



邓颖玲 著

康拉德小说 的空间艺术

Spatial Art in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad



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- ◇ 策划组稿/李 阳
- ◇ 责任编辑/李 阳
- ◇ 装帧版式/周基东

ISBN 7-81081-529-6



9 787810 815291 >

ISBN 7-81081-529-6/1 • 026

定价：20.00元



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◆ 湖南师范大学出版社
HUNAN NORMAL UNIVERSITY PRESS

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图书在版编目(CIP)数据

康拉德小说的空间艺术 / 邓颖玲著. —长沙: 湖南师范大学出版社, 2005. 7

(英语学术文库)

ISBN 7-81081-529-6

I. 康... II. 邓... III. 康拉德, J. (1857~1924)—
小说—文学研究 IV. I561.074

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2005)第 080216 号

康拉德小说的空间艺术

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◇策划组稿:李 阳

◇责任编辑:李 阳

◇责任校对:李永芳

◇出版发行:湖南师范大学出版社

地址/长沙市岳麓山 邮编/410081

电话/0731.8853867 8872751 传真/0731.8872636

网址/www.hunnu.edu.cn/press

◇经销:湖南省新华书店

◇印刷:中南大学印刷厂

◇开本:670×960 1/16

◇印张:15.25

◇字数:268千字

◇版次:2005年7月第1版 2005年7月第1次印刷

◇书号:ISBN 7-81081-529-6/I·026

◇定价:20.00元



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Acknowledgements

In the process of writing this book, I received help from a number of people, without whose support this book could not have reached its completion. First, I would like to express my gratitude to my doctoral supervisor Professor Ning Yizhong of Beijing Languages University for his expert advice and criticism, and to his wife Professor Duan Jiangli, who has given her help so unstintingly that it is not possible to detail it here. I am especially thankful to Professors Xiao Minghan, Jiang Jiansong, Jiang Hongxin, Huang Zhending, Zhao Yanqiu, for their valuable comments and suggestions. I am grateful to Professor Frederic Will of Texas University for his graciousness in offering help during the initial phase, and Professor Liu Wen and Doctor Song Guodong, who sent me materials on recent Conradian studies.

I am also grateful to the English faculty at the Foreign Languages Department of Hunan Normal University for their encouragement, particularly Chen Qian, Yi Yanping, Cai Ping, Yao Peizhi for their friendship and general support for my scholarly endeavors; Luo Hui and Deng Jie for sharing their knowledge of computer throughout the production process.

I would like to thank my family for their love and endless faith in me. I am grateful to my eleven-year-old daughter, who I suspect cares nothing for Conrad but is nevertheless a great joy to be around. I

would like to express my deepest appreciation to my husband, who has been patient, supportive, and loving during the long, difficult, and often discouraging period.

Finally, my gratitude is due to my dear late father, who passed away as I was working on this book, and whom I did not even spare one day to attend to when he was bed-ridden. May the completion of this book be a consolation to him and a momentary relief of my remorse.

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Introduction

This book will investigate the spatial art observable in the fiction of Joseph Conrad. Its primary focus is on the methods and devices of the author's creation of the spatial form^① in his major works. "Spatial form" is here seen as an integral aspect of textual structure, but the study is not narrowly or exclusively structuralistic as it is concerned with the complicated relationship in Conrad's fiction between the spatialized narration and the complex thematics as well as the author's aesthetic ideology and the reader's reception.

Conrad's literary career is commonly divided into three periods: a short early period of largely Malay fiction ending in 1896; the major phrase extending from 1897 to 1911; and a more diverse body of later fiction from 1911 to his death in 1924. His earliest works are thematically rich but cumbersome in plotting

① This term was first employed by Joseph Frank in his article "Spatial Form in Modern Literature", originally published in 1945. The idea originated in his analysis of Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood*. Since its publication, the idea has aroused interest, stimulated further work and provoked disagreement and refutation in the modern and even postmodern literature. This essay was an early and provocative influence on my dissertation.

and inflatedly self-conscious in descriptive style. His second period that extends from *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* to *Under Western Eyes* displays "a brilliantly exuberant virtuosity in thought and expression, in concept and technique, which dwarfs the recurrent flaws."^① It is a period of astonishing richness and majesty: "*Heart of Darkness* or *Nostramo* alone would have sufficed to give Conrad an enduring reputation as a major writer", let alone his other masterpieces as *Lord Jim*, *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes*. The works in this phrase establish Conrad's stature as "one of the half-dozen of the very greatest fiction-writers in the English."^② The present study will center mainly on three of Conrad's influential novels in this period: *Lord Jim*, *Nostramo* and *The Secret Agent*. Of course, this selection cannot avoid simplification and omission, but for me, they represent the central achievement of Conrad in his experiment with spatial techniques. The paper attempts to identify and evaluate the spatial form in these texts, probe into the productive interaction between the extreme flexibility and mobility of Conrad's narrative and his moral and thematic ideology, and on this basis provide a new way to interpret these novels.

According to an extensive tradition including Horace and Lessing, art is divided between the temporal art and the

① Cedric Watts, *A Preface to Conrad* (New York: Longman Group Limited, 1982) 171.

② Watts, *A Preface to Conrad*, 34.

spatial art.^① The essential attribute of temporal art is successiveness and irreversibility while that of spatial art is simultaneity and reversibility. Thus literature and music are temporal; painting, sculpture, and architecture are spatial. However, this kind of division is arbitrary. The temporal art and spatial art are not absolutely divided.

Lessing's failure as an aesthetician [...] rests in his acceptance of the logical limitations of the two forms of art, his belief that the arts achieve their best results by remaining within the confines of their respective essences. Lessing does not consider the extramedial effects by which the spatial arts may convey the effects of succession and the temporal arts the effects of simultaneity.^②

The "simultaneity" of spatial art implies a temporal relation and the "succession" of temporal art implies a spatial relation. The concept of spatial art evolves from the idea that temporal art uses spatial qualities for their realization, extension, and development. Therefore, spatiality in the

① In his "Laocoön", Lessing distinguishes between two categories of art: those based on co-existence in space, and those based on consecutiveness in time. He thinks that literature and music can describe a succession of actions while painting and sculpture catch only an instant of time. Therefore, he categorizes literature and music as temporal art while painting and sculpture the spatial art.

② Joseph A. Kestner, *The Spatiality of the Novel* (Detroit: Wayne State University Pr., 1978) 19.

temporal art of the novel involves methods of spatial properties, like simultaneity. In a temporal art like the novel, spatial art thus means the exercise of spatial elements to extend the essential temporal nature of the novel. Studies of time in the novel, including A. A. Mendilow's *Time and the novel* and Hans Meyerhoff's *Time in Literature*, have examined one facet of the nature of the novel—its temporal essence, characterized by succession and irreversibility. However, it is important to recognize, as Mendilow has observed, “the novel relies on spatiality for its operative secondary illusion to elaborate this temporal essence.”^① Therefore, the study of the spatiality in the novel is of the same importance as that of the temporality. The decisive documents of the theory of the novel, including Percy Lubbock's *Craft of Fiction*, Henry James' *Art of the Novel*, E. M. Foster's *Aspects of the Novel*, and Wayne Booth's *Rhetoric of Fiction*, contain implications important for spatial methodology. James frequently refers to the novel itself as an architectural product. He claims in the preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*:

The house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million—a number of possible windows not to be reckoned, rather, every one of which has been pierced, or is still

① Kestner, *The Spatiality of the Novel*, 10.

pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of the individual vision and by the pressure of the individual will. ①

Here, James uses an architectural metaphor to provide insight into the spatial art of literature. Forster's *Aspects of the novel* from the beginning assumes James's attitude toward works of fiction as "mansions". He declares the idea of detachment and states that "space is the lord of *War and Peace*, not time." ② Studies of literature in connection with spatial art find their great improvement on Joseph Frank, whose "Spatial Form in Modern Literature" examines the achievement of reversibility and simultaneity in the novel. ③

The study of spatial art in the novel involves two considerations; first, the use of space as a formal construct in the text; and second, the nature of spatiality as a critical method of writing and reading the text, including the beliefs, outlook and aesthetic ideas of the author as well as the reader's response and reaction to the text. Therefore, the central thesis of this study can be set out as a twofold argument. First it argues that the narrative method of spatial form in Conrad's fiction is an important field of study in

① Kestner, *The Spatiality of the Novel*, 28.

② E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (Harmondsworth; Penguin, 1974) 51.

③ The importance of space as an architectonic construct for novelists is particular emphasized in Sharon Spencer, *Space, Time, and Structure in the Modern Novel*.

itself. As Edward W. Said comments, Conrad's fiction is "great for its presentation, not only for what it was representing."^① Conrad himself once wrote to his friend "the whole of the truth lies in the presentation."^② Approaching Conrad's fiction in the light of Joseph Frank's theory of spatial form, the book attempts to investigate the "presentation" of his three major novels from the aspects of chronological distortion, juxtaposition, and impressionism. It holds that thematic generalization about Conrad's fiction might become more convincing if based on analysis of the author's intention as well as the reader's understanding of the text. I personally believe that an attention to spatial art in Conrad's novels can enhance an appreciation of the authorial skills, help to display the relationship between the actual forming of the works and the author's artistic and ideological thought, and to provide a means of obtaining insights into the literary works themselves, insights that might not be available from other sources and that may at times suggest possible solutions to as yet unsolved critical problems.

Joseph Conrad is a peculiar writer in the transition from Victorian fiction to the more perplexed forms and values of

① Jakob Lothe, *Conrad's Narrative Method* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 3.

② Zdzislaw Najder, ed., *Conrad's Polish Background: Letters to and from Polish Friends*, trans. Halina Carroll (London: Oxford University Press, 1964) 200.

the twentieth century. His own drastic life experience, his sea-faring days and his travels in the exotic lands provide him with sources of creative energy and stimulus. Though he writes out of and about himself, he doesn't intend to create a private world. He often links the most intense social and political experience of his life with his own intense inward life. "In considering the nature of Conrad's greatest, four headings suggest themselves: his descriptive power; his moral interest; his understanding of the social nature of man; and his artistic control."^① In a relatively brief literary career, he has produced a distinctive body of work that remains unique in British literary history, some of which have become the masterpieces in world literature. The position of Joseph Conrad among his great contemporaries is unique. "No other novelist (except, perhaps, James Joyce) has had a more profound and pervasive influence on twentieth-century fiction than Joseph Conrad."^② Virginia Woolf once wrote to his friend that "I am engulfed in the works of Conrad, who is a much better writer than all of us put together, [...] Conrad is not one and simple; no, he is many and complex."^③ In

① Arnold Kettle, "The Greatness of Joseph Conrad," *Joseph Conrad: Critical Assessments*, vol. II, ed. Keith Carabine (Robertsbridge: Helm Information Ltd., 1992) 558.

② Ted Billy, *Critical Essays on Joseph Conrad* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1987) 1.

③ David Dowling, *Novelists on Novelists* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1983) 48.

1948, the influential Cambridge critic F. R. Leavis published *The Great Tradition*, in which he acknowledged that Conrad “has, of course, long been generally held to be among the English masters”^① and concluded by affirming that “Conrad is among the very greatest novelists in the language—or any language.”^② His acknowledgement has firmly established the centrality of Conrad's position in the mainstream of literature.

Conrad's works have been subjected to many different types of critical scrutiny, and even some of his minor writings have been extensively analyzed. They have generated a diversity of interpretations. His somewhat complex and difficult prose style presents difficulties artistically and

① F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1948) 200.

② Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, 257. F. R. Leavis remains the most influential critic in establishing the criteria for evaluating Conrad's works for their moral seriousness by conjoining the writer's aesthetic and moral concerns. He includes Conrad in the great tradition of the English novel because, “like Jane Austen and George Eliot and Henry James,” he is “an innovator in ‘form’ and method,” and his “concern with art... is the servant of a profoundly serious interest in life” (*The Great Tradition*, 28).