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**A computer-aided approach to *I* and the *World* in Conrad's *The Shadow Line***

The present paper adopts a computer-aided approach to the study of the personal pronouns in Conrad's *The Shadow-Line, A Confession* (1917). This work belongs to the tradition of the *Bildungsroman*, in which the coming of age of a youth is told. The story revolves around a young inexperienced sea-captain who, during his first command of a ship, has to overcome a series of difficulties to accomplish his mission. His journey is a rite of passage from youth into maturity that takes the form of a Proppian initiation ritual, in which the challenge (the ability to drive the ship and manage the crew) must be accomplished by a hero (the young protagonist) who encounters the severe natural obstacle of a dead calm, accompanied by an obscure and menacing adversary (the haunting figure of the dead captain). However, the store-keeper (the helper) assists him throughout the journey. In the end the young captain will receive the prize: his ship is safely taken back to harbour. Given that the *I* protagonist-narrator is at the centre of the dominant antagonism of the story, the present paper carries out a quantitative, intra-textual analysis of the first person pronouns and of the other personal pronouns in the whole work. The statistical results and their qualitative analysis point to a foregrounded stylistic feature of *The Shadow-Line*, which contributes to place the *I*-narrator protagonist at the centre of his rite of passage from youth to maturity.

**Keywords:** Fiction, Conrad, Stylistics, intra-textual, quantitative analysis, qualitative analysis.

## 1. Introduction

*The Shadow-Line, A Confession* (1917) has been regarded as one of the finest works of Conrad's final creative period (Leavis 1958: 188-200; Stape and Simmons, in Conrad 2013: xxv) and as "a sharp formal departure from Conrad's earlier, more celebrated work" (Domestico 2010: 3) in which Conrad "returns to the sea after diverging into other, landlocked spheres [...], and he frames his thematic return in stark, powerful terms" (*id.*: 1).<sup>i</sup>

*The Shadow-Line* is the story of an unnamed young man who, after deciding to leave his position as a mariner on a steamship and return to England for good, is unexpectedly appointed captain of a ship which is no ordinary boat: "At first glance I saw that she was a high-class vessel, a harmonious creature in the lines of her fine body, in the proportioned tallness of her spars" (Conrad 2013: 45).<sup>ii</sup> The journey, which begins in Bangkok and ends in Singapore, is marked by two special challenges. The first of these involves the adult world, to which the protagonist must demonstrate he is able to accomplish the tasks, duties and responsibilities it imposes. The second, unexpected challenge of the voyage is that it is marked by his fight against occult powers associated with the former captain, now dead. Despite the warning of a medical officer he meets in Bangkok just before departing not to start the journey because the crew is ill with malaria, he decides to take the ship out to sea, confident that the crew will recover. However, the crew remain ill throughout the voyage and, amongst other things, the young captain finds out that the former captain had sold all the quinine necessary to cure the crew. Only the young captain and Ransome, the cook with a bad heart, remain untouched by malaria. During the voyage, the ship is also marooned in a dead calm sea that Mr. Burns, the Chief Mate, is convinced is the curse of the late commander.

Thus, this *Bildungsroman* or novel of formation (Hirsch 1979: 293-311; Boes 2006: 230-243)<sup>iii</sup> takes on the structure of a Proppian initiation ritual,<sup>iv</sup> in which a challenge (in this case, the ability to sail the ship and manage the crew) must be accomplished by a hero (the young protagonist) who encounters severe natural obstacles accompanied by an obscure and menacing adversary (the dead former captain). However, Ransome, (the helper) is always on his side from the beginning to the end of his ordeal. In the end the young captain will receive the prize when he manages to take his ship safely back to harbour.

The story is presented throughout from the point of view of an older narrator, recalling in retrospect his first sea voyage as a young captain, the obstacles he had to face and the struggles within himself and with the external world. Conrad himself admitted that the principal objective of the *novella* was to present "certain facts which certainly were associated with the change from youth, care-free and fervent, to the more self-conscious and more poignant period of maturer life" (Stape and Simmons, in Conrad 2013: 6).<sup>v</sup> He also acknowledged that this work, in many respects, drew upon his personal experience as master of the *Otago* in the Eastern Seas (*id.*: 251-256). Critics have also remarked on the autobiographical aspects of *The Shadow-Line*. For example, Leavis (1958: 188; see also Stape and Simmons, in Conrad 2013: xxxv-xliii) states that "[i]t comes out of experience that was intimately and urgently personal;" Watt (1981: 93) prefers not to define this *novella* as autobiographical when he says that it is "characteristically personal without being directly autobiographical."

The marked personal qualities are also testified by the title, *The Shadow-Line, A Confession* (Stape and Simmons, in Conrad 2013: 6), in which the term “Confession” unlocks the texture of this work. In every confession the inner world of an individual prevails since one’s inner self is revealed, for different reasons, to the external world, *i.e.* to other/s. For example, in Saint Augustine’s *Confessions* (397-400 AD, Chadwick 2008), a milestone in the Western literary tradition, Augustine’s favoured addressee of his spiritual journey is God. In *The Shadow-Line* the addressee of the *I* narrator-protagonist appears to be the reader,<sup>vi</sup> to whom he discloses his psychological and physical journey, which is attained by overcoming the obstacles that during the story put him on trial and continually challenge his youthful optimism and enthusiasm.

## 2. Assumptions

Considered that *The Shadow-Line* presents a neat divide between the *I* protagonist-narrator’s internal world and the external world he has to confront during his rite of passage, one linguistic area that may be particularly revealing is the use of personal pronouns. The investigation of such linguistic features can benefit from the use of corpus-aided techniques (Stubbs 2005: 5-24; Leech 2008: 162-178; Stockwell 2008: 351-363; Walker 2010: 364-387; Mahlberg 2013). According one’s purpose, quantitative analyses can be focused either on function words (*e.g.* articles, auxiliaries, pronouns, *etc.*) or content words (*e.g.* nouns, verbs, adjectives, *etc.*), or on both. Function words have traditionally been object of quantitative studies carried out in the field of authorship attribution (*e.g.* Burrows 1987) because they have been regarded as the best indicators of authorial fingerprint, but they have also inspired other quantitative studies into style in fictional works (*e.g.* Hoover 2003: 151-178; Balossi 2014).

Quantitative approaches to text analysis can be intra-textual (Adolphs 2016: 65-69), *i.e.* when the analysis is carried out on an individual text (*e.g.* Conrad’s *The Shadow-Line*), or inter-textual, *i.e.* when an individual text is compared with other texts of the same author or with a larger corpus or corpora (*e.g.* Conrad’s *The Shadow-Line* with Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, or Conrad’s *The Shadow-Line* with The British National Corpus).

Often, quantitative analyses (*e.g.* word frequencies) applied to literary texts are combined with qualitative analyses (*e.g.* concordances) and employed in concert with theories and concepts (Leech and Short 2007: 1) from linguistics or other disciplines such as the social sciences (see, for example, Pennebaker 2011). Leech and Short (*id.*: 57) acknowledge that statements on style need to be based on quantitative evidence but at the same time, as stated by Stubbs (2002: 100) “words and context are inseparable.”

## 3. Aims

The present paper makes use of the computer to carry out a quantitative investigation of the personal pronouns in *The Shadow-Line*. The quantitative results will show the predominance of the first person pronouns which in the architecture of the *novella* may hint at a stylistically foregrounded feature of this work compared to the other pronouns that refer principally to the external world of the other male characters the young captain interacts with before, during and at the end of his mission. After quantitative

analysis, I will move onto a detailed analysis of three sample passages of *The Shadow-Line* in order to exemplify the centrality that the *I* narrator-protagonist holds in this work.

#### 4. The Conrad Hyper-Concordance and the Wmatrix POS Tool

The statistical output to the present analysis of the personal pronouns in Conrad's *The Shadow-Line* is drawn from the Wmatrix3 POS (Part-of-speech) Tool (Rayson: 2009) and Matsuoka's Conrad Hyper-Concordance (2003).

Wmatrix is a web-based environment containing corpus annotation tools for grammatical and semantic analysis. The tool employed in my analysis is the POS tagging, which is a system designed to attribute grammatical tags to the words in a text. The POS automatic analysis in Wmatrix can generate word frequency profiles (*i.e.* list of words, their frequency and relative frequency) and POS frequency profiles (*i.e.* the frequency and relative frequency of part-of-speech tags). Relative frequencies prove to be very useful when comparing texts or passages of different sizes, as is the case here (*cf.* 5.1 *ff.*). Wmatrix can show concordances for each grammatical or semantic item and carry out comparisons between a source corpus and a reference corpus.

Matsuoka's Hyper-Concordance already contains all Conrad's main works; it thus allows us to carry out comparisons without needing to upload the e-texts into the programme. Similarly to Wmatrix and other software such as Wordsmith (Scott 2010) or AntConc (Anthony 2014), the number of occurrences of a searched item and its concordances are provided.

The Wmatrix3 POS tool was employed to obtain the POS tagging of the passages for detailed analysis; while Matsuoka's Hyper-Concordance proved useful in carrying out the statistics of the number of words occurring in *The Shadow-Line* because unlike Wmatrix, Matsuoka's Hyper-Concordance does not treat as one token multiword expressions (*e.g.* 'all\_right'), which I do not think should be considered as single words. Moreover, Matsuoka's programme does not count as single words orthographic marks such as the Genitive (*i.e.* the - s' in the possessive singular and the apostrophe in the possessive plural), hyphens, dashes or inverted commas, which I do not regard as words but parts of a word (for a full list of cases *cf.* Balossi 2014: 78-79).

#### 4.1 The Results

Below I provide the statistics of the top most frequently occurring personal pronouns (Table 4.1) and of the others (Table 4.2).<sup>vii</sup> Both tables show the occurring pronoun word<sup>viii</sup> (first column from left) followed by the frequencies of each pronoun and their relative frequencies relative to all the words occurring in *The Shadow-Line*. The total words occurring in the text, the total number of pronouns (*e.g.* *I*, *my*, *me*, *myself* and *mine*) and their total relative frequency (*e.g.* 5.11% for the *I*-words in Table 4.1) are shown at the bottom of the table.

In order to see who/what the pronouns refer to, I looked at the concordances generated by Wmatrix. Special attention was paid to distinguish between the *I* words referring to the *I* protagonist and those referring to the other characters, occurring in their direct speech. For example, the pronoun *I*, though mainly indicating the narrator-

protagonist, also refers (*ca.* 83 times out of 1,316) to other characters the young mariner interacts with in the story.

**Table 4.1: The top most frequently occurring pronouns**

<i>I</i> words	Freq.	Relative freq.	<i>He</i> words	Freq.	Relative freq.
I	1,233	3.02	he	774	1.89
my	410	1.00	his	455	1.11
me	378	0.93	him	252	0.62
myself	52	0.13	himself	47	0.12
mine	14	0.03			
<b>Tot. 40,848</b>	<b>2,087</b>	<b>5.11</b>		<b>1,529</b>	<b>3.74</b>

**Table 4.2: The other pronouns**

<i>It</i> words	Freq.	Relative freq.	<i>You</i> words	Freq.	Relative freq.	<i>We</i> words	Freq.	Relative freq.
it	594	1.45	you	264	0.65	we	100	0.24
its	42	0.10	yourself	7	0.02	our	45	0.11
			ye	2	0.00	us	44	0.11
			yours	2	0.00	ours	1	0.00
						ourselves	1	0.00
<b>Tot. 40,848</b>	<b>636</b>	<b>1.56</b>		<b>275</b>	<b>0.67</b>		<b>191</b>	<b>0.47</b>

  

<i>They</i> words	Freq.	Relative freq.	<i>She</i> words	Freq.	Relative freq.
them	80	0.20	her	96	0.24
they	69	0.17	she	49	0.12
their	35	0.09	herself	4	0.01
themselves	2	0.00			
<b>Tot. 40,848</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>0.46</b>		<b>149</b>	<b>0.36</b>

As shown in Table 4.1, the most frequently occurring personal pronouns are the *I* words (5.11%) followed by the *he* words (3.74%). The occurrences recorded for the remaining personal pronouns (*cf.* Table 4.2) are much lower; among these, the most frequently occurring pronoun is the neutral *it/its* (1.56%) followed by a lower frequency of occurrences of the *you* (0.67%), *we* (0.47%) and *they* words (0.46%); The *she* words hold the least frequency of all (0.36%). The *we*, *you* and *they* words, if looked in their concordances, appear to be mainly employed by the *I* narrator-protagonist to refer to a male or other males who, most of the times, is/are part of the crew, and which for the *we* words also include the protagonist. Instead, the *she* words point in most of the cases

(138 occurrences out of 149), as is the convention in English, to the ship the young captain left, and the ship he is appointed to (see also Baldwin 2015: 132-146).

An interesting distinction is flagged up between the different frequencies of occurrence in the male+male patterns. First, the *I-he* pattern prevails over the *I-you*, *I-we* and the *I-they* patterns. When these patterns are looked at in their linguistic context, the *he* words, which the *I*-protagonist refers to, represent for him the adult world and include characters such as Captain Kent, the commander of the narrator's previous ship, the experienced retired navigator Mr. Giles, Hamilton, a non-paying loafer and snob (at the beginning of the story), the haunting figure of the dead former captain whose position the young protagonist takes up, but most of the time to the ship-mates Mr. Burns and Ransome. The *I-he* pattern is even statistically higher if we consider the fact that the protagonist refers to these two characters also by their proper names, which hold the highest frequencies in the statistics for proper nouns (Mr. Burns 114, Ransome 63); this may reflect the fact that, in his relations with the external world, the protagonist interacts mainly with the two opposing forces: the antagonist Mr. Burns, who continually reminds him of the former captain, and the helper, Ransome, who the young captain can rely on during his trial.

As for the least occurring pronouns such as the *you* words the statistics, as they stand now, do not distinguish between its singular and plural forms or its grammatical function (*i.e.* *you* as subject or as object). However, the concordances of the *you* words show that they are mainly used by the narrator-protagonist in the singular, and occur in the dialogues taking place between the young captain and one of crew-members, mainly Ransome from the start till the end of the journey. The same holds true for the *we* words, which the protagonist employs to refer principally to Ransome and himself. Eventually, the *they* words refer most of the times to the crew-members the young captain is in charge of.

In the light of these results, and by taking into account the type of work under analysis, we may advance some initial considerations. The high frequency of occurrence of *I* words may be associated with its genre, the novel of formation, and its narrative mode (*i.e.* first-person narration). However, a novel of formation is not necessarily told in the first person, for example Joyce's novel of formation *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) is told in third-person. The patterns of the different pronouns might also reveal a peculiar interaction towards the adult world. In fact it appears that during his ordeal the young captain favours the *I-Mr. Burns* (his antagonist) and the *I-Ransome* (his helper) relationships and tends to exclude the *I-they* and the *I-we* relationships. Perhaps the higher use of the one-to-one patterns hints at the protagonist's difficulty in feeling part of crew and his need to rely on someone he can trust; it could also be a sign of lack of comradeship, or even be a self-defense strategy enacted by someone who still has to be accepted in the adult world.<sup>ix</sup> These are of course tentative interpretations that will be partially backed up in the qualitative analysis.

## 5. Sample Texts for Qualitative Analysis

From the illustration of the statistics of the personal pronouns in *The Shadow-Line*, it has emerged that the frequency of *I* words referring to the narrator-protagonist is quantitatively higher compared to those of the other pronouns, and that the *I* narrator-protagonist is characterized, in his interaction with the external world, by the *I-he* pattern referring mainly to the helper (Ransome) and to the antagonist (Mr. Burns) of the story. However, the centrality in the narrative of the major character's fight between his inner self and the adult world can be better understood through a detailed analysis of sample texts representative of the protagonist's journey "from one idealistic world-view to a realistic/materialistic one" (LaMont 2011: 109).

The passages selected are taken from the beginning, middle and end of the story, each representing a key phase of the protagonist's maturing process: the initial situation (the protagonist's idealistic, optimist world-view), the obstacle (the ordeal he has to face) and finally the resolution (the goal is achieved: the ship and the crew are taken safely back to harbour).

### 5.1 The *I* words at the beginning of the story

The sample texts chosen for detailed analysis are of different sizes: Sample Text 1 is of 354 words, Sample Text 2 of 389, and Sample Text 3 of 451. Despite the excerpts being rather short, for sake of clarity, before linguistic analysis, I provide a summary table of the pronouns for each of the sample.

Table 5.1 shows the occurring pronouns (first column from left) followed by their parts of speech (POS).<sup>x</sup> The frequencies of each pronoun (*e.g.* *I*) are shown in column three, while the last column shows the total relative frequency of each category of pronouns (*e.g.* all the *I* words), which was calculated against the total number of words occurring in the sample text. The total words occurring in the text, the total number of pronouns and their total relative frequency are given at the bottom of the table.

**Table 5.1: Pronouns words in Sample Text 1**

<b>Pronouns words</b>	<b>POS</b>	<b>Freq.</b>	<b>Relative Freq.</b>
<i>I</i> words			
<b>I</b>	PPIS1	5	
<b>my</b>	APPGE	3	
<b>me</b>	PPIO1	1	
<b>myself</b>	PPX1	1	
<b>Tot.</b>		<b>10</b>	<b>2.82</b>
<i>It</i> words			
<b>It</b>	PPH1	7	

<b>its</b>	APPGE	3	
<b>Tot.</b>		<b>10</b>	<b>2.82</b>
<b><i>She</i> words</b>			
<b>she</b>	PPHS1	1	
<b>Tot.</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>0.28</b>
<b>Tot. words</b>		<b>Tot.</b>	<b>5.93</b>
<b>354</b>		<b>Pronouns</b>	
		<b>21</b>	

Table 5.1 shows that of the 354 words the text is made up of, 5.93% belong to the category of personal pronouns which are distributed between the *I* words (2.82%), the impersonal *it* (2.82%) or the impersonal *one* (2.54%, although this pronoun is not the object of quantitative analysis, it adds to the stylistic quality of the passage); the only other occurring pronoun is feminine *she* which occurs only once (0.28%) and refers, in this context, to the ship.

Sample Text 1 is taken from the opening of the tale when the unnamed protagonist is the only character on the scene and is telling the narratee (understood in this case, by default, as the reader) about the reasons for quitting his job as a mariner on a steamship. The passage exemplifies an element typically found at the beginning of a novel of formation in which, as noted by Stape and Simmons (in Conrad 2013: xlv), “the youthful hero [...] experiences a sudden discontent, shock, or impulse for change that entails a break with the known routines of family, career or traditional home.” The pronouns appear in their co-text as follows (the pronouns are marked in italics).

Only the young have such moments. *I* don't mean the very young. No. The very young have, properly speaking, no moments. *It* is the privilege of early youth to live in advance of *its* days in all the beautiful continuity of hope which knows no pauses and no introspection.

*One* closes behind *one* the little gate of mere boyishness--and enters an enchanted garden. *Its* very shades glow with promise. Every turn of the path has *its* seduction. And *it* isn't because *it* is an undiscovered country. *One* knows well enough that all mankind had streamed that way. *It* is the charm of universal experience from which one expects an uncommon or personal sensation - a bit of *one's* own.

*One* goes on recognizing the landmarks of the predecessors, excited, amused, taking the hard luck and the good luck together--the kicks and the half-pence, as the saying is--the picturesque common lot that holds so many possibilities for the deserving or perhaps for the lucky. Yes. *One* goes on. And the time, too, goes on - till *one* perceives ahead a shadow-line warning *one* that the region of early youth, too, must be left behind.

This is the period of life in which such moments of which *I* have spoken are likely to come. What moments? Why, the moments of boredom, of weariness, of dissatisfaction. Rash moments. *I* mean moments when the still young are inclined to commit rash actions, such as getting married suddenly or else throwing up a job for no reason.



This is not a marriage story. *It* wasn't so bad as that with *me*. *My* action, rash as *it* was, had more the character of divorce - almost of desertion. For no reason on which a sensible person could put a finger *I* threw up *my* job - chucked *my* berth - left the ship of which the worst that could be said was that *she* was a steamship and therefore, perhaps, not entitled to that blind loyalty which... . However, *it's* no use trying to put a gloss on what even at the time *I myself* half suspected to be a caprice.  
(2013: 11-12)

The first impression of this passage is of an invisible narrator ruminating on the anxieties of youth (e.g. "Only the young have such moments") and who is struggling to reveal itself openly as the protagonist of the story. Such an internal struggle is particularly perceived in the first part of the passage (Paragraphs 1-4) through the alternation between a subjective internal narration (*I* subject (7)<sup>xi</sup>, which is the only pronoun referring to people present in the passage, and the impersonal *one it* (7) and *one* (8)).

After the general opening statement "Only the young have such moments," the *I* presents itself as the speaker of the succeeding vague statement: "*I* don't mean the very young." Yet, in the next sentences the explicit *I* disappears, and becomes invisible thanks to the use of the impersonal *it* (e.g. "*It* is the privilege of early youth to live in advance of *its* days"), or of *one*, which returns, at the beginning of Paragraphs 2 and 3 or is embedded in sentences (e.g. "And the time, too, goes on - till *one* perceives ahead a shadow-line"). In Paragraph 4 the *I* pronoun still occupies a rather 'weak' position within the sentences as it post-modifies a phrase or a clause (e.g. "such moments of which *I* have spoken," "Rash moments. *I* mean moments") and thus it appears to have the function of a mere guide to the reader. Again, though not so markedly evident, as in the first part of the passage (Paragraphs 1-3), the speaker seems to hide himself behind intentionally generic observations.

However, the speaker is paving the way to introducing his leading role in the story (also confirmed by the high occurrence of the *I* words), which will be the 'confession' of his coming of age, symbolically referred to in this extract and elsewhere in the tale as 'a shadow line.' This role becomes clear in Paragraph 5 with the object pronoun *me* (1) and the possessive *my* (3), which make the story more subjective and personal and help clarify who the explicit protagonist is (a mariner). At the beginning of Paragraph 5, *I* moves from a generic and summarizing statement ("It wasn't so bad as that with *me*") to a clearer definition of what "*my* action" had entailed ("*My* action, rash as *it* was, had more the character of divorce"), which is spelled out through "*I* threw up *my* job-chucked *my* berth-left the ship." From the generic "*my* action," the narrator becomes more specific by clarifying the type of action ("*my* job") and next, more concretely, the type of job he left "*my* berth," (i.e. "the ship"), a decision that is however partially justified by the consideration that "*she* was a steamship [...]." In fact, the *I* acknowledges that "*it's* no use trying to put a gloss on what even at the time *I myself* half suspected to be a caprice."

## 5.2 The *I* words in the middle of the story

Table 5.2 shows the occurring pronouns in Sample Text 2. Of the 389 words occurring in the text, 12.33% are pronouns, amongst which the *I* words are the highest (7.19%) followed by the *he* words (3.85%); the other pronouns hold a very low occurrence (*we* and *you* words 0.51%, and *it* words 0.26%).

**Table 5.2: Pronoun words in Sample Text 2**

<b>Pronoun words</b>	<b>POS</b>	<b>Freq.</b>	<b>Relative Freq.</b>
<b><i>I</i> words</b>			
<b>I</b>	PPIS1	18	
<b>me</b>	PPIO1	6	
<b>my</b>	APPGE	3	
<b>myself</b>	PPX1	1	
<b>Tot.</b>		<b>28</b>	<b>7.19</b>
<b><i>He</i> words</b>			
<b>he</b>	PPHS1	11	
<b>his</b>	APPGE	3	
<b>him</b>	PPHO1	1	
<b>Tot.</b>		<b>15</b>	<b>3.85</b>
<b><i>We</i> words</b>			
<b>we</b>	PPIS2	1	
<b>our</b>	APPGE	1	
<b>Tot.</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>0.51</b>
<b><i>You</i> words</b>			
<b>you</b>	PPY	2	
<b>Tot.</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>0.51</b>
<b><i>It</i> words</b>			
<b>it</b>	PPH1	1	
<b>Tot.</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>0.26</b>
<b>Tot. words</b>		<b>Tot.</b>	<b>12.33</b>
<b>389</b>		<b>Pronouns</b>	
		<b>48</b>	

Sample Text 2 is taken from the middle of the story, when the young protagonist's trial reaches its *climax*: the Chief Mate, Mr. Burns, is ill, the rest of the crew is also seriously

ill, and the ship is marooned in a dead sea, thus unable to continue the planned voyage. Here, the young commander relies on the helper Ransome. The pronouns appear in their co-text as follows (the pronouns are marked in italics).

*I* avoided giving Mr. Burns any opening for conversation for the next few days. *I* merely used to throw *him* a hasty, cheery word when passing *his* door. *I* believe that if *he* had had the strength *he* would have called out after *me* more than once. But *he* hadn't the strength. Ransome, however, observed to *me* one afternoon that the mate "seemed to be picking up wonderfully."

"Did *he* talk any nonsense to *you* of late?" *I* asked casually. "No, sir." Ransome was startled by the direct question; but, after a pause, *he* added equably: "*He* told *me* this morning, sir, that *he* was sorry *he* had to bury *our* late captain right in the ship's way, as one may say, out of the Gulf." "Isn't this nonsense enough for *you*?" *I* asked, looking confidently at the intelligent, quiet face on which the secret uneasiness in the man's breast had thrown a transparent veil of care. Ransome didn't know. *He* had not given a thought to the matter. And with a faint smile *he* flitted away from *me* on *his* never-ending duties, with *his* usual guarded activity.

Two more days passed. *We* had advanced a little way - a very little way - into the larger space of the Gulf of Siam. Seizing eagerly upon the elation of the first command thrown into *my* lap, by the agency of Captain Giles, *I* had yet an uneasy feeling that such luck as this has got perhaps to be paid for in some way. *I* had held, professionally, a review of *my* chances. *I* was competent enough for that. At least, *I* thought so. *I* had a general sense of *my* preparedness which only a man pursuing a calling *he* loves can know. That feeling seemed to *me* the most natural thing in the world. As natural as breathing. *I* imagined *I* could not have lived without *it*.

*I* don't know what *I* expected. Perhaps nothing else than that special intensity of existence which is the quintessence of youthful aspirations. Whatever *I* expected *I* did not expect to be beset by hurricanes. *I* knew better than that. In the Gulf of Siam there are no hurricanes. But neither did *I* expect to find *myself* bound hand and foot to the hopeless extent which was revealed to *me* as the days went on.

(2013: 68-69)

In Sample Text 1 (*cf.* Section 5.1), the *I* narrator was the sole occupant of the narrative for the quality or topic of the text itself as the *I* introduces himself, as the narrator-protagonist of the story to come. In this passage the *I* is no longer focalizing exclusively on his inner self but is continually moving between *I* (18) and the external world by means of the *he* words (*he* (11), *he* (3), *him* (1)), which deictically point either to Mr. Burns or Ransome, the antagonist and the helper respectively. The passage could be regarded as an illustration of the function of *I-he* pattern that, as pointed out (*cf.* Section 4.1), is the protagonist's most favoured pattern of interaction in the whole story.

In Paragraph 1, through the *I* words (*I* (3), *me* (2)), we can still acknowledge the pivotal role that the *I*-narrator-protagonist occupies despite the fact that focalization is not on himself but rather on his preoccupation about the ill Mr. Burns (mainly referred to through *he* words (5)). Paragraph 2 is mainly characterized by the dialogue taking place between the narrator-protagonist and Ransome. The *I* words (4) occur less frequently compared to those of *he* (*he* (7), *his* (2)) and we can also notice the presence

*you* (2) and *our* (1). In the dialogic structure of this paragraph, the pronouns occurring are arranged in a more modulated manner: the *I* words employed to refer to the *I* protagonist occur three times as *I* (2) and *me* (1). The pronoun *me* referring to Ransome, who is here the interlocutor of the *I*-narrator-protagonist, occurs once. The topic of the dialogue taking place between the two characters is centred on the condition of Mr. Burns who is present in the Paragraph 2 as *he* (4). The remaining occurrences of the *he* words (*he* (3) and *his* (2)) refer to Ransome in both the dialogue and narration. Overall, the *I* (3) protagonist is downplayed by the occurrence of narrative *he* (10) and dialogic *he* (10).

In Paragraphs 3 and 4, the *I* words (*I* (7), *my* (3), *me* (1)) return to play the dominant role. Indeed the paragraphs are built upon a persistent sequencing of rapid reflections of the *I* protagonist who does not leave room, except in a very circumscribed way, for the external world. The confessional use of *I* is so intense that the generic *we* ((1) referring to the *I* protagonist+the crew) peters out at the very beginning, but it is soon absorbed by the observations of the protagonist; the single use of *he* in these paragraphs refers to indefinite *man* (“*I* had a general sense of *my* preparedness which only a man pursuing a calling *he* loves can know”). While *it* (1), besides marking the importance the protagonist’s feelings, summarizes and concludes the awareness that the protagonist has now achieved (“That feeling seemed to me the most natural thing in the world. [...] *I* could not have lived without *it*”).

In Paragraph 5, only *I* words (*I* (7), *me* (1), *myself* (1)) occur. Real or potential events (e.g. “*I* don’t know what *I* expected”) give rise to his reflections and impressions (“Whatever *I* expected *I* did not expect to be beset by hurricanes”) that are recalled in the present by the narrator’s overpowering and relieving will to make them the object of confession.

Sample Text 2 provides a specimen of the centrality of the *I* which on the one hand becomes exclusive, when everything is filtered and absorbed by it, in order for the *I* narrator-protagonist to master everything and thus overcome his own youthful existential anguish (“the shadow line”). On the other hand, he grants voice, at different degrees, to both his antagonist and helper, only for his own aims, *i.e.* to assure himself against his own anguish and preoccupations.

### 5.3 The *I* words at the end of the story

Table 5.3 shows the occurring pronouns in Sample Text 3. Of the 451 words, pronouns amount to 14.41%. The text displays different categories of pronouns amongst which the *I* words and *he* are the highest (5.32%) followed by a lower occurrence of *they* (1.33%), *you*, *it* (1.11%) and *we* (0.22%) words.

**Table 5.3: Pronoun words in Sample Text 3**

<b>Pronoun words</b>	<b>POS</b>	<b>Freq.</b>	<b>Relative Freq.</b>
<b><i>I</i> words</b>			
<b>I</b>	PPIS1	17	
<b>me</b>	PPIO1	5	
<b>my</b>	APPGE	2	
<b>Tot.</b>		<b>24</b>	<b>5.32</b>
<b><i>He</i> words</b>			
<b>he</b>	PPHS1	11	
<b>his</b>	APPGE	7	
<b>him</b>	PPHO1	3	
<b>himself</b>	PPX1	3	
<b>Tot.</b>		<b>24</b>	<b>5.32</b>
<b><i>They</i> words</b>			
<b>they</b>	PPHS2	3	
<b>them</b>	PPHO2	3	
<b>Tot.</b>		<b>6</b>	<b>1.33</b>
<b><i>You</i> words</b>			
<b>you</b>	PPY	5	
<b>Tot.</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>1.11</b>
<b><i>We</i> words</b>			
<b>We words</b>	APPGE	1	
<b>Tot.</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>0.22</b>
<b><i>It</i> words</b>			
<b>it</b>	PPH1	5	
<b>Tot.</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>1.11</b>
<b>Tot. words</b>		<b>Tot.</b>	<b>14.41</b>
<b>451</b>		<b>Pronouns</b>	
		<b>65</b>	

Sample Text 3 is from the final part of the story when, at last, the ship reaches the Port of Siam and the tension that has accumulated during the voyage is finally released: the crew is safe. Ransome unexpectedly informs the young captain of his decision to leave the ship, upsetting him. The pronouns appear in their co-text as follows (the pronouns are marked in italics).

“*You don’t mean to leave the ship!*” *I* cried out. “*I do really, sir. I want to go and be quiet somewhere. Anywhere. The hospital will do.*” “But, Ransome,” *I* said. “*I hate the idea of parting with you.*” *I* must go,” *he* broke in, “*I have the right.*” *He* gasped and a look of almost savage determination passed over *his* face. For an instant *he* was another being. And *I* saw under the worth and the comeliness of the man the humble reality of things. Life was a boon to *him* - this precarious hard life, and *he* was thoroughly alarmed about *himself*.

“Of course *I* shall pay you off if you wish *it*,” *I* hastened to say. “Only *I* must ask you to remain on board till this afternoon. *I* can’t leave Mr. Burns absolutely by *himself* in the ship for hours.” *He* softened at once and assured *me* with a smile and in *his* natural pleasant voice that *he* understood that very well.

When *I* returned on deck everything was ready for the removal of the men. *It* was the last ordeal of that episode which had been maturing and tempering *my* character - though *I* did not know *it*.

*It* was awful. *They* passed under *my* eyes one after another - each of *them* an embodied reproach of the bitterest kind, till *I* felt a sort of revolt wake up in *me*. Poor Frenchy had gone suddenly under. *He* was carried past *me* insensible, *his* comic face horribly flushed and as if swollen, breathing stertorously. *He* looked more like Mr. Punch than ever; a disgracefully intoxicated Mr. Punch.

The austere Gambriel, on the contrary, had improved temporarily. *He* insisted on walking on *his* own feet to the rail - of course with assistance on each side of him. But *he* gave way to a sudden panic at the moment of being swung over the side and began to wail despairingly:

“Don’t let *them* drop *me*, sir. Don’t let *them* drop *me*, sir!” While *I* kept on shouting to *him* in most soothing accents: “All right, Gambriel. *They* won’t! *They* won’t!”

*It* was no doubt very ridiculous. The blue-jackets on *our* deck were grinning quietly, while even Ransome himself (much to the fore in lending a hand) had to enlarge *his* wistful smile for a fleeting moment.

*I* left for the shore in the steam pinnace, and on looking back beheld Mr. Burns actually standing up by the taffrail, still in *his* enormous woolly overcoat. The bright sunlight brought out *his* weirdness amazingly. *He* looked like a frightful and elaborate scarecrow set up on the poop of a death-stricken ship, set up to keep the seabirds from the corpses.

(2013:102-103)

Contrary to Sample Text 1, where the internal world of the protagonist was foregrounded, and contrary to Sample Text 2, where the *I-he* pattern prevailed, the passage displays the occurrence of different pronouns (*cf.* Table 5.3) which in the context help connote its quality: the tension of the dramatic voyage is loosening, and the crew-members, except for the *I* narrator-protagonist, seem to be overawed by the urge to land and leave behind the nightmare of the voyage. On the one hand, the ending of

the ordeal foregrounds again the exclusive and somehow dependent relationship of the protagonist towards Ransome, as emerged in the analysis Text 2. In fact, in Paragraphs 1-2, the *I* words occurring refer to either the *I*-protagonist (11) or to Ransome (4), while the *you* (5) and *he* (9) words to Ransome only. Here, we can see how the *I* protagonist's external use of *I* and internal use (in his dialogue with Ransome and in his internal thought) are centred on the anxiety and fear of having to depart from Ransome, the adult who has supported, and guided him into his entry in the adult world (e.g. "You don't mean to leave the ship!" I cried out. "He gasped and a look of almost savage determination passed over his face").

Through the pronouns (e.g. *he*, *they*, *our*) occurring in the remaining part of the passage, the protagonist shifts onto the external world, i.e. all his crew-members ("they:" Gambriel the grizzled sailor, Franky, Mr. Burns). Now, the narrator-protagonist seems more absorbed in the needs of the people he is responsible for than in himself and this attention to the real world could be a sign of his maturity. At last, the generic *it* holds the function of accelerating the narrative rhythm that brings the now no longer inexperienced captain to conclude his ordeal ("It was the last ordeal of that episode which had been maturing and tempering *my* character").

The fact that the characters burst back on the scene entails that the omnipresence of the *I* narrator-protagonist is diminished and also marks the end, for lack of narrative space now, to the confession of a dramatic, perhaps rewarding rite of passage, which has been the passage "from one idealistic world-view to a realistic/materialistic one" LaMont (2011: 109).

## 6. Further Directions

The intra-textual quantitative investigation of the personal pronouns in *The Shadow-Line* through the computer has provided evidence for the *I* words as a foregrounded linguistic feature of this *novella* of formation. However, further investigation needs to be carried out in order to ascertain to what extent the salience of *I* can be attributed to the genre (*bildungsroman*), to the narrative form (*novella*), or to the narrative style (1st person narration). This would require the investigation of pronouns in Conrad's *The Shadow-Line* via quantitative inter-textual analyses (Adolphs 2016: 65-69) with other corpora or with the works of Conrad's that literary critics have claimed to share many of the narrative and thematic characteristics with *The Shadow-Line* (see, for example, Watt 1981: 93; Peters 2013: 37-38). This could be carried out through keyness analysis in Wmatrix (Rayson 2009). The study of this grammatical area could be further refined by the inclusion of all the forms of impersonal pronouns and by the study of their collocates (Stubbs 2005: 5-24), which would further contribute to showing how the internal emotional world of the protagonist interacts and develops in this *novella* of formation.

## Notes

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- i The *Shadow-Line* had been preceded by more complex and lengthy works such as *Lord Jim* (1901), *Nostramo* (1904) and *The Secret Agent* (1907).
- ii Citations from Conrad's *The Shadow-Line* (1917) are from the Cambridge Edition to the Works of Joseph Conrad edited by Stape and Simmons (2013).
- iii Hirsch views the Bildungsroman as a European literary genre and uses it as an umbrella term comprising different novels of formation amongst which she lists that of "confession."
- iv The initiation ritual is a narrative device marking the entrance and acceptance of a youth into one's social group. Propp applied such notion fully to his structuralist analysis of the tale, especially to his work *The Morphology of the Folktale* (1968).
- v There have been critics who have claimed that *The Shadow-Line* resembles in many respects to Coleridge's *The Rhyme of The Ancient Mariner* for they both deal with the supernatural. However, Conrad (Stape and Simmons, in Conrad 2013: 5), in the author's note to *The Shadow-Line* rejected such claims. Indeed he stated: "This story, which I admit to be in its brevity a fairly complex piece of work, was not intended to touch on the supernatural. Yet more than one critic has been inclined to take it in that way, seeing in it an attempt on my part to give the fullest scope to my imagination by taking it beyond the confines of the world of the living, suffering humanity. But as a matter of fact my imagination is not made of stuff so elastic as all that. I believe that if I attempted to put the strain of the Supernatural on it would fail deplorably and exhibit an unlovely gap."
- vi In this regard, Watt (1981: 270) talks of the narrative device of "delayed decoding" often employed by Conrad in his earlier works (e.g. *Heart of Darkness*) through which the reader is placed "in the position of being an immediate witness of each step in the process whereby the semantic gap between the sensations aroused in the individual by an object or event, and their actual cause of meaning, was slowly closed in his consciousness."
- vii Impersonal pronouns forms (e.g. *one*) have not been object of analysis.
- viii By *I* words, *he* words, *etc.*, I refer to all the pronominal forms (e.g. *I, me, my, mine* and *myself*) and to their grammatical categories (e.g. subject, object, *etc.*).
- ix Social psychologists such as Pennebaker (2011) adopt computer-aided methods to study people's linguistic patterns. Function words are regarded as powerful indicators of people's personalities. Amongst the most occurring function words are the personal pronouns that, according to Pennebaker, may reveal positive or negative experiences. For example higher use of *We* words (i.e. *we, us, our, ours*) generally reveal a positive experience while *I* words (i.e. *I, me, my, mine*) holds a higher rate in people who are experiencing a negative experience, as they tend to "focus inwardly" (*id.*: 106).
- x The POS categories of the personal pronouns are derived from UCREL CLAWS7 tagset and they can be viewed in Appendix 1.
- xi Numbers in round brackets refer to the occurrences of pronouns in the sample texts analysed.

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#### **Appendix 1**

APPE	possessive pronoun, pre-nominal (e.g. my, your, our)
PPGE	nominal possessive personal pronoun (e.g. mine, yours)
PPH1	3rd person sing. neuter personal pronoun (it)
PPHO1	3rd person sing. objective personal pronoun (him, her)
PPHO2	3rd person plural objective personal pronoun (them)
PPHS1	3rd person sing. subjective personal pronoun (he, she)
PPHS2	3rd person plural subjective personal pronoun (they)
PPIO1	1st person sing. objective personal pronoun (me)
PPIO2	1st person plural objective personal pronoun (us)
PPIS1	1st person sing. subjective personal pronoun (I)
PPIS2	1st person plural subjective personal pronoun (we)
PPX1	singular reflexive personal pronoun (e.g. yourself, itself)
PPX2	plural reflexive personal pronoun (e.g. yourselves, themselves)
PPY	2nd person personal pronoun (you)