explains the sharp disjunction which attentive readers would feel exists between the actual contemporary readers of the popular magazines and, to borrow Iser's term, the implied reader to whom he addressed the works. We could say that the Chinese box structures in Conrad's mid-to-late career short stories are intriguing in that they help us

consider this major problem of readership in Conrad's literature, and I hope I have somehow managed to present a plausible approach to that issue through analysis of these two short stories.

Note

¹ Graver remarks that "since [Kennedy] was more an observer than a participant, his elaborate classical allusions and solemn moralizing are sometimes strained and unconvincing. He is never able to speak with the authority of Marlow, who could afford rhetoric because he at least suffered for it. Kennedy may have been a thematic and structural necessity for Conrad, but he is a mixed blessing for the reader" (107-108), and Watson argues that "[at] times the double-narrator structure seems to be managed almost mechanically, in striking contrast to the rich complexities of the superficially similar narrative pattern in *Heart of Darkness*, written two years earlier" (183).

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