

THE
POLISH HERITAGE OF
JOSEPH CONRAD

THÈSE

PRÉSENTÉE À LA FACULTÉ DES LETTRES DE L'UNIVERSITÉ DE NEUCHÂTEL
POUR OBTENIR LE GRADE DE DOCTEUR

PAR G. MORF

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Ready is your boat, and in the outspread sails
Blows the wind, lighthearted,
Some of us life may deceive,
You will choose the right way.

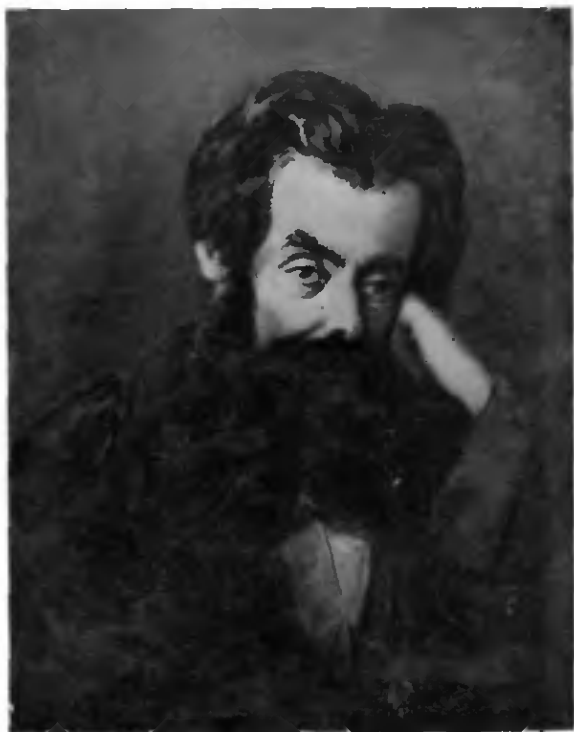
May cowards tremble at lofty waves,
To you they bring good fortune!
You know the hidden reefs,
And are familiar with the tempest!

Your eager boat, with eagle's wings,
Will make a rapid passage,
And, steered by reason, governed with strength,
Will reach the shores of fame!

But, resting from your journey,
In the golden lands of fortune,
Remember, o remember with a-sigh
Those who perished in the tempest!

(A. Korzeniowski to T. Bobrowski, about 1850).

(The original of this piece of poetry is in Polish. It has been published in Bobrowski's Memoirs, Vol. I, p. 363. The original MS. was found amongst Conrad's papers, and curiously enough, it is the only piece of handwriting of his father which he possessed.)



APOLLO KORZENIOWSKI IN EXILE
(From a portrait)

A leonine head, the eyes of a dreamer and visionary, the beard of a man whose accounts with the world at large are closed.

Frontispiece]

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G. MORF.

1. Throughout this book, the italics are the Author's.
2. In quotations, suppressed passages have been marked . . . , and points of suspension recurring in the original text have been replaced by —.
3. Whenever possible, only the name of the author has been given after quotations instead of a full indication of the source. The title of the respective book will be found in the bibliography, under the name of the author.
4. All important Polish names, especially those of Conrad's relatives, have been given in the correct Polish spelling. The English form has only been used when such a form is current and when it was not essential to reproduce the original Polish.
5. All page numbers given in references to Joseph Conrad's books are those of Dent's Uniform Edition and the American Concord Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad.

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THE ANCESTORS

That which in their grown-up years may appear to the world about them as the most enigmatic side of their natures, and perhaps must remain for ever obscure even to themselves, will be their unconscious response to the still voice of that inexorable past from which his work of fiction and their personalities are remotely derived.—(*A Personal Record.*)

“HE was a man of noble rank, of gentle birth,” says a Polish writer of Joseph Conrad, in an article which is reproduced in Appendix II. The formula fits Conrad well. He was a descendant of an old Polish family of landowning gentry, whose class, with brilliant qualities and pronounced defects, had governed Poland for over three centuries.

To study¹ Joseph Conrad's ancestry has more than purely an historical interest. Unenlightened as we still are concerning hereditary ability we know that families, just like races, possess traits of their own which occasionally develop to such an extent as to dominate during many generations. The object of this chapter will be, therefore, to examine whether

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the Nałęcz Korzeniowski family, to which Conrad belongs, possessed such distinctive traits, and, if so, how they might be defined and traced in Conrad's work and personality.

English sources of information concerning the subject are naturally scarce and incomplete. Joseph Conrad did nothing to enlighten us, and his indications are one-sided, vague, and often even incorrect. In a letter to an American friend and printed in *The New Republic* (U.S.A.) of August 4th, 1918, he wrote:

. . . my maternal uncle advised me that if I wanted to know something about my descent I would find it in the archives of the Province of Podolia,¹ relating mainly to the 18th century . . . he had had researches made already, which showed that *during that century my paternal ancestors were men of substance, and what may be called "prominent citizens," frequently elected to provincial offices of trust, and forming alliances in their own modest sphere after the usual several years' service in the army of the Republic.* My paternal grandfather served in the Polish army from 1817 to 1820, when he sold his land in Podolia and came to live on his wife's estate in Volhynia. Their fortune, which descended to my father, his brother, and his sister,² was confiscated by the Russian Government in consequence of the rebellion of 1863.

As I shall show afterwards, Conrad's account of his ancestors of the eighteenth century is fairly accurate,

¹ Now in Ukraine, Soviet Russia.

² Conrad's father had two brothers, but no sister. Conrad had the habit of ignoring the existence of his uncle Robert (comp. p. 8).

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but the picture he gives of his paternal grandfather is rather different from that given by his uncle, whose unfavourable opinion he certainly did not ignore. Joseph Conrad mentioned his grandfather, Teodor, again in a letter to Edward Garnett, dated 20th January, 1900, and first published in Aubrey's *Life and Letters*, vol. I, pp. 290-291, from which I quote the following passage:

My paternal grandfather, Theodor N. Korzeniowski, served in the cavalry. Decorated with the cross "Virtuti Militari" (a plain white enamel with a green wreath of laurel and these words in the centre), something in the nature of V.C.¹ Attained the rank of captain in 1830,² when the Russo-Polish war occurred, after which the so-called Polish army ceased to exist. Two wounds. Retired to a little hereditary estate adjoining the extensive possessions of the family of Sobański they are in the Almanach de Gotha), great friends and, I fancy, distant relations.³ Administered the territorial fortune of Madame Melanie Sobańska. Wrote a tragedy in five acts, privately printed, and so extremely dull that no one was ever known to have read it through. I know I couldn't, notwithstanding my family pride and the general piety of my disposition.

In the same letter, Conrad describes his other grandfather, Joseph Bobrowski, as "a landowner, man of wit, owner of a famous stud of steppe horses," who "lived and died on his estate in Oratów; popular, greatly

¹ This cross is now in possession of Mrs. Conrad. See illustration, p. 16.

² In 1831, according to Conrad's uncle.

³ This was exact.

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lamented." He was anything but a literary man, and "never wrote but letters and a large number of promissory notes dedicated to various Jews."

In the same document Conrad mentions two of his uncles, Tadeusz and Stefan Bobrowski. Tadeusz, his guardian after his father's death, is quite a well-known figure to students of Conrad. *Almayer's Folly* is dedicated "to the memory of T. B.," and the greatest part of *A Personal Record* refers constantly to "my uncle and guardian, T. B." In his letter to Garnett, Joseph Conrad says of him:

Thaddeus, to whom I stand more in the relation of a son than of a nephew, was a man of powerful intelligence and great force of character, and possessed an enormous influence in the Three Provinces (Ukraine, Volhynia, and Podolia). A most distinguished man.

As to his other uncle, Stefan Bobrowski, Conrad says that he was, "in 1862, chief of the Polish Revolutionary Committee in Warsaw, and died, assassinated, soon after the Polish outbreak of 1863¹." Speaking of his mother's family generally, he goes on:

None of the members of the many families to which these two are related was a literary man; all made sacrifices of fortune, liberty, and life for the cause in which they believed; and very few had any illusions as to its success.

¹ According to T. Bobrowski, he was indeed a member of the Provisional Polish Government, but died in a duel with a political enemy, in 1862, before the Polish rising.

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Conrad's grand-uncle, Nicholas Bobrowski, is not mentioned in this letter. Joseph Conrad has given a portrait of this original man in *A Personal Record*, where his half-legendary person occupies a good deal of the Chapters II and III. Like Conrad's grandfather, Teodor, Nicholas had been a great warrior, who possessed the cross for valour. For the rest, the two men differed entirely, Nicholas being the most taciturn, and Teodor the most loquacious of men. Detailed accounts of Nicholas' brilliant career were known by heart by every member of the Bobrowski family, and his martial figure became one of Conrad's earliest admirations. Before serving in the Polish army, he had served under Napoleon, whom he worshipped (*A Personal Record*, pp. 29, 40 and 48); had been promoted to the rank of sub-lieutenant in 1808, of lieutenant in 1813; had been *officier d'ordonnance* to Marshal Marmont; had played a glorious part in the battle of Leipsic, and, finally, had become a captain in the Polish army. He was also *Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur*. He lived long enough to know the little Conrad, and although the boy was then too young to remember much of his physique, he obviously remembered the stories, glorious and pitiful, that perpetuated outstanding episodes of the grand-uncle's warfaring life. We can safely assume that the Old Warrior in "The Warrior's Soul" (one of the *Tales of Hearsay*) owes his existence to the grand-uncle "who once upon a time had eaten a dog." As a matter of fact, this warrior even uses typically Polish expressions, as I shall show in another chapter, though the reader is, of course, expected to take him for a Russian. Another descendant of Nicholas is the

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Rover, whose figure I shall study more closely in another chapter.

With the exception of his parents, the few persons cited above are the only Polish relatives mentioned by Conrad in his writings. It is obvious that he is greatly attracted by their military and patriotic virtues. He completely ignores their agricultural achievements (for, after all, they were landowners, and Nicholas' fortune, which descended to the young Conrad, had been made in agriculture).

In his *Life and Letters*, Jean-Aubry has given a short but well-informed account of the parents and grandparents of Joseph Conrad. Unfortunately, very much like Conrad's own version, the information given by Aubry is too much concerned with external events and dates to bring into relief the dominating traits of the Korzeniowski and Bobrowski families.

To find more detailed information we must turn to Polish sources, and before everything, to T. Bobrowski's *Memoirs*, which were published long after his death, in 1900. They consist of two volumes in which, on every page, some half-a-dozen new personages are introduced to the reader. In a few words, their merits are mentioned, their shortcomings criticized, and their past as well as their prospects are outlined. The whole society, Polish, Ukrainian, Russian, of Podolia, Volhynia, and part of the Ukraine, is depicted with a faithfulness and a seemingly unerring memory which astonish the reader. In spite of its late appearance, the book raised a storm of protests, and Bobrowski was posthumously accused of lack of patriotism by the writer of an anonymous pamphlet.

In his *Memoirs*, Bobrowski speaks only occasionally of his relatives. The tragic fate of his brother Stefan,



TEODOR KORZENIOWSKI •
(Conrad's paternal grandfather)

A man of great ability, captain in the Polish army till 1831, estate-manager afterwards, but more and more imbued with the unpractical romanticism of his age.

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for instance, is related soberly, unemotionally, in a few lines written in a mood which could be expressed thus: I always thought this would happen. The story of Conrad's father, from his first meeting with Bobrowski to his death, is written in the same spirit of stern objectivity.

And now I will quote the passages referring to Conrad's paternal grandparents. T. Bobrowski was well acquainted with their family, even before they became his relatives, and he had no indulgence for their weaknesses. The picture which he draws of Teodor is not as sympathetic as that which Conrad gave in his letter to Garnett (from which I have already quoted), but it is certainly, in spite of a dash of humour here and there, more reliable. He writes:

The parents of [Apollo] Korzeniowski¹ were very honest people and much respected in the neighbourhood. The mother was of the Dyakiewicz family, honourable, tyrannized over by her husband, a good mother, but leading an existence of no importance; the father, Teodor, lieutenant in 1807, and captain in 1831, fought well, but had all the narrow-mindedness of a "nobleman." He was convinced that he was the first soldier in Europe, the best estate-manager, and the man of the highest merit in the whole country, as a matter of fact, he was a utopian, and a teller of stories of that particular kind which first lie to themselves, get to believe firmly their own lies, and then pass them on to others and quarrel with those who will not believe

¹ Apollo Korzeniowski was Conrad's father.

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them. It goes without saying that he considered himself as a great politician and as a first-class patriot, for, without listening to common sense, he was always ready to saddle a horse and to chase the enemy out of the country.¹ And people listened to what he said and often even believed him, for everybody knew that the "noblemen" had fought well in old times. Few people, therefore, objected that they were equally good in inventing yarns of imaginary deeds of heroism. After the loss of the estate of his wife (in the Winnica district), he administered the estate Korytno, belonging to the Government, but though the estate was beautiful and the lease low, and in spite of his being quite an industrious and intelligent manager, he continued to live according to his illusions, and lost the rest of his money there.² For himself he had a great respect, but for his sons he nourished a strong admiration, especially when he spoke of them to others. It was a habit with him (especially when he was angry, which happened very often) to treat them, not as grown-up people, but as small boys, calling them imbeciles, if nothing worse, treatment which they bore with the greatest respect, kissing the father's hands. The eldest of his three sons, Robert, was a gambler and a drunkard, who died in 1863, no longer very young, having contributed not

¹ Conrad quotes these words in *A Personal Record* (p. 57): "He himself was of that type of Polish squire whose only ideal of patriotic action was to 'get into saddle and drive them out'."

² When Conrad wrote in a passage already quoted, that his fortune "was confiscated by the Russian Government in consequence of the rebellion of 1863," he seems to make a confusion between his grandfather and another relative, whose estate was confiscated after the rising of 1831.

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a little to the decline of the family. The youngest, Hilary, was just the same utopian as his father, and not less sarcastic than his brother Apollo, but without the latter's good manners. Occupied with estate managing his whole life, the poor devil quite intelligently "turned whips out of sand",¹ persuading himself and others (including myself) that one can make something out of nothing, till, in 1863, he was arrested before the rising and deported to Tomsk. There he took again to estate-managing, sought gold,² and speculated. He died in 1873, very much in debt. Only my brother-in-law³ did not possess that passion for speculating which had dominated his father and his brothers. Living amongst his personal, family, and political-patriotical illusions, the brave captain⁴ spent his old age in poverty, and in 1863 saw the consequences of his convictions. In spring, 1864, while he was looking after the estate of his son, Hilary, his ruined life ended. (Bobrowski I, pp. 363-365.)

This picture of Conrad's paternal grandfather, so different from that given by Conrad, shows clearly that the dominating traits of the Korzeniowski family in the first part of the nineteenth century were: A passion for speculation, an unpractical romanticism, and a vivid imagination, leading to boastfulness and untruthfulness. Fiercely devoted to the Polish cause, they

¹ Polish expression signifying: To produce something out of nothing, by mere bluff.

² Polish expression for: Trying to get rich without working, by a stroke of fortune. The story of Hilary (whom the young Conrad had known) has many traits in common with that of Almayer.

³ Joseph Conrad's father.

⁴ Joseph Conrad's paternal grandfather, Teodor.

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never accepted the Russian domination as an accomplished fact. In this as in other respects they were by no means an exception. In imagination the Polish country noblemen still lived, as a rule, in the days of Poland's military splendour. Not unlike Don Quixote, they never seemed to realize that the great age had gone, irretrievably gone, and that a new situation demanded a new adaptation to life.

The Polish *szlachcic* or "country nobleman" was, until not very long ago, especially in the Southern and Eastern provinces, the Pole *par excellence*, romantic and boastful, with an innate taste for liquor and an acquired taste for Western culture, always ready to take illusions for reality, and reality for a series of alternate strokes of fortune and misfortune, to be borne with Eastern fatalism, and possessed by that spirit of fierce and passionate individualism which, amongst other things, accounts for the unfortunate right of veto of every individual member of the Polish Diet, such as it existed before the last partition.

But the old *szlachcic* had his good qualities as well. Mickiewicz, in his "national" poem "Pan Tadeusz" has exalted them. That work is really an animated picture of the delightful country-life in the Polish *dwór* or "Hall." Unbounded hospitality was one of the nobleman's most distinctive traits of character, unbounded devotion to his friends and relatives another. The Polish gentleman disliked limitations in any sense. He was absolute in hatred and love alike. He had a strong taste for warfare. "The source of inspiration of the gentry lies in the virtue of military service" says Jablonowski in his *Heraldica*. The numerous struggles against neighbouring tribes

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and countries, which Poland had to fight in old times afforded ample opportunities for the display of their warlike qualities. The second partition of Poland saw the rise of the gallant and heroic figure of Kosciusko, whose life, ended in exile, inspired many generations of Polish men right down to this day. After the last partition, many Poles chose the profession of a soldier and served abroad. Eighty thousand Poles are said to have served under Napoleon alone, when were originated the so-called *Polish Legions*. The most famous of these is the legion formed under General Dombrowski, in Milano, which distinguished itself particularly in the Italian campaigns, and during the retreat from Moscow and the battle of Leipsic. Other Polish legions were formed during the Crimean war, and during the Franco-German war of 1870-71. In the country itself, the risings of 1830-31 and 1863 once again awoke the old fighting instinct of the gentry. V. Korolenko has drawn, in his autobiographical *History of my Contemporary*, the portrait of a young Polish patriot who, like so many others, sees in the rising the return to the romantic age of Poland's splendid wars. Korolenko was then a boy, living at Jitomir; near the homes of the Korzeniowski and Bobrowski families. (Jitomir is the town where Conrad was baptized. It is mentioned as J— on p. 58 of *A Personal Record*.)

Korolenko relates how he was present at the execution of a young Polish officer, Strojnowski, who asked for the favour of having his eyes unbandaged, and who himself gave the order to fire. And then the Russian writer (whose mother, by the way, was a Pole) adds the following reflections:

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The romance which attracted the young noblemen so much was a bad training for a war. The enthusiasm of these young people was inspired by a past which was done with, by a shadow of life, not by life itself. The crude and unromantic attack of a handful of peasants against the Cossacks had no resemblance to the beautiful pictures of battles as they imagined them. And so the poor Strojnowski had to pay with his life for his faith in historical romance. . . . (Chapter 12.)

The last war has shown that Polish warlike qualities are not dead. Pilsudski's and Haller's legions distinguished themselves not only during the war, but in the fight against the Russian invasion of 1920 as well. The youthfully romantic descent of Pilsudski upon Kiev, and the *coup* of Wilno in that year, and finally his more recent *coup d'état* upon Warsaw are evidence enough that the romance of war still exercises a great fascination on the Pole. For Pilsudski is by no means an exception, and he would never have become the undisputed popular hero of Poland if his romantic figure did not strongly appeal to the Polish mind. According to Count d'Etchegoyen (who is a *militaire* himself), Pilsudski is "a careful copy of Napoleon I" (p. 117).

The romantically warlike spirit of the Polish gentry lives in many pages of Conrad's works. His military tales like *The Duel*, *The Warrior's Soul*, *Gaspar Ruiz*, are its most perfect expression. But even apart from these, there are so many warriors, officers, and generals, so many "French lieutenants" in his books that there can be no doubt that we have to deal here with a distinct

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Polish trait. Where Conrad is more original (though not necessarily less Polish) is where he transfers his interest from the soldier to the seaman, who appears distinctly as a warrior fighting against the elements. Conrad belonged to a family where the fighting instinct had always been very marked.

His ancestors possessed indeed all the qualities and defects of their class. They were "Poles, Catholics, and gentlemen," as the phrase was. They were great warriors, but they had, as most noblemen, their agricultural hobbies.¹ Their taste for venture and adventure was often too marked to allow of a sedentary life. Most of them administered their earthly belongings in a way which ruined them. Very much like Conrad himself, they had not the money sense, and never remained long in the same place. These facts justified the constant warnings of Conrad's uncle against the "Korzeniowski strain," and explain sentences like these in his letters to his nephew:

You are always restless and careless. You remind me more of the Korzeniowskis than of my dear sister, your mother (1876).

You would not be a Nałęcz, dear boy, if you did not change your plans (1880).

As you are a Nałęcz, beware of risky speculations which rest on nothing but hope, for your grandfather wasted his property in speculations, and your uncle got into debt and many awkward fixes through the same cause (1881).

¹ Like the Polish gentleman whom the Conrads visited in 1914, see "Notes," p. 177, and Jessie Conrad, p. 71.

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He recognized, however, in the Nałęcz Korzeniowski "a spirit of initiative and enterprise superior to that which runs in our veins" (1880).¹

A few remarks concerning Conrad's name may be made here. His full name was *Józef Teodor Konrad Nałęcz Korzeniowski*² (or *Korzeniowski herbu Nałęcz*). There are many families bearing the name Korzeniowski which are not related at all. Conrad's family distinguished itself by the coat of arms "Nałęcz" (a handkerchief with two corners tied together)³ from other families of the same name. According to Conrad,⁴ he and his two sons were the only descendants of the Nałęcz Korzeniowski family.

There are different versions of the origin of the Nałęcz coat of arms. When Boleslav the Valiant converted the last pagan tribes of his kingdom to Christianity, he tied a handkerchief round their foreheads as a symbol of their attachment to the new

¹ The four preceding quotations are from Aubry I, pp. 39, 56, 65, 60.

² It may be noted as one of the curiosa in the history of English literature, that Conrad's name has been variously deformed by each of his friends and biographers, and that it is not even correct on his tombstone, where we read *Joseph Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski*, nor in Aubry's official biography which has *Josef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski*. The reason for this confusion is probably that in none of Conrad's papers (which I have examined), not even in his baptismal certificate, his name is given in full. But then, Conrad had been named after his grandfathers whose names were respectively *Józef* and *Teodor* (all documents agree in this). Joseph Conrad wrote in a letter to Edward Garnett, dated 20th January, 1900 (Aubry I, p. 290), that his full name was *Joseph Theodor Konrad Nałęcz Korzeniowski*, which is correct, the first two words being given in English spelling, the rest in Polish. *Joseph* or *Josef* are not Polish, the first being English and the second German or, possibly, a transcription from the Russian.

³ These arms adorn the inside of the cover of Conrad's Works, Dent's Uniform Edition.

⁴ Aubry I, p. 290.

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faith. The memory of this symbolic action is said to be preserved in the arms Nałęcz ("tied together"). Another explanation has it that the king bestowed these arms upon a warrior who dressed his royal wound in the midst of a battle. Whatever the value of these stories, these arms were always understood to be a symbol of faithfulness to the country, and to its religion, and that is how they must have been interpreted by Conrad's ancestors and by Conrad himself.

The name Nałęcz Korzeniowski appears (according to Dunin-Borkowski, p. 173) for the first time in 1584. It is mentioned again by the same author as being recorded in 1618 and 1625. Another author (Okolski II, p. 82) mentions, amongst the families possessing the "Nałęcz" arms, the Korzeniowscy "in the province Lublin," but without giving a date. As it is highly improbable that there should have been two families with this name and these arms, we can admit that Conrad belonged to that very old family of landowning gentry.

A Polish historian, Stanislaw Mleczeko, has published in a Polish paper¹ a study of Joseph Conrad, part of which the reader will find in Appendix III. In this article he gives detailed information about some of Conrad's ancestors, both on his father's and his mother's side.

According to Mleczeko, the most remarkable members of the Korzeniowski family were: Kajetan, who was, in 1775, chancellor of the principality of Lithuania. He married a Countess Krasicka, daughter of a military chief. Their son became lord of the manor Zakroczym in 1783. Their daughter married an army chaplain, Pocij, whose military deeds have been immortalized by Mickiewicz. In 1774, while defending Warsaw

¹ In the *Nowy Kurjer Polski* of 29th and 31st August, 1926.

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against the Muscovites, he is said to have received not less than twenty-two wounds. He eventually escaped and returned, long after the war, to Lithuania, where everybody had given him up as dead. Being "as crippled as straw," he was unable to take an active part in the Napoleonic wars, but he sent a considerable sum of money to support Dombrowski's Polish Legions. Other well-known members of this family were: Michał, a member of the Diet in Pinsk, and Ignacy, a man of letters, whose works (mostly poetry) were published in 1832 and 1838.

The family of Conrad's mother, the Bobrowskis, belonged to the same class of landowning gentry. They were, as a rule, wholly devoted to agriculture. It was not in their character to govern, to fight, or to write poetry. Their coat of arms represented a hawk. The family was old, but had emigrated to the Ukraine only at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The sole Bobrowski who took an active part in politics was Stefan, whose tragic fate has already been mentioned. And yet the family did not lack the warlike qualities of Polish gentry. Not less than four descendants of the Bobrowskis distinguished themselves in the recent war. Zbigniew and Emil were amongst the officers of the Polish Legion fighting on the side of the Allies for the freedom of Poland. Another Bobrowski commanded the "Students' Legion" in the struggle against the Russians in 1920, and yet another, an officer in the Polish Army, was decorated with the cross *Virtuti Militari* in 1922.

Joseph Conrad was true to his type. A true Nalęcz Korzeniowski, he never remained long in the same



THE POLISH CROSS
FOR VALOUR

Virtuti Militari

This cross belonged to Conrad's grandfather Teodor. It was discovered in a box amongst things belonging to Conrad's father; and sent on to Conrad in the year 1915 or 1916.

[Face page 16

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place. During the twenty years of his seafaring life, he served in over twenty ships, and during the twenty-nine years ashore, he moved seven times to a new home. The very year of his death, he contemplated buying a new house, on the other hand, he seriously thought of returning later to Poland. He had all the impracticability of the Korzeniowskis. Mrs. Conrad has related (pp. 133-134) how Conrad once rented a farmhouse and what a bad bargain it was. M. F. Hueffer has described (p. 112) how Conrad once went in for a gold mine business, which did not turn out much of a success, since, as R. Curle relates,¹ Conrad lost his small inheritance there. Aubry has traced several commercial schemes of Conrad's, amongst others (I. p. 82), a plan to fit out a whaling expedition which would have required £1,500. "My soul is bent on a whaling adventure," the twenty-two-year-old Conrad avowed in a letter. His soul was always bent on something new. He was ever on the lookout for some stroke of fortune to come, ever afraid of some blow of misfortune, and ever without money, in spite of the great incomes of his later years. How exceedingly resembling are the portraits which T. Bobrowski draws of Conrad's paternal ancestors, and this portrait of Conrad, by R. Curle, published in the *Edinburgh Review* of January, 1925:

.When his success came to him late in life, the natural princeliness of his nature made him lavish, and he put by next to nothing. *Theoretically a wonderful man of business, and full of elaborate projects, in actual practice he was entirely lacking in the money*

¹ *The Last Twelve Years of Joseph Conrad*, p. 44.

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sense. His earnings melted away to his own perpetual astonishment, and I remember him telling me once, with humorous resignation, that if he had £100,000 a year he believed he would spend it all. And yet no man delighted more in drawing up minute budgets of expenditure for the next coming year, budgets designed to leave him with comfortable surpluses.

John Galsworthy notes the same trait in his *Reminiscences* on Conrad:¹

A sailor and an artist, he had little sense of money. He was not of those who can budget exactly and keep within it; and, anyway, he had too little, however neatly budgeted.

F. M. Hueffer, on the other hand, defines Conrad as "a magnificent business man of the imaginative type."

After what we know about his ancestors, there can hardly be a doubt that it was not so much his profession of a sailor and an artist, but heredity, which explains these traits of his character. His *insouciance* and his carelessness in all practical matters were indeed deeply rooted. Mrs. Conrad relates (pp. 19-20) how he used to make bread pellets during dinner and fling them about the room, when he was irritated, notwithstanding the presence of guests. By the way, he did not treat his more silent friends, the books, any better, for (p. 154) "a cigarette burn usually adorned their covers." Books belonging to somebody else underwent the same treatment, and sheets and table-linen got their share, too.

¹ In *Castles of Spain*, p. 82.

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But if Conrad had most of the deficiencies of his ancestors, Polish country gentlemen, he also possessed their brilliant qualities. His house was not so much the Anglo-Saxon "happy home" as the Polish *dwór*, where guests were always received with open arms and treated like princes. His affection for his friends was unbounded, and so was his antipathy for those who were unfortunate enough to displease him. He liked the illusion of creating around him the informal hearty atmosphere of Polish hospitality, and of resuscitating about him the brilliant images of Polish country-life which his memory still retained after so many years. Very much unlike the English, but very much like the Polish gentleman, he did not find it necessary (it was, perhaps, altogether beyond him) to hide his dislikes under the cover of cool politeness and indifference. His conception of friends and enemies was that of the Polish gentry, absolute and unobjective.

The very power which shaped his life is that which had shaped that of his ancestors: an indomitable spirit of adventure, closely associated with his irresistible imagination. He was to be, like his grandfather and grand-uncle, *a hero of the imaginative type*, seeing things, in his young as well as in his old days, not with the eyes of a man of facts, but with the eyes of a poet. It was only natural that his very life was one long adventure. "Few men's lives have known more astonishing vicissitudes and changes," says R. Curle. As a small boy, he followed his father into exile, fell desperately ill on the journey, and was saved by a doctor who, by an almost miraculous coincidence, happened to live near by, and, being an old friend of his father, did all he could to procure them good

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lodgings. A little later the boy was present at the last meeting between his father and his uncle Hilary, who was on his way to Siberia.¹ The return to Poland, the decline and death of his father, the public funeral, left a deep mark on his mind. At the age of seventeen, he arrived in Marseilles, the golden gate to the Mediterranean, "the charmer and deceiver of audacious men," and soon made a voyage to Central America, where he took part in a smuggling business. Back to France again, he helped to smuggle arms to Spain for the benefit of that romantic enterprise which is known as the Carlist revolution. A shipwreck and a duel followed in due course, as in a boys' book of adventure. When France was no longer a new country to him, England began to attract him, then the East. There the incidents related in *Youth* took place, followed by the Malay period of Conrad's life. It seems that the young man once more took part in a smuggling business.² The East afforded him extraordinary opportunities for studying all sorts of human specimens. After some years he went through the Congo adventure, where he nearly lost his life, and then, following an obscure but strong impulse, he took to writing, just as the Polish country squire took to agriculture after long years of warfare.

But even then the adventurous element was not absent from Joseph Conrad's life. His nervous disposition gave even events of everyday occurrence the character of an adventure. The preparations for his journey to Poland in 1914, at a moment when nobody thought of an impending war, were as full of incidents as the departure of the *Judea* for Bangkok. The details can be found in Mrs. Conrad's book. According to

¹ See Jessie Conrad, pp. 9-10.

² See F. M. Hueffer, p. 34.

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Mégroz,¹ "contact with people was always adventurous for him."

Never had Conrad been truer to his type than when he chose the profession of a sailor. There is nothing extraordinary, as I shall show in another chapter, in his wish to become a sailor, since this was the nearest approach to becoming a soldier. For he was, like his ancestors, a warrior of the imaginative type, not a born sailor. On his first voyages he combined, like his "Rover," both professions. He expected to find (and his expectations were partly fulfilled) in sea-life some of the glamour which warfare had lost long ago, with the close of the Napoleonic era.

The "Korzeniowski strain" is very visible in Conrad's works. It is personified, exteriorized in the many utopians, idealists, philosophers, revolutionaries, and gold-seekers which fill a great part of his gallery of characters. They are all of them for ever speculating and preparing new fortunes or new eras. And if Conrad hates them, it is because he hates the Korzeniowski strain within himself.

Take the figure of Almayer, for instance. What determined Conrad to single him out, of all men, and to immortalize him in his first book, if not the fact *that the real Almayer appealed to him as a symbolical figure, as a sort of other self?* Conrad's grandfather had lost his fortune through speculation, and died in poverty, away from his native estate. Conrad's uncle, Hilary, did no better, and, after his deportation to Siberia, went on speculating ("seeking gold"), and died a ruined man. Conrad's other uncle was a gambler and a drunkard. Conrad's father, undoubtedly of a better

¹ See F. M. Hueffer, p. 22.

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stamp than his brothers, had known the days of exuberance, but ended in exile, incapable of supporting himself. Must not Conrad have feared that there was a fatality in his family from which he could not escape? The same fatality that hangs over *Almayer*?

Joseph Conrad wrote *because* he had known *Almayer*. "If I had not got to know *Almayer* pretty well it is almost certain there would never have been a line of mine in print." We must not take this too literally. There are other *Almayers* in the world. But one thing is certain: *if Almayer had not appeared to him like a vision of what his paternal ancestors had been, and of what he, second mate of the "Vidar," might fatally become one day, Joseph Conrad would never have felt the need of telling Almayer's pathetic tale.* *Almayer's* apparition in Conrad's life was a revelation which, like every revelation, liberated new forces within himself, forces leading him a new way and directing his thoughts in an entirely new direction.¹

¹ In *A Personal Record*, Conrad wrote:

I had the man [Almayer] and his surroundings with me ever since my return from the eastern waters, some four years before the days of which I speak.

It was in the front sitting-room of furnished apartments in a Pimlico square that they first began to live again *with a vividness and poignancy quite foreign to our former real intercourse.* I had been treating myself to a long stay on shore, and in the necessity of occupying my mornings, *Almayer* (that old acquaintance) came nobly to the rescue. Before long, as was only proper, his wife and daughter joined him round the table, and then the rest of that Pantai land came full of words and gestures. Unknown to my respectable landlady, it was my practice, directly after my breakfast, to hold animated receptions of Malays, Arabs and half-castes. They did not clamour aloud for my attention. *They came with silent and irresistible appeal—and the appeal, I affirm it here, was not to my self-love or my vanity. It seems now to have had a moral character, for why should the memory of these beings, seen in their obscure sun-bathed existence, demand to express itself in the shape of a novel, except on the ground of that mysterious fellowship which unites in a community of hopes and fears all the dwellers on this earth?* —(p. 9).

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Lydia : Is it bad to dream?

Basia : To dream? Of what? Of whom?

Lydia : Of nobody, of nothing.

(A. KORZENIOWSKI,—*A Comedy*.)

THE best source of information concerning Conrad's parents is T. Bobrowski's *Memoirs*, from which I have already extensively quoted in the preceding chapter. Conrad himself (in *A Personal Record*),¹ and his biographer, Jean Aubry, used it in preference to other documents.

T. Bobrowski, discussing Apollo Korzeniowski, writes as follows:²

Of all the young men of the neighbourhood there was only one whom I really liked: Apollo Nałęcz Korzeniowski, as he used to sign his full name rather boastfully. He became later my brother-in-law. I did not, however, then see him for the first time, we only renewed an acquaintance dating from our schooldays, but which had never been intimate, as there was between us a difference of eight years, he being in the seventh form and I in the third. When I left for St. Petersburg, he had

¹ See Aubry II, p. 87.

² The following four quotations are all taken from Bobrowski I, pp. 361-363.

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just returned from there, without having finished his studies. . . . In the countryside he had the reputation of being ugly, and of a sarcastic character, as a matter of fact, he was not beautiful, not even nice, but he had very charming expressive eyes, and his sarcastic character was only a matter of verbiage and society conventions, for I could never trace it in what he felt or did. Passionate in his feelings, expansive, and a sincere friend of everybody, but unpractical in his actions and often even helpless, he was easily implacable in speech and writing, but only too indulgent (apparently in compensation, as I told him often) in everyday life, for he had a different measure for the little and simple ones and for the great of this world. He was a great reader of French and Polish literature, and was himself an able writer, but he had no thorough knowledge in any branch. He had an unusual talent for poetry, and as a poet may be counted amongst the best followers of Krasinski (his "Seven Words on the Cross," known in MS. only, are beautiful), while as a translator of Victor Hugo and Heine he was unequalled, so exceedingly well could he incarnate the style and the form of the first, and the bitterness of the second. The style of his works and translations is excellent. His dramatic works: *A Comedy* and *Because of the Money*¹ (the latter obtained a prize in Warsaw) had a considerable success with the reading and thinking public, but in my opinion have the defect

¹ Literally: "For the Sake of the Penny." Joseph Conrad may have thought of his father's comedy when he gave the title "Because of the Dollars" to one of the tales in *Within the Tides*.

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of giving a prejudiced picture of certain classes of society.¹ On the scenes of Kiev and Jitomir, the latter comedy had success.

T. Bobrowski then discusses Apollo's marriage with his sister, Ewelina, whose parents were strongly against the match:

My mother liked him very much, but she found that he had no qualifications whatever for a good husband, and she shared the opinion of my father, that doing nothing (for he was living with his father without any occupation), and possessing nothing, he was, in spite of his social advantages, an undesirable pretender.

Father Bobrowski actually went so far as to try to marry Apollo to somebody else. After relating this rather humorous incident, T. Bobrowski passes on to the description of the "social advantages" which made Conrad's father so attractive in the eyes of the women:

In the salons he was very pleasant, his unusual appearance, his originality and his gifts attracted the women—everybody knows how much women are interested in anything out of the ordinary—and on the other hand, he pleased the men by the ease of his conversation and his politeness, by his traditional Polish attention for old people, and his tactfulness towards the young; for, as I said before, he was only violent and sarcastic pen in hand, and ironical only when conversing with women, strictly

¹ Of the upper classes.

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within the limits of decency. His "public" (as I would call it) irony chose its victims amongst persons who either had offended him, or else were too proud of their wealth or situation—and he had the laughers mostly on his side. Though he considered himself a sincere democrat, and others called him a "revolutionary" and a "Red," he was a greater aristocrat than myself, as I showed him many a time, whom nobody suspected of democratical convictions. As a matter of fact, he had a soft, sensitive heart, and much compassion for the poor and oppressed.¹

It is not uninteresting, then, to hear something about Apollo's political ideas:

I never could make out what his political and social ideas were at bottom, except that he had a nebulous preference for the Republican form of government as delimited by the Constitution of the 3rd May, which was already insufficient for our times. In the agricultural question, for example, he was very uncertain about the liberation of the serfs. He sympathized with my [liberal] point of view, but was also afraid, and said that those who

¹ Compare the portrait of Garibaldi in *Nostromo*, so similar to that of Conrad's father: "It was enough to look once at his face to see the divine force of faith in him and his great pity for all that was poor, suffering, and oppressed in this world" (p. 31). When writing these last words, Joseph Conrad was obviously inspired by the above passage from his uncle's *Memoirs*, and by the latter's statement that Apollo "had a different measure for the little and simple ones and for the great of this world." This is one proof more for my view, exposed in another chapter, that, contrarily to what all critics and friends of Conrad say, *Nostromo* is not essentially built on a two days' visit to Venezuela, but is really based on Polish and Mediterranean reminiscences.

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possessed the ground had better decide the question. *I am not at all surprised at this, for it is a fact that poets, who are men of imagination and ideals, are incapable of formulating clearly their views on practical questions, and do better, therefore, not to occupy themselves with such questions, but to leave them to those who are perhaps no idealists, but are familiar with the struggles and necessities of everyday life.*

In this last sentence, Bobrowski clearly alludes to the Polish rising, and shows how deeply he regretted the participation which his idealistic brother-in-law took in it.

Apollo was, indeed, an unpractical man. Like his brothers and his father, he took to estate-managing at first, but only lost his means and partly those of his mother-in-law in the undertaking. In 1859, when the young Conrad was two years old, he had to give up his estate Derebczynka, "having lost everything" (Bobrowski I, p. 85), and he moved to Jitomir, devoting himself to literary production. There he was secretary of a publishing firm from the middle of 1859 to May, 1861,¹ when he decided to move to Warsaw.

During the years which preceded the Polish rising of 1863, it seemed as if Russia would to some extent relax her grip on Poland and allow this unfortunate country some sort of self-government. Poles had been appointed to public offices instead of Russians,

¹ Date given by Bobrowski, Ustimowicz and Kręcki. The date indicated by Aubry (1862) seems to be taken from the so-called Bobrowski document, where Bobrowski writes indeed 1862. But the 2 in that document is not quite distinct and there are traces of a rubber or a penknife having been used to rub out a former number. In the Polish periodical, *Droga*, of December, 1927, Aubry himself gives the date 1861.

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and it seemed as if the policy of Count Wielopolski and others would create a new situation, allowing the Poles to develop their own culture. Unfortunately, the opinions of the Polish patriots did not agree as to the best policy, and soon two parties formed themselves in Warsaw and in the provinces. The "Whites" tried to work systematically and peacefully, keeping strictly within the limits of the possibilities, while the "Reds" wanted to start the action at once, without reflecting where it might lead. According to Kręcki (I, p. 5), the "Reds" were people of temperament: elder students, men of letters, clerks, or young people without occupation. In September, 1861, Apollo Korzeniowski became their leader (Kręcki I, p. 8). He was also a member of the "Central Committee" which was composed of representatives of the "Whites" and the "Reds." It was he who proposed (Kręcki I, p. 7) to have the figure of St. Nicholas added to the traditional Polish eagle on the seal of the Provisional Government.¹

A young man of Warsaw, W. Daniłowski, who took an active part in the rising himself, has left in his *Notes* ("Notatki") an account which throws an interesting light upon the revolutionary activities of Apollo Korzeniowski. Daniłowski describes, first, the two parties which he calls "the Whites or aristocrats," and "the Reds or extremists" (p. 53). The position of Conrad's father is characterised as follows (p. 55): "In the 'Red' party there were no influential persons *except Apollo Korzeniowski . . .*"

¹The members of that Committee also wore a ring with the Polish eagle and the figure of St. Nicholas. Joseph Conrad preserved his father's ring together with other family souvenirs. (See illustration.)



THE RING
OF THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT
Conrad inherited this ring from his
father who had been a member of
the Polish Provisional Government,
a secret body preparing the rising
of 1863.

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The opposition between the two parties becoming more and more dangerous for the Polish cause, an attempt at a compromise was made, and in a sitting held in the Amphitheatre of Anatomy at the Academy of Warsaw, the "Red" party agreed to co-operate in the impending elections of the Town Council. But this promise was broken soon afterwards, and the antagonism between the two wings broke out afresh:

Two days later people came in great numbers to the Church of the Holy Cross, and to the building of the Academy, where the elections were to take place. We saw many students of the School of Arts and other people, young or old, belonging to the extremists, amongst them *Apollo Korzeniowski*, an honourable but too ardent patriot. These passed and re-passed through the crowd assembled to vote, distributing pamphlets, and whispering or talking to those to whom they handed them. One of our party succeeded in snatching one of these pamphlets, which had been printed in great haste, and we saw with astonishment that, in spite of the agreement, this was an urgent appeal not to vote. We tried in vain to recall their promise to them, that they were not to oppose themselves to the elections; it was impossible to calm the effervescence and to stop the noisy propaganda in the streets and before the Academy. People of the moderate party were obliged to intervene, and there ensued, unfortunately, a struggle between the two wings which was not without scandalous scenes. The moderate were victorious, and the opposition, who tried to enter

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the buildings, were thrown out, and limited themselves to distributing their "Mandate."

The extremists insulted the students of the Academy, and one of the former, *Apollo Korzeniowski*, a well-known personality, full of genuine patriotism, and leader of the "Red" party, was obliged publicly to take back his words before the assembled students.

(Daniłowski, pp. 60-64.)

Apollo Korzeniowski was naturally known very soon to the Russian police (for which "literator" and "agitator" had always been identical terms), as the author of the above-mentioned "Mandate" (its full title was: "Message of the Nation to the Voters! Nation! Take Care!"), and of "other pamphlets of seditious contents."¹ He was arrested in October, 1861,² and imprisoned in the Citadel of Warsaw until January of the following year, when he was deported to the Government Vologda, in North-Eastern Russia, where his wife and boy followed him. After four years of privations, his wife died, and he became a very lonely man. During his exile, the study and translation of some of Shakespeare's works occupied him. He was more and more attracted by the genius of the great dramatist. He also wrote then his memoirs and impressions, but decided later to burn them. In 1868, he was at last allowed to leave Russia and, an ill and broken man, he went to live in Cracow, where he had friends, and where the young Conrad could attend classes in a good Polish school. He died on

¹ Expression used by Ustimowicz (p. 77).

² This date is given by Bobrowski, Kręcki and Ustimowicz. Aubry indicates 1862 in his *Life and Letters*, but gives the correct date in an article in *Droga*, December Number, 1927.

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the 23rd of May, 1869, faithful to the last to his country and to the Roman Catholic religion.

A. Korzeniowski's works have been little appreciated in Poland. He was and remained "a little-known poet." There were too many excellent translators at work during the nineteenth century, especially Kraszewski (who was one of his best friends), and Komierowski. Shakespeare's works had been translated already, and there was no great demand for translations from Vigny or Hugo. The educated classes knew French well enough to read them in the original.

The following list gives all the translations of Conrad's father which appeared in book form, according to Estreicher's *Polish Bibliography* :

A. Vigny : Chatterton, 1857.¹

V. Hugo : La Légende des Siècles, First Part
(in collaboration with A. Plug).
1860.

V. Hugo : Hernani, 1862.

V. Hugo : Marion Delorme, 1863.

Korzeniowski's translations are beautiful in form (always written in the Alexandrine verse of the original), but sometimes rather free. As he said himself in an article on Shakespeare, he was convinced that the best translation was that which best rendered the "*spirit* and the *form* of the original." I will give two examples, found at random, of his way of translating. It would be easy to multiply them. To avoid translating both texts, I have translated the Polish text into French. The passages, where Apollo Korzeniowski substitutes

¹The dates are those of the publication.

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an image or a version of his own for Hugo's text, have been italicized.

(From *Hernani*):

Original (V. Hugo):

Cette heure! et voilà tout. *Pour nous, plus rien qu'une heure!*

Après qu'importe? Il faut qu'on oublie ou qu'on meure.

Angé! *Une heure avec vous! une heure en vérité, A qui voudrait la vie et puis l'éternité!*

Translation (A. Korzeniowski):

Une heure, *un moment* est à nous! *Plus tard, il faut partir*

Qui ne sait oublier, doit mourir.

Angé! *Un moment* avec vous, *après ce moment*

La vie et l'éternité ne seront rien nous aurons tout vécu!

The second example which I will quote is from A. Korzeniowski's translation of *Marion Delorme* (V. Hugo), a translation published first in the monthly *Biblioteka Warszawska* of 1863 (vols. III and IV).

Original (V. Hugo):

Marion: C'est le seul amoureux. Et le vieux président? . . .

(Riant)

Son nom déjà? . . .

(Riant plus fort)

Lecoup!

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Laverny : *Mais en vous attendant,
Il a votre portrait et fait mainte élégie.*

Translation (A. Korzeniowski):

Marion : Le seul qui m'aime. Et le vieux
président . . .
(elle rit)

Quand il m'en souvient cela me fait rire.

Laverny : *Il brûle des sacrifices devant votre por-
trait,
Devant celui-là même que vous lui
donniez.*

Apollo Korzeniowski's original works are strongly under the influence of Hugo and Vigny. They are mostly written in Alexandrine verse and please by the beauty of their form without gripping the attention by their dramatic quality. The plot is commonplace, often second-hand, and the incidents are not dramatic enough. The best of his writings are not his dramas but his few pieces of poetry. Two of these are printed in Bobrowski's *Memoirs*, I have chosen one of them as a motto to the present book.

The list of Korzeniowski's original works (as far as they have been published in book form) has been given in Estreicher's *Polish Bibliography*, from which I reproduce it, omitting only the indication of the place of publication:

First Act, drama, [published] 1869, 40 pages.

The Whip, comedy in 2 acts, 1861, 32 pages.

What shall I do with this? comedy, 1862, 23 pages.

Because of the Money, comedy in 3 acts, 1859.

A Comedy, drama in 3 acts, 1859, 266 pages.

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In his work, Korzeniowski's partiality for the weak and oppressed (which, according to Bobrowski, was one of the outstanding traits of his character) is strongly marked. His best drama, *A Comedy*, shows the conflict between an old and dishonest president and a poor but sympathetic "proletarian,"¹ who asks his ward in marriage. The president is described as follows:

55 years old. The ideal bourgeois: has been elected to a public office, egotist, cunning, of a practical, everyday cleverness, is called by his neighbours an honourable man, and commands respect because of his fortune, his office, his birth, and his excellent cuisine. The president administers the fortune of the young Lydia to his profit, and educates her to her damage.

Apollo Korzeniowski's philosophy of art is expressed in an article on Shakespeare, written in exile and published in the *Biblioteka Warszawska* of 1868 (vol. II). The study is written by a great admirer of Shakespeare's art. All the pathos, all the absoluteness of the *Nalęcz* is there, all their sense of romance and beauty, and humanity.

Shakespeare! It is enough to pronounce this name and at once a whole world of alluring visions deludes the mind. Before one's eyes, the man and the poet, his people and its civilization, and his age stand out—enigmatical and alluring.

The life of this extraordinary man did not especially attract the attention of his contemporaries, and for

¹ Korzeniowski's own expression.

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posterity it remains in a well-nigh impenetrable darkness. But the dramatic work he created shines on the new road he opened up all the more brilliantly, as after three hundred years, he still stands alone, unique, and solitary.

After this passage of a truly Conradesque movement, A. Korzeniowski says that the dramatist must live with his people, and create out of the fullness of its heart. Dramatic conflicts must needs be all-human conflicts. That is why dramatic art as such, independent of all changes of form, has always existed, and was never invented:

There can be no history of the birth of dramatic art. From the very moment it began to exist, it was, like every natural phenomenon, like inspiration, perfect and distinctive. In primitive ages, it manifested itself through the souls of magicians and prophets, and later in geniuses; and even to-day, whenever it manifests itself, it does so in its perfection, wholly perfect. And the history of the development and transformations of dramatic art testifies sufficiently to its nature as we tried to define it.

Korzeniowski then discusses the philosophy of Shakespeare as expressed in his tragedies. He admires the poet's profound view of reality, and of its inherent necessities:

The well-known [Polish] proverb "Man fires, but God carries the bullet" seems to be the principle upon which Shakespeare's dramatic art is built, as

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being the best definition of reality as applied to human existence on earth. God permits man to use his free will, but to fulfil plans which man did not invent himself, and He permits him to carry out, of his own free will, tasks which he did not set himself.

This, according to A. Korzeniowski, is the philosophy of Shakespeare. It is still more the philosophy of the exiled Pole himself, the philosophy of resignation at the end of a life which had brought, after marvellous promises, little more than deceptions. "Man fires, but God carries the bullet," the Polish version of the French *L'homme propose, Dieu dispose*, must have been as familiar to the young Conrad as it was to his father. Joseph Conrad quotes it in *Gaspar Ruiz*, the first tale in *A Set of Six*, adding a very personal commentary, the bitterness of which stands in a strange contrast to the religious resignation of his father:

[The proverb] evolved out of the naïve heart of the great Russian people,¹ "Man discharges the piece, but God carries the bullet," is piously atrocious, and at bitter variance with the accepted conception of a compassionate God. It would indeed be an inconsistent occupation for the Guardian of the poor, the innocent, and the helpless, to carry the bullet, for instance, into the heart of a father.

—(*A Set of Six*, p. 18.)

It is easy to see how different is the philosophy of father and son. What for the father was "the best

¹ Similar proverbs exist in Russia, but what Conrad quotes here, is the common *Polish version*.

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definition of reality as applied to human existence on the earth," is for the son "piously atrocious." The son has visibly revolted long ago against the religious faith of his father. And the break with the family tradition becomes still more evident when we consider the last sentence of the above quotation. It is an allusion to the Polish prayers of his boyhood, which (being an orphan) he must have repeated over and over again, and where God is indeed called "the Guardian of the poor, the innocent, and the helpless."

It is true that this is more a difference in outlook than in character. The temperament of father and son is the same, although their energy is partly directed to different channels. We recognize in Conrad all the dominating traits of his father. His "dynamic" style, the pathos, the absoluteness of his expression, the power and the rhythm of his sentences, the intensity of his appeal, are already visible in his father's writings. In the works of both father and son there is the same partiality for the weak and oppressed, the same intuitive sympathy with those who (innocently or not) suffer, the same romantic realism. Conrad has also inherited his father's sarcastic character. Apollo Korzeniowski's "public irony" appears in Joseph Conrad as "cosmic irony." Conrad's sarcastic mind is visible in his private life (where he did not spare his enemies) as well as in his work. Conrad's books are sarcastic books, provocative books, they are "pamphlets of seditious contents" in the form of symbolic stories. It needs an appalling superficiality to overlook this fact. It is indeed, as a Polish critic writes (*see Appendix IV*), "not easy to represent to oneself that on breezy decks [of steamers de luxe] white clad gentlemen,

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leaning back in their easy chairs, handle these volumes without the slightest signs of uneasiness."¹

The portrait which Joseph Conrad draws of his father in *A Personal Record*, shows the latter as an ardent patriot, a man of letters, and a stoic. In his *Author's Note*, added to the book in 1919, Conrad protests against his father being called a "revolutionist":

No epithet could be more inapplicable to a man with such a strong sense of responsibility in the region of ideas and action and so indifferent to the promptings of personal ambition as my father. (p. ix.)

A few lines further on, Conrad defines what he means:

Amongst the men concerned in the preliminaries of the 1863 movement, my father was no more revolutionary than the others, in the sense of working for the subversion of any social or political scheme of existence. He was simply a patriot in the sense of a man who, believing in the spirituality of a national existence, could not bear to see that spirit enslaved.

Joseph Conrad's explanations seem rather to overshoot the mark. Nobody ever questioned the perfect unselfishness of Apollo Korzeniowski's political and social endeavours. His motives, certainly, were pure and generous. The profound morality of his character

¹The reason for this is of course that the reading public draw a distinct line between fiction and life, fiction being written (this is often the case, I admit) to please, not to give a true picture of life. That is why the public overlooks all dangerous ideas, not only in the work of Conrad, but in that of Thomas Hardy (another provocative writer!) as well.

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is above all doubts. And yet, the same can be said of many who deserve the epithet of revolutionary. What distinguishes the revolutionist from the reformer is not exactly a lower morality, but the choice of violent means to attain a political end. It matters little whether the end in itself is good or bad, for to him it will always seem good. After what we know about Apollo Korzeniowski's political activities, there can hardly be a doubt, that his mentality was that of a revolutionist. He was a "Red," an extremist amongst Polish patriots. He was all for violent methods, he organized obstruction (that foremost weapon in all revolutionary movements), he wrote pamphlets in which he urged for immediate action. When Conrad says that his father was not working for the subversion of any social or political scheme in existence, he is (in perfectly good faith, I admit) simply playing with words. Apollo Korzeniowski was, of course, working for the subversion of a political scheme in existence. When a man belongs to a secret society with political ends, and prepares a civil war, his mentality becomes naturally that of a revolutionist.

Joseph Conrad's revolutionists and anarchists (in *A Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes*) belong to a very different type. *Their* undertakings are abominably stupid, and prompted *only* by a criminal desire of destructing or a selfish longing for fame at all costs. It is as if Conrad had wanted to prove to himself and others that his father was anything but a revolutionist. And yet, even so, a certain resemblance between Conrad's political *demi-monde* and his father is unmistakable. I should go even further and say that Conrad himself had retained something of a revolutionist.

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His strong sarcasm, the cosmic irony of his books may be considered as the expression of a revolutionary mind which (owing to insurmountable material difficulties) has abandoned the reform of a world which does not want to be reformed, and so limited itself to threats and to grumbling. When Conrad notes, with visible satisfaction, that certain American anarchists recognized themselves in *The Secret Agent*, he betrays himself. He could, indeed, not have known the anarchist mind so well by intuition, if there had not been a common bond, a similarity of feeling or of outlook between them and himself. Many a reader of Conrad's books has felt acutely how often this author verges on nihilism in his writings. It matters little, in this connection that it is fortunately a sort of nihilism which, in spite of its extreme aggressiveness, does not seem to do any conscious harm.

As to Conrad's very narrow definition of the revolutionist, it may be taken as a safeguard against too much introspection. For, as he said once to a friend, "explicitness is fatal." This is the reason why he draws such a distinct line between his father (and himself) and the revolutionary.

We know very little about Conrad's mother. T. Bobrowski does not say much more of her than Conrad in *A Personal Record*. Ewelina Korzeniowska must have suffered much, not only because of the privations of exile, but because she saw in these perhaps a retribution for having married a man of whom her parents did not approve. She died at thirty-four, when her son was eight years old. Her image, indistinct and

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dim as it must of necessity have remained to Conrad, never quite left him. We have in the *Author's Note to A Personal Record* a picture of her, seen through the eyes of the four-year old boy:

I remember my mother, a more familiar figure than the others, dressed in the black of the national mourning worn in defiance of ferocious police regulations. I have also preserved from that particular time the awe of her mysterious gravity which, indeed, was by no means smileless. For I remember her smiles, too. Perhaps, for me, she could always find a smile. She was young then, certainly not thirty yet. She died four years later in exile.

In the same book (p. 29) Conrad pays this homage to the memory of his mother:

Meeting with calm fortitude the cruel trials of a life reflecting all the national and social misfortunes of the community, she realised the highest conceptions of duty as a wife, a mother, and a patriot, sharing the exile of her husband and representing nobly the ideal of Polish womanhood.

Most critics of Conrad have remarked that his women have always something unfinished, something shadowy, something elusive about them. It is, indeed, as if the memory of her that flitted like a shadow through his infant life prevented him from drawing his women with the same sure stroke which characterizes his portraits of men.

But, although remembering her only a little, he must have thought often of her life story. He knew,

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from his uncle, that she had struggled for over five years against what was universally considered as an unfortunate attachment. The death of her father had not solved the problem. Conrad, following almost literally the text of his uncle's *Memoirs* (I, p. 362), describes the situation of the young woman thus:

Suffering in her health from the shock of her father's death (she was alone in the house with him when he died suddenly), *she was torn by the inward struggle between her love for the man whom she was to marry in the end, and her knowledge of her dead father's declared objection to that match. Unable to bring herself to disregard that cherished memory and that judgment she had always respected and trusted, and, on the other hand, feeling the impossibility to resist a sentiment so deep and so true, she could not have been expected to preserve her mental and moral balance. At war with herself, she could not give to others that feeling of peace which was not her own.* It was only later, when united at last with the man of her choice, that she developed those uncommon gifts of mind and heart which compelled the respect and admiration even of our foes.—(*A Personal Record*, pp. 28-29.)

In this episode in the history of his family lies perhaps the explanation why Joseph Conrad (who was, before everything, the poet of faithfulness) has so often been attracted by the subject of the influence of the father upon the grown-up daughter. He once said to the French writer Lenormand: "*Toute ma vie j'ai été*

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extrêmement préoccupé par les rapports de père à fille."¹

In his first book, *Almayer* is the chief character, but Nina is the chief force. The unhappy man, married to a Malay woman who is absolutely beneath him, transfers his love from the unworthy mother to the beautiful daughter. For Nina's sake he wants to discover gold and, once rich, to return to Europe. Her attachment to Dain is, from this point of view, a desertion, a revolt, and when she runs away with her lover, Almayer loses his hold on life altogether and, incapable as he is of resignation, can find forgetfulness only in opium.

In the tales *A Smile of Fortune*, *Freya of the Seven Isles*, *Amy Foster*, different aspects of the father-daughter problem are studied. In *Chance*, written much later, de Barral's almost occult power over his married daughter forms the central theme.

¹ See *Nouvelle Revue Française*, December, 1924.

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Oh Youth! Thy flights are mighty as the flights of
eagles,
Like a thunderbolt thy arm!

(MICKIEWICZ.)

APOLLO KORZENIOWSKI's only son, born on December 3rd, 1857, at Berdyczew, was christened *Józef Teodor Konrad*. Very Polish names these were, marking him off, in that Russian province, as belonging to the Polish minority. The name Joseph is as popular in Poland as unpopular in Russia, and probably more frequent amongst Poles than even Kazimierz. On the other hand, *Konrad*, having been popularized by Mickiewicz in his heroic poem "Konrad Wallenrod," is also considered as a very Polish name. Korolenko relates a school anecdote of a Russian priest upon whom the name Konrad acted like a red cloth upon a bull, and who obliged a boy who had the misfortune of bearing the anti-Russian name to change it into *Kodrat*. From time to time, he would interrupt the lesson and ask the pupil: "What's your name?" and with immense satisfaction hear the answer: "Kodrat, sir."

Conrad's education was thoroughly Polish. He was brought up in the Roman Catholic Church. Like every Pole worth his salt, he learned to write and read his native language in private. He learnt it very

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early, for he could already write at the age of five.¹ Later, when he was sent to Lwów in order to go to school, his father was very dissatisfied with the Polish language spoken there. He had to watch, to use his own words,² "that during his lessons Polish was not changed into the Galician language." Soon afterwards, father and son moved to Cracow, where the schools were better.

The young Conrad had already been taught, together with other children, during his stay in his uncle's house at Nowofastów, in 1867. The following passage from the beginning of the tale *Prince Roman*,³ allows of an interesting glimpse into that time, which was probably the happiest episode in Conrad's childhood:

It was the dead of the winter. The great lawn in front was as pure and smooth as an alpine snowfield, a white and feathery level sparkling under the sun as if sprinkled with diamond-dust, declining gently to a lake—a long sinuous piece of frozen water looking bluish and more solid than the earth. A cold, brilliant sun gilded low above the undulating horizon of great folds of snow, in which the villages of Ukrainian peasants remained out of sight, like clusters of boats hidden in the hollows of a running sea. And everything was very still.

I don't know now how I had managed to escape at eleven o'clock in the morning from the school-room. I was a boy of eight,⁴ the little girl, my cousin, a few months younger than myself, though hereditarily more quick-tempered, was less adven-

¹ *A Personal Record*, p. 70.

² See Aubry I, p. 19.

³ *Tales of Hearsay*, pp. 31-32 and 33.

⁴ Conrad was then 10 years old.

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turous. So I had escaped alone, and presently I found myself in the great stone-paved hall, warmed by a monumental stove of white tiles, a much more pleasant locality than the schoolroom, which for some reason or other, perhaps hygienic, was always kept at a low temperature.

We children were aware that there was a guest staying in the house. He had arrived the night before just as we were driven off to bed. We broke through the line of beaters to rush and flatten our noses against the dark window panes; but we were too late to see him alight. We had only watched in a ruddy glare the big travelling carriage on sleigh-runners harnessed with six horses, a black mass against the snow, going off to the stables, preceded by a horseman carrying a blazing ball of tow and resin in an iron basket at the end of a long stick swung from his saddle bow. Two stable boys had been sent out early in the afternoon along the snow-tracks to meet the expected guest at dusk and light his way with these road torches. At that time, you must remember, there was not a single mile of railways in our southern provinces. My little cousin and I had no knowledge of trains and engines, except from picture-books, as of things rather vague, extremely remote, and not particularly interesting unless to grown-ups who travelled abroad.

. . . .—I elected to stroll spiritlessly into the billiard room where certainly I had no business. There was no one there either, and I felt very lost and desolate under its high ceiling, all alone with

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the massive English billiard table which seemed, in heavy, rectilinear silence, to disapprove of that small boy's intrusion.

When his mother died, the young Conrad could not feel her loss much. It was different with the death of his father. The boy was then twelve years old, an age when the notion of death can already have a terrible meaning.

Fully forty-five years later, in 1915, Conrad wrote the following significant lines, defining the impression made upon him by the illness and the death of his father:

I looked forward to what was coming with an incredulous terror. I turned my eyes from it sometimes with success, and yet all the time I had an awful sensation of the inevitable. I had also moments of revolt which stripped off me some of my simple trust in the government of the universe.

—(Notes on Life and Letters, p. 168.)

The importance of these statements cannot be over-rated. Every reader of Conrad knows that "awful sensation of the inevitable," which he could, after Hardy, express so well in his master books. The principal merit of *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, of *The Shadow Line*, of *Heart of Darkness*, of *The Secret Sharer* consists in nothing else. And there is hardly a book of his where the "awful sensation of the inevitable" (or "that fear of the Incomprehensible that hangs over all our heads" as Conrad expressed it in another book) does not form an important element of the mental atmosphere.

The decline of his father was the first occasion when

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Conrad felt that sensation, and is as such of a decisive importance. It created the channel in which similar sensations could form themselves later. It is responsible for Conrad's philosophy of fate, and partly for his pessimism. Its influence is not only visible in Conrad's books, but also in his life. When he and his family were surprised by the outbreak of the war in the very town where Apollo Korzeniowski had died, the impression of his childhood came back to Conrad:

I am glad I have not so many years left me to remember *that appalling feeling of inexorable fate, tangible, palpable*, come after so many cruel years, a figure of dread, murmuring with iron lips the final words: Ruin—and Extinction.—(id., p. 171.)

The young Conrad not being, like Heyst, a stoic, had moments of revolt which stripped from him "some of the simple trust in the government of the universe." Every normal boy has such moments, though they may be less strong and remain wholly unconscious. The choice of a profession, the membership of an association, marriage itself, can be as many forms of revolting against the authority of parents or teachers, i.e. of revolting against the beliefs these persons try to impose. What is very remarkable in Conrad's case, is the earliness and the violence of his revolt. He had his moments of revolt (accompanied, I think, by fits of depression) at the age of twelve, and at a moment when the air around him "was all piety, resignation and silence." Accustomed to think as well as to read by himself, his mind matured early, too early perhaps, guided only by impressions and

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feelings of a depressing nature. Conrad's philosophy of fate is but the adult form of that first youthful revolt against the government of the universe. Another evidence of the violence of his feelings is the fact that it alarmed his relatives.

Owing to the kindness of Mrs. Conrad, I am able to reproduce here a charming letter, addressed to the boy by his uncle Tadeusz, the first he ever received from his future guardian:

Nowofastów, 8/20 September, 1869.

My dear little Conrad!

It has pleased God to send you the greatest misfortune that can befall a child—the loss of the parents! But in His kindness, God has mercifully permitted your grandmother and myself to watch over you, over your health, over your education, and to arrange for your future. Do you know how much we love you? The great attachment which we had for your parents we transfer to you. You know also that your parents had always been worthy of our sympathy, and you, as their son, ought to be worthy of our love! This is why you ought to do your best to profit by the lessons which you have, and by the advice which friends of your father and of us, like the Stefan B[uszczyński] family or A. G. . . . [this name is illegible] and to follow in everything their opinion and advice.

Without a good education you will never become somebody in this world, and never even earn your bread. A good education begins with learning the elements of the sciences which a man of culture must possess, a man as I expect you want to become

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and as we should like you to see later. Prepare yourself, therefore, my dear child, to learn the beginnings of each science. I know that the beginning often seems dull to children, but this must be overcome by work and perseverance. If you want to become an engineer or a technician, you must begin with arithmetic and geometry, if you wish to be later a physician or a lawyer, you must first study the languages, geography, and so on. In one word, one influences the other, one is based on the other. Therefore, you ought not to occupy yourself with what is easy and amusing, but with what is useful, though sometimes difficult. The man who has no real knowledge in any branch¹ has no strong character and no perseverance, and is unable to work and to manage his business alone. He ceases to be a man and becomes a doll, of no use at all. Try therefore, my child, not to be and not to become such a doll, but a useful, active, competent and consequently honourable man, this will be our reward for the cares and the trouble we have on behalf of your education. We are directing your education, and will give you whatever you need—what *you* have to do is to work and to be in good health. In this last respect, although health depends on the will of God, you will recover your health completely if you listen to the advice of older people *and if you do not yield too much to feelings and thoughts which are not natural at your age.*

Write us, dear child, at any rate once per month; write what you think and what you feel—you know,

¹ Compare Bobrowski's judgment of Apollo Korzeniowski: "He had no thorough knowledge in any branch."—(Reprod. p. 24.)

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news from you will always be welcome, they are even indispensable for the peace of mind of your dear grandmother, and will always be impatiently expected by myself and Josia, so do write regularly.

You begin now to attend classes, with the will to become a useful and honourable man, guided by the advice of respectable people, and with the help of God—on this new road which you are taking I give you my very heartiest blessings and my love,

your uncle: T. BOBROWSKI

Little Josia embraces you and so do Emily and Irania.

In the month in which this letter was written, the boy began indeed to attend classes at the St. Anne School in Cracow. Latin and German were the principal subjects taught there, and in these the boy was backward, but he worked with great assiduity and soon caught up with the rest of the class.

The few German quotations which we find in Conrad's works seem mostly to be echoes of the German lessons of this-time. The verse, for instance, quoted by Stein in *Lord Jim* (p. 211):

So halt ich endlich es in meinen Händen
Und nenn es in gewissem Sinne mein

is from Goethe's *Torquato Tasso* which was widely used as a school-book. In the *Arrow of Gold*, we have an allusion to Goethe's ballad "The King of Thule," which Conrad must have heard (perhaps learnt by heart) at school:

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[The arrow] was not a thing that one could leave behind one for strange hands—for the cold eyes of ignorance. Like the old King of Thule with the gold goblet of his mistress he would have had to cast it into the sea, before he died. He says he smiled at the romantic notion. But what else could he have done with it? (p. 352).

On the other hand, frequent allusions in his works show that Conrad acquired quite a nice knowledge of ancient literature and mythology, that he really was, as he wrote to a friend in 1922, "steeped in classicism to the lips."¹ In a passage like the following, where Heyst and Jones observe Ricardo kissing Lena's feet, the allusion seems far-fetched:

"Behold!" the skeleton of the crazy bandit [Jones] jabbered in his ear in spectral fellowship. Behold the simple Acis kissing the sandals of the nymph, on the way to her lips, all forgetful, while the menacing fife of Polyphemus already sounds close at hand—if he could only hear it!"

—(*Victory*, p. 393.)

But though Conrad obviously learnt a good deal at school, his interests were far from being satisfied by its teaching. His contempt for schoolmasters was unbounded, and seemed to become more pronounced than ever towards the end of his life. He called them once "the very worst people to decide anything,"² and in an article entitled "Geography and some Explorers," republished in *Last Essays*, pp. 1-21, he

¹ See Aubry II, p. 289.

² See Sutherland, p. 91.

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has given vent to his indignation, which was then over forty years old, at the dullness of his geography lessons. Being very interested in the subject, he expected very much from the few hours during which it was taught, but his expectations were not fulfilled:

Unfortunately, the marks awarded for that subject were almost as few as the hours appointed to it *by persons of no romantic sense for the real, ignorant of the great possibilities of active life; with no desire for struggle, no notion of the wide spaces of the world—mere bored professors,¹ in fact, who were not only middle-aged, but who looked to me as if they had never been young.* And their geography was very much like themselves, a bloodless thing with a dry skin covering a repulsive armature of uninteresting bones.

I would be ashamed of my warmth in digging up a hatchet which has been buried now for nearly fifty years if those fellows had not tried so often to take my scalp at the yearly examinations. There are things that one does not forget. And besides, the geography which I discovered for myself was the geography of open spaces and wide horizons built up on men's devoted work in the open air, the geography still militant but already conscious of its approaching end with the death of the last great explorer. The antagonism was radical.

These feelings of animosity against his teachers must have engaged Conrad more and more to seek in books what he could not find at school: stories of active and inspiring lives, of dangers overcome and of

¹ In Poland, teachers of secondary schools have the title *professor*.

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achievements due to personal valour, endurance, and fidelity.

Conrad had always been a reading boy. In the solitude of exile, books had become his best companions. Grimms' *Fairy Tales* seem to have been amongst his earliest readings, and the impression they made upon the boy can be traced in the work of the man. His regret at having lost that childish paradise disclosed in fairy tales and fables is never quite absent.

At the beginning of *Prince Roman* (one of the stories in *Tales of Hearsay*), Conrad describes the deep impression made upon him by the first discovery of the divorce between reality and the ideal world of fairy tales:

Our notion of princes, perhaps a little more precise, was mainly literary and had the glamour reflected from the light of fairy tales, in which princes always appear young, charming, heroic, and fortunate. Yet, as well as any other children, we could draw a firm line between the real and the ideal. We knew that princes were historical personages. And there was some glamour in that fact, too. . . . —(*Tales of Hearsay*, pp. 32-33.)

Conrad then relates how he was introduced to the prince, and pursues:

But what concerned me most was the failure of the fairy-tale glamour. It was shocking to discover a prince who was deaf, bald, meagre, and so prodigiously old. It never occurred to me that this imposing and disappointing man had been young,

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rich, beautiful; I could not know that he had been happy in the felicity of an ideal marriage uniting two young hearts, two great names and two great fortunes; happy with a happiness which, as in fairy tales, seemed destined to last for ever. . . . But it did not last for ever. It was fated not to last very long even by the measure of the days allotted to men's passage on this earth where enduring happiness is only found in the conclusion of fairy tales.—(*Tales of Hearsay*, pp. 35-36.)

Many other passages in Conrad's work allude to the distant but alluring world of fairy tales. I can only quote the most characteristic here:

And to the right of the dark group the stained front of the Mint, cleansed by the flood of light, stood out for a moment dazzling and white, like a marble palace in a fairy tale.—(*The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* p. 172.)

The approach to this Kurtz grubbing for ivory in the wretched bush was beset by as many dangers as though he had been an enchanted princess sleeping in a fabulous castle.—(*Heart of Darkness*, in *Youth*, p. 106.)

The contrast between reality and the world of fairy tales still puzzles Conrad sometimes:

Here was the prominent creature absolutely on board asking for the favour of a cup of coffee! *And life not being a fairy tale, the improbability of the event almost shocked me. Had I discovered an enchanted*

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nook of the earth where wealthy merchants run fasting on board ships before they are fairly moored? Was this white magic or merely some black trick of trade?— (A Smile of Fortune, in Twixt Land and Sea, p. 7.)

Like a child, Conrad amuses himself to believe that the world of fairy tales is a historical reality on which we depend still in some measure. For it is difficult not to believe a little, if only unconsciously or in our lost moments, in what we believed without reserve when we were children. The impressions which Conrad attributes to Powell in the following passage, are but reminiscences of his own:

. . . to him life, perhaps not so much his own as that of others, *was something still in the nature of a fairy tale with a 'they lived happy ever after' termination. We are the creatures of our light literature much more than is generally suspected* in a world which prides itself on being scientific and practical, and in possession of incontrovertible theories. Powell felt in that way the more because the captain of a ship at sea is a remote, inaccessible creature, *something like a prince of a fairy tale*, alone of his kind, depending on nobody.—(*Chance*, p. 288.)

The same remark applies to this conversation between Mrs. Travers and Lingard:

I was a gold digger at one time. Some of us used to come down to Melbourne *with our pockets full of money*, I daresay it was poor enough to what you must have seen, but once I went to a show acted

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like that. It was a story acted to music. All the people went singing through it right to the very end.

"How it must have jarred on your sense of reality," said Mrs. Travers "It must have appeared to you like the very defiance of all truth. *Would real people go singing through their life anywhere except in a fairy tale?*"—(*The Rescue*, pp. 300—301.)

The following sarcastic remark of Heyst's is characteristic of the way in which Conrad uses his memories of fairy tales:

I keep our store of sovereigns in there. The treasure, my dear, is not big enough to require a cavern.—(*Victory*, p. 254.)

In two passages of *The Arrow of Gold*, we have an allusion to a picture which must have adorned his book of fairy tales, an illustration, possibly, to Grimms' *Hansel and Gretel*:

But the picture I had in my eye, coloured and simple like an illustration to a nursery-book tale of two venturesome children's escapade, was what fascinated me most. (p. 149.)

We sat like two venturesome children in an illustration to a tale, scared by their adventure. (p. 151).

Another reminiscence of a picture seen in one of his first books finds itself in the story *Falk* (*Typhoon*, p. 162).

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It seems absurd to compare a tug-boat skipper to a centaur; but he reminded me somehow of an engraving in a little book I had as a boy, which represented centaurs at a stream, and there was one especially, in the foreground, prancing, bow and arrows in hand, with regular severe features, and an immense curled, wavy beard, flowing down his breast. Falk's face reminded me of that centaur. Besides, he was a composite creature. Not a man-horse, it is true, but a man-boat.

At an early age, Conrad read *Don Quixote* and *Gil Blas* in abridged Polish editions.¹ His first contact with English literature (and with Shakespeare at that) is related in *A Personal Record* (pp. 71-72):

My first acquaintance [with English literature] was (or were) the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and that in the very manuscript of my father's translation. It was during our exile in Russia, and it must have been less than a year after my mother's death That afternoon, instead of going out to play in the large yard which we shared with our landlord, I had lingered in the room in which my father generally wrote. What emboldened me to clamber into his chair I am sure I don't know, but a couple of hours afterwards he discovered me kneeling in it with my elbows on the table and my head in both hands over the MS. of loose pages. I was greatly confused, expecting to get into trouble. He stood in the doorway looking at me with some surprise, but the only thing he said after a moment of silence was:

¹ *A Personal Record*, p. 71.



APOLLO KORZENIOWSKI IN EXILE
together with two other Polish patriots

At the back of the original photograph are two dedications, by Count M. Szembek (the man in the middle) and J. G. Sabiński (to the right), which read:

"To my relative and brother in suffering and spirit Apollo Korzeniowski I dedicate this memory of the bitter and heartrending moments of deportation. 19/8 August 1863.

As an old friend and companion in arms of his father, I offer this, thirty years later, to the son Apollo Nałęcz Korzeniowski, the sharer of my exile, with my heartiest thanks for the encouragement and help which I received from him."

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"Read the page aloud."

Luckily the page lying before me was not overblotted with erasures and corrections, and my father's handwriting was otherwise extremely legible. When I got to the end he nodded and I flew out of doors thinking myself lucky to have escaped reproof for that piece of impulsive audacity I reflect proudly that I must have read that page of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* tolerably well at the age of eight.

The first English book that Conrad ever read through seems to have been a Polish translation of *Nicholas Nickleby*, which he got at the age of thirteen.¹ But the books which attracted him more and more were books of travel and adventure. He must have read indefatigably, in French as well as in Polish, during the years which preceded his departure for France. Marryat, Cooper, and that curious French artist and sailor, Louis-Ambroise Garneray, were his favourite authors. The memories of the heroes and events described in these books never left him. He sometimes alludes to them in his books. So in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* when he writes:

To the left of them the trees in Tower Gardens sighed, the stones of the Tower gleaming, seemed to stir in the play of light, as if remembering suddenly all the great joys and sorrows of the past, *the fighting prototypes of these men; press-gangs; mutinous cries; the wailing of women by the riverside, and the shouts of men welcoming victories.* (p. 172.)

¹ *A Personal Record*, p. 71.

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To judge from this passage, as well as from those I give below, Conrad must have had moments, when circumstances recalled to him vividly, an episode of some book which had been the delight of his boyhood: moments when the view of the very spot which saw the scenes described in his books made a deep impression upon him, moments when a glimmer of romance passed like a smile over the stern face of reality.

The three passages which I am going to quote are most probably reminiscences from Conrad's sea-life in the East:

That chap Doramin had given him [Jim] the ring. . . . The ring was a sort of credential—"It's like something you read of in books," he threw in appreciatively) and Doramin would do his best for him.—(*Lord Jim*, pp. 233-234.)

The room was generally thronged. The solemn formality of greetings and leave-takings, the profound respect expressed in gestures, on the faces, in the low whispers, is simply indescribable. "It's well worth seeing," Jim had assured me while we were crossing the river, on our way back. "*They are like people in a book, aren't they?*" he said triumphantly.—(id. p. 260.)

And there was somewhere in me the thought: By Jove! this is the deuce of an adventure, *something you read about*; and it is my first voyage as second-mate.—(*Youth*, p. 12.)

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In another passage, Conrad uses such a memory as a simile:

. . . . this rough man [Lingard], looking as if he had stepped out from an engraving in a book about buccaneers, broke in upon his resignation with mysterious allusions. . . .—(*The Rescue*, p. 126.)

In *Chance*, there is an allusion to Cooper's stories, which Conrad read, like Marryat's, first in Polish and then, much later, in English:

Perfectly, I said. You [Marlow] are the expert in the psychological wilderness. *This is like one of those Redskin stories where the noble savages carry off a girl and the honest backwoodsman with his incomparable knowledge follows the track and reads the signs of her fate in a footprint here, a broken twig there, a trinket dropped by the way. I have always liked such stories.*—(*Chance*, p. 311.)

In an article entitled "Tales of the Sea," published first in 1898, and reprinted in *Notes on Life and Letters*, Joseph Conrad expressed what Marryat and Cooper had been to him:

Perhaps no two authors of fiction influenced so many lives and gave to so many the initial impulse towards a glorious or a useful career. Through the distances of space and time those two men of another race have shaped also the life of the writer of this appreciation. Life is life, and art is art—and truth is hard to find in either. Yet in testimony to the achievement of both these authors it may be said that,

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in the case of the writer at least, the youthful glamour, the headlong vitality of the one and the profound sympathy, the artistic insight of the other—to which he had surrendered—have withstood the brutal shock of facts and the wear of laborious years. He has never regretted his surrender.—(Notes, pp. 56-57.)

Amongst the books which Conrad cherished most, was also an atlas ("my beloved old atlas"), which, having been published in 1852,¹ was five years older than himself. The boy used to sit over it for hours, studying the shapes of the continents, and the forms of the rivers and mountain ranges, and following the way of the explorers he was reading about in his books. Towards the end of his life, in 1924, Conrad wrote the following lines in his article entitled "Geography and Some Explorers":

I have no doubt that star-gazing is a fine occupation, for it leads you within the borders of the unattainable. *But map-gazing, to which I became addicted so early, brings the problem of the great spaces of the earth into stimulating and directing contact with sane curiosity and gives an honest precision to one's imaginative faculty. And the honest maps of the nineteenth century nourished in me a passionate interest in the truth of geographical facts and a desire for precise knowledge, which was extended later to other subjects.—(Last Essays, p. 13.)*

On this atlas, unknown parts of the earth were represented by "exciting spaces of white paper," where

¹Date given by Conrad, *Last Essays*, p. 14.

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explorers were perhaps at work to discover and to unveil thrilling mysteries. Truly an inexhaustible subject for a boy to think and to dream about!

Regions unknown! My imagination could depict to itself there worthy, adventurous and devoted men, nibbling at the edges, attacking from north and south and east and west, conquering a bit of truth here, and a bit of truth there, and sometimes swallowed up by the mystery their hearts were so persistently set on unveiling.—(Id. pp. 13, 14.)

For young Conrad, the blank spaces of the map were inseparable from the thought of the possibilities hidden there, possibilities of romance and of adventure, and splendid opportunities for the display of those warlike qualities which distinguished the Polish country gentlemen. For him, *geography* and *explorers* were indissoluble terms. Geography was the living history of past and contemporary exploration, and not merely a school subject. To learn geography was to follow the course of explorations and to enter on the map the newly discovered facts. For such a geography, Conrad was full of an interest so strong that he almost identified himself with those courageous men who worked to enrich our knowledge of far-off parts of the earth. "I could imagine myself stepping in the very footprints of geographical discovery," Conrad writes in the article mentioned before. For these *men* still more than for the *heroes of fiction*, the boy nourished a strong admiration. And since admiration always means imitation, there is nothing surprising in the fact that the example of these men is responsible, amongst

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other things, for the biggest adventures in Conrad's life, such as the Congo episode and the passage through Torres Straits. The latter is mentioned in the same article:

It was in 1888, when in command of a ship loading in Sydney a mixed cargo for Mauritius, that, one day, *all of a sudden*, all the deep-lying historic sense of *the exploring adventures in the Pacific* surged up to the surface of my being. Almost without reflection I sat down and wrote a letter to my owners suggesting that, instead of the usual southern route, I should take the ship to Mauritius by way of Torres Straits. I ought to have received a severe rap on the knuckles, if only for wasting their time in submitting such an unheard-of proposition.—(*Last Essays*, p. 18.)

But the reply was favourable to the great astonishment of Conrad himself.

My letter had struck a lucky day in Messrs. H. Simpson and Sons' offices—a romantic day.

And so the voyage took place. Nothing happened in spite of a heavy gale, in which Conrad had to take the ship out of the harbour. The passage itself recalled to Conrad vivid memories of the explorers familiar to his childhood:

If the dead haunt the scenes of their earthly exploits, then I must have been attended benevolently

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by those three shades—the inflexible Spaniard [Torres] of such lofty spirit that in his report he disdains to say a single word about the appalling hardships and dangers of his passage; the pig-headed Hollander [Tasman] who, having made up his mind that there was no passage there, missed the truth only by fifty miles or so; and the great Englishman [James Cook], a son of the soil, a great commander and a great professional seaman, who solved that question among many others and left no unsolved problems of the Pacific behind him. Great shades! *All friends of my youth!*—(Id. pp. 19, 20.)

In another passage, Conrad insists upon the fact, that it was the *men*, not the discoveries, which fascinated him most:

My heart and my warm participation swung from the frigid to the torrid zone, fascinated by the problem of each, no doubt, but *more yet by the man who, like masters of a great art, worked each according to his temperament to complete the picture of the earth. Almost each day of my schoolboy life had its hour given up to their company. And to this day I think it was a very good company.*—(Id. p. 19.)

The more serious Congo episode in Conrad's life is very probably due to a wish of his childhood. Three times, and in three different books, Conrad has told the story of his youthful resolution to explore inner Africa. In *A Personal Record*, written in 1908, we read on page 13:

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It was in 1868, when nine years¹ or thereabouts, that while looking at a map of Africa of the time and putting my finger on the blank space then representing the unsolved mystery of that continent, I said to myself with absolute assurance and an amazing audacity which are no longer in my character now:

“When I grow up I shall go *there*.”

And of course I thought no more about it till after a quarter of a century or so an opportunity offered to go there—as if the sin of childish audacity was to be visited on my mature head. Yes, I did go there: *there* being the region of Stanley Falls which in '68 was the blankest of blank spaces on the earth's figured surface.

In his article “Geography and Some Explorers,” written in 1924, Conrad gives a slightly different version of the same event:

Once only did that enthusiasm [for geography] expose me to the derision of my schoolboy chums. One day, putting my finger on a spot in the very middle of the then white heart of Africa, I declared that some day I would go there. My chums' chaffing was perfectly justifiable.

I myself was ashamed of having been betrayed into mere vapouring. Nothing was further from my wildest hopes. Yet it is a fact that, about eighteen years afterwards, a wretched little stern-wheel steambot I commanded, lay moored to the

¹ As is characteristic of him, Conrad is two years out in this statement, for he was nine in 1866.

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bank of an African river. . . . Away in the middle of the stream, on a little island nestling all black in the foam of the broken water, a solitary little light glimmered feebly, and I said to myself with awe: "This is the very spot of my boyish boast."—(*Last Essays*, pp. 16, 17.)

The third allusion to the same event is put into the mouth of Marlow, in *Heart of Darkness*, written in 1898:

Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that), I would put my finger on it and say: When I grow up I will go there. The North Pole was one of these places, I remember. Well, I haven't been there yet, and shall not try to. The glamour's off. Other places were scattered about the Equator, and in every sort of latitude all over the two hemispheres. I have been in some of them, and . . . well, we won't talk about that. But there was one yet—the biggest, the most blank, so to speak—that I was hankering after.

True, by this time it was not a blank space any more. It had got filled since my boyhood with rivers and lakes and names. It had ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery—a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over. It had become a place of darkness. But there was in it one river

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especially, a mighty big river, that you could see on the map, resembling an immense snake uncoiled, with its head in the sea, its body at rest curving afar over a vast country, and its tail lost in the depths of the land. And as I looked at the map of it in a shop-window, it fascinated me as a snake would a bird—a silly little bird.—(*Youth*, etc., p. 52.)

It is impossible to say whether, as in the case of Marlow, a map of the Congo, seen in a shop-window, really determined Conrad to go there, but it is certain that the wish expressed as a small boy was responsible for the decision to apply for a post in the Congo. It is in fact the only post which Conrad ever got by influence, after many difficulties and delays, which only a strong impulse could overcome. For it was certainly not the rather insignificant work, but the adventure and romance which attracted Conrad. He did not go there as a captain but as an explorer—and, like an explorer, he began to keep a diary as soon as he arrived in the promised land of his childhood, in which he fixed, for the first and the last time in his life, his impressions of travel.

If the longing for adventure and travel was already extremely vivid in the child and the boy, the man of letters manifested itself also in Conrad's early youth. We read in *Aubry* (I, p. 27, note) that, when Conrad was twelve or eleven years old, he used to write little comedies, and to act them with the girls living in his uncle's family.

During his school years the boy usually passed the summer holidays with his tutor at Krynica, a well-known mountain resort in the Carpathians. It is

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there, no doubt, that he got acquainted with the life and customs of the Polish mountain folk, the "Goralians",¹ a knowledge which enabled him later to draw his *Yanko Goorall* so astonishingly true to nature. The very name *Yanko* (Polish *Janko*) is an archaism which has become exceedingly rare, but which one may still meet on the borderlands of Poland.

At the age of fifteen, the young Conrad made a long journey with his tutor through Austria, Germany, Switzerland, and Italy. Some episodes of this holiday tour are related in *A Personal Record*, especially his "first contact with British mankind" at Göschenen, and the last desperate attempt of his tutor to persuade him of the folly of his resolution to become a sailor. The reproach, uttered at the top of the Furca Pass: "You are an incorrigible, helpless Don Quixote," a reproach to which he could only oppose an obstinate silence, was never forgotten.

A year or two before Conrad left Poland for Marseilles, he was elected Burgess of the city of Cracow with the remission of the usual fees, "to honour the memory of his father as a Patriot and a man of letters"² This honour (granted under the condition that he should become an Austrian citizen)³ did not deter him from becoming a sailor. Under the influence of books, which responded better to his temperament than the school teaching, his interest in travel, and his longing

¹ Term derived from the Polish *góral* ("mountain peasant"), and used in the *Studio* special number of Autumn, 1911.

² Conrad's own words (in the letter mentioned p. 2). They are not on the official document, but may have been part of an accompanying letter.

³ He never fulfilled this condition, which is not mentioned anywhere in Conrad's writings, but which I have seen on the original document.

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for discovery deepened more and more, and culminated finally in the firm resolve to go to sea. He would have run away, as so many of his characters do (Young Powell, MacWhirr, Lieutenant Réal, and many others), if the sea had been near enough. To judge from two passages in *A Personal Record*, the discussion which preceded his departure for Marseilles, remained for ever engraved in his memory:

. . . . for a boy between fifteen and sixteen, sensitive enough, in all conscience, that commotion of his little world had seemed a very considerable thing indeed. So considerable that, absurdly enough, *the echoes of it linger to this day. I catch myself, in hours of solitude and retrospect, meeting arguments and charges made thirty-five years ago by voices now for ever still*, finding things to say that an assailed boy could not have found, simply because of the mysteriousness of his impulses to himself. I understood no more than the people who called upon me to explain myself.—(p. 121.)

. . . I have faced the astonished indignations, the mockeries and the reproaches of a sort hard to bear for a boy of fifteen; . . . I have been charged with the want of patriotism, the want of sense, and the want of heart too; I went through agonies of self-conflict and shed secret tears not a few, and had the beauties of the Furca Pass spoilt for me. —(p. 110.)

Jean Aubry thinks that sentimental reasons (the disappointment of first love) played a part in his determination to go to sea. This is true, but I think

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that it did not so much urge him to escape at all costs, as augment his desire to distinguish himself. There can be no doubt that the young Conrad had nourished a strong admiration for two girls, one of which served as a model to Antonia in *Nostramo*. This is what the novelist says of her in his "Author's Note" to that book:

If anything could induce me to revisit Sulaco (I should hate to see all these changes) it would be Antonia. And the true reason for that—why not be frank about it?—the true reason is that I have modelled her on my first love. *How we, a band of tallish schoolboys, the chums of her two brothers, how we used to look up to that girl, just out of the school-room herself, as the standard-bearer of a faith to which we all were born, but which she alone knew how to hold aloft with an unflinching hope! She had, perhaps, more glow and less serenity in her soul than Antonia, but she was an uncompromising Puritan of patriotism, with no taint of the slightest worldliness in her thoughts. I was not the only one in love with her, but it was I who had to hear oftenest her scathing criticism of my levities—very much like poor Decoud—or stand the brunt of her austere, unanswerable invective. She did not quite understand—but never mind. That afternoon when I came in, a shrinking yet defiant sinner, to say the final good-bye, I received a hand-squeeze that made my heart leap, and saw a tear that took my breath away. She was softened at the last as though she had suddenly perceived (we were such children still!) that I was really going away for good, going very far away. . .*

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Another allusion to the same person finds itself in a cancelled passage of *The Arrow of Gold*, a passage which has been reproduced by Aubry in its entirety (I, pp. 25, 26), from whom I quote two characteristic passages:

A great austerity of feeling and conviction is not a very common phenomenon in youth. But that young girl seems to have been an uncommon personality, the moral centre of a group of young people on the threshold of life. Her own education appears to have been not finished at the time. *But she had the power of an exalted character.*

. . . she obviously awed him [the young Conrad] a little. And yet *it was she who at the last put some heart into him.* It was very little that she had done. A mere pressure of the hand. *But he had remembered it for five and thirty years of separation and silence!*

In the final version of *The Arrow of Gold* ("First Note," pp. 3, 4), there is yet another passage throwing some light upon the figure of that girl, and upon the struggles and discussions which preceded Conrad's departure for France. The woman friend who is the subject of these lines, is the same person as the girl of whom Conrad wrote in the preceding quotations:

They had parted as children, or very little more than children. Years passed. Then something recalled to the woman the companion of her young days, and she wrote to him: "I have been hearing of you lately. I know where life has brought you

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You certainly selected your own road. But to us, left behind, it always looked as if you had struck out into a pathless desert. We always regarded you as a person that must be given up for lost. But you have turned up again, and though we may never see each other, my memory welcomes you, and I confess to you that I should like to know the incidents on the road which has led you to where you are now."

And he answers her: "I believe you are the only one now alive who remembers me as a child. I have heard of you from time to time, but I wonder what sort of person you are now. Perhaps, if I did know, I wouldn't dare put pen to paper. But I don't know. *I only remember that we were great chums.* In fact, I chummed with you even more than with your brothers. *But I am like the pigeon that went away in the fable of the Two Pigeons.* If I once start to tell you I would want you to feel that you have been there yourself. I may overtax your patience with the story of my life so different from yours, not only in all the facts, but altogether in spirit. You may not understand. You may even be shocked. I say all this to myself; but I know I shall succumb. I have a distinct recollection that in the old days, when you were about fifteen, you always could make me do whatever you liked.

The full meaning of this passage can only be understood by reading the fable to which Conrad alludes. It is a fable of Hindoo origin, which has been retold, amongst others, by La Fontaine (in his second book of *Fables*), and by Russia's greatest writer of fables, Ivan

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Krylov, who lived from 1768 to 1844: Krylov's first book of fables, in which "The Two Pigeons" form the number 18, was published in 1816, and translated into Polish in 1851. A better and more popular translation, made by Antoni Gliński (who was a fable-writer himself), came out in 1860, fully sixteen years before Conrad went to sea. And it is very probable that it is in this version that he knew the fable (possibly even by heart, as certain expressions in *The Arrow of Gold* seem to show), and that it was invoked by the boy's relatives as an example of what would happen to *him* if he followed his desire for adventure. Whoever is acquainted with Polish people and Polish life knows the almost superstitious importance that the Poles (and especially the Polish women) attach to all kinds of forebodings and popular sayings. The dismal fate of the "pigeon that went away" must have seemed the clearest of warnings which could be addressed to the boy who had put it into his head to go to sea. Conrad's uncle certainly did not believe in the foreboding, but there can be but little doubt, judging from what the Polish lady writes ("We always regarded you as a person that must be given up for lost") that Conrad's women relatives and friends feared very much that his fate would be that of the too audacious pigeon, if not worse.

The fable being too long to be quoted here in its entirety, I only give the beginning and the end, which concern us most, italicizing the passages which Conrad seems to have remembered when he wrote the beginning of *The Arrow of Gold*. The translation is that of Bernard Pares (*Krylov's Fables*, London, J. Cape, 1926):

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TWO PIGEONS

There lived two pigeons; each to each was dear as
brother;

They would not eat nor drink, the one without the
other.

Wherever one might be, his mate was surely there;
Come grief, come happiness, in all they loved to
share.

They never took account how quick the hours went
past;

Its shadow sorrow threw, but dullness never cast.

Now where could either find delight
Without his sweetheart and his friend?

Yet no: one birdie yearned to take a distant flight
And get to know by sight

The wide world's wonders without end,
Distinguish false from true, sift fact from idle tale,
"How can you," says his mate, with plaintive wail,

"Oh, why go roaming far from here?

Or do you want to leave your dear?

Oh, shame upon you! If you don't mind if I cry;
Think of the ravening birds, the dreadful storms, the
traps,

A journey manifold mishaps!

Or wait at least till spring, before so far you fly.

I promise to agree, whatever then you would;

But now our stock of food so pitiful and small!

And there! You heard the raven call?

Be sure that bodes no good;

Oh, stay at home, my dear one, do!

I am so happy here with you!"

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(She goes on representing to herself all the dangers that await him on the road, and then the poem goes on:)

Her friend is quite upset to hear her speaking so;
He pities her at heart, but dearly longs to go.
The wish in all his hopes, in all his thoughts appears.
"Don't cry, my pretty one," 'tis so he calms her fears,
For just three days, no more, I'll go awandering:
I'll notice everything so quickly as I fly,
And when I've seen the sights,—the ones that catch
my eye,
I'll soon be back again beneath my dear one's wing,
Then think of what a road there'll be for us to trace!
I'll not miss out an hour, I'll mention every place;
There's nought you shall not hear,—their doings and
their ways,
And every marvel that I see,
'Twill almost as I talk, lie here beneath your gaze,
As if you too had flown all round the world with me.¹
Well, there it was! The friends exchanged a kiss
sad-hearted
And said good-bye and parted.

(But the pigeon has no luck, storm and rain await him, he is pursued by birds of prey, and when he finally escapes them, exhausted and nearly frightened out of his wits, a child perceives him and throws stones at him. The poor bird just contrives to get back to his companion in a pitiful state. And the poet concludes:)

¹ It is to these words that Conrad alludes when he writes in *The Arrow of Gold*: "But I am like the pigeon that went away in the fable of the Two Pigeons. If I once start to tell you *I would want you to feel that you have been there yourself.*"

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Oh, you who so much yearn to travel without end
The whole wide world to view,
First read my little fable through.
Haste not your happiness on *that far road*¹ to send;
Whatever joys that dream has promised to your mind,
No distant search, be sure, a fairer land will find
Than that which holds your love, your true devoted
friend.

Conrad was of those who did not follow the poet's advice. But the ominous fable of the two pigeons must have often been present to his mind, associated with the recollection of the playmate whom he had left behind. It was present, vividly present even, to his mind when, thirty-five years after his departure, he began to write *The Arrow of Gold*, a book which is a faithful record of what happened to *him* at the beginning of *his* adventurous career, and a record which, in close analogy with Krylov's fable, is represented as having been written in order to fulfil a wish expressed by his playmate.

¹ Compare Conrad's words: "You certainly selected your own road."

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Warm heart and weak head—that is the word of the riddle; and it is a fact that the bitterest contradictions and the deadliest conflicts of the world are carried on in every individual breast capable of feeling and passion.

(*An Anarchist.*)

JOSEPH CONRAD'S extraordinary personality (revealed in his books and his life) may be likened to a precious stone, which becomes impenetrable by virtue of its very brilliancy. Most of those who knew Conrad, and who published their impressions, use the word "fascinating" when speaking of his personality, a term applying to things brilliant and impenetrable at the same time. To define, through contradictory appearances, the secret of its powerful charm, and to analyse a soul as rich and complex as that of Conrad, is indeed a task the difficulties of which none can hope ever to overcome entirely.

In the *Edinburgh Review* of January, 1925, and in his more recent *Last Twelve Years of Joseph Conrad*, R. Curle has analysed Conrad's complex personality as it showed itself to the friend:

There was, at heart, a noble simplicity about his attitude towards life; but he was the least obvious of men, and it was often difficult to follow his thought

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through the complexity of his outer moods, and the play of reminiscence upon the argument of the instant. It was so difficult indeed, that . . . all sorts of erroneous conclusions might have been formed. But when one did begin to know Conrad, one saw, as through a mazy forest, the steady beacon of his fidelity to an ideal, and of that inner sobriety of which he writes. He never altered in these fundamental things, because his roots were clear and deep.—(*Last Twelve Years of Joseph Conrad*, p. 28.)

And this sense of a dual nature was intensified by the feeling one had that his mind was composed of a series of different levels from any one of which he might suddenly jump.—(Id. p. 37.)

. . . he had the habit of viewing things from all sorts of angles . . . his sensibilities were quick, plastic, and incalculable.—(*Edinburgh Review*, Jan., 1925.)

In his whole conception of the universe, the ideas of order and duty took first place, and this gave to his outlook an austerity of vision which was philosophic rather than moral. For the weaknesses of humanity he had pity, but for calculated betrayals he had unbounded scorn.—(*Last Twelve Years*, p. 28.)

There were moments, it is true, when still very different lights (or shadows) played on the surface of Conrad's personality, moments when he seemed to retire within himself, as if in the firm conviction that nobody in the wide world would ever understand

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him. R. Curle attributes these moments to physical causes:

The shadow of suffering never left Conrad, and he was at times inaccessible and ready to misunderstand. But that was only the toxic poisoning of gout, a frayed condition of his system, and it meant less than nothing.—(*Last Twelve Years*, p. 29.)

. . . when gout was imminent or upon him he would sometimes retire into eclipsed, nerve-racked ruminations, where it was impossible to follow him, and where he seemed fearfully alone.—(*Edinburgh Review*, Jan. 25.)

There were many occasions on which Conrad felt languid and depressed. At such times he appeared to be surrounded by an imponderable darkness and to recede far out of one's orbit.—(*Last Twelve Years*, p. 19.)

R. Curle's explanations do not seem to explain entirely the frequent misanthropic moods through which Conrad passed. He was subject to fits of depression even as a boy. This we can infer from a letter from his uncle, written in 1891: "I think this tendency to pessimism was already in you as long ago as the days when you were at Marseilles. . . . I am sure that with your melancholic temperament you ought to avoid all meditations which lead to pessimistic conclusions. I advise you to lead a more active life than ever, and to cultivate cheerful habits." In the same letter, his uncle speaks of "that habit of reverie which I have observed to be part of your

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character. It is inherited; it has been always there, in spite of your active life" (Aubry I, p. 148). It seems, therefore, that Conrad's bad health only laid bare what otherwise would have been covered up by his courteous manners: the poignant struggles of the man and artist against the sense of isolation. For Conrad was at heart a lonely man.

He was not rooted, like Hardy, in the English soil, nor, like Galsworthy, in English society. He was a self-made man amongst the hereditarily wealthy. Starting with little, he had to work harder than others to become somebody. In his letters to Ed. Garnett, he reveals himself as the self-made artist he is. The road was long and strenuous and lonely from the Polish schoolboy to the English master mariner, and from the English master mariner to the author of European fame. A man who had achieved such a tremendous task might well feel lonely.¹ "There were no guides to the desert that he crossed," John Galsworthy remarks, very rightly (*Castles in Spain*, p. 90), and the same writer defines (p. 89) the beginning of Conrad's career as follows: "he started out on a path of his own, with a method quite peculiar to himself." Indeed "Flaubert could do nothing for Conrad except give him pleasure. *No one could help Conrad.* He had to subdue to the purposes of his imagination a language that was not native to him; to work in a medium that was not the natural clothing of his Polish temperament."

These are the reasons why Conrad was a lonely man, why, to use Mrs. Conrad's words (p. 3), "one always

¹ Read Conrad's description of his first contact with London in *Poland Revisited* (Notes, p. 150).

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felt that there was a depth within him that, after even years of the closest friendship, one had not reached."

Those who know Conrad only by his works may become aware of this "depth within him" (which is nothing else but the sense of loneliness). In his books it presents itself as *fear*, a fear lurking behind everything, mingling with the very essence of life, clinging to his heroes like their shade. "I seem to hear the whispered cry: the horror! the horror!" one might well repeat after Marlow at the thought of so many Conrad episodes. Strong temperamental traits, dissatisfied with his seafaring life, had lead him to become an English author. It was like a voyage of exploration, like an expedition into an unknown land. "Never had Rubicon been more blindly forded," Conrad avows in *A Personal Record* (p. 69.)

Indeed, it was not until a few years later that he realized that it was too late to go back. His first book had been written in somewhat the same spirit of adventure as that in which his journey to the Mediterranean had been made. He had stepped into literature very much as he had stepped, in 1873, into the Vienna Express, "like a man into a dream." But the day was approaching when the youthful, nothing-is-impossible spirit, the recklessness of his roving days, would have to give way to something more solid, more tangible, if people had not to laugh at Conrad's Folly. Ruin or success hung in the balance, and for many, many years, it was difficult to say which was going to win. These were the days of Conrad's fear, the fear that the newly-conquered ground upon which he stood might shift under his feet, and that the country which he had adopted, might not adopt him. This fear never quite

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left him, and this partly explains why he liked so much to have friends around him, like a child frightened by nightmares.

R. Curle writes: "I remember that when his agent, Mr. J. B. Pinker, died, he immediately sent me a telegram to come and be with him. It was not really that I could do anything to help, it was just that *he wanted, in his distress, to feel that I was by his side.*"—(*Last Twelve Years*, p. 18.)

Joseph Conrad was, in spite of his later success, never optimistic about the future. R. Curle says on this subject: "Indeed, he never quite believed in his material prosperity. The more or less impersonal gratification he derived from it was tinged with doubt and fear for the future. It appeared to him a kind of reed which might fail him at any instant."—(*Last Twelve Years*, pp. 153, 154.)

In the *Edinburgh Review*, R. Curle says that his prosperity appeared to Conrad "as a kind of bubble that might burst at any moment."

And after all, Joseph Conrad was perhaps not altogether wrong. When one considers how unique his career was and how tremendously long and solitary was the way which this man had gone, one may well feel the unreality of all this, and with Curle call Conrad "a legendary figure," in whose presence one "was inclined to rub one's eyes."

And Conrad himself, gifted as he was with an unusual power of introspection, felt it well, both consciously and unconsciously. The sense of unreality in the midst of reality has never been expressed, in modern literature, with more skill and more intensity than in his work. It forms the nerve of *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"*

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of *The Shadow Line*, of *Lord Jim*. How unreal, and yet how true! is the impression which Conrad's realism conveys. And one may add: "and how intensely felt!" For Joseph Conrad preaches with the ardour of a neophyte to his reluctant readers or listeners (somebody called them *schoolboys*) the lesson of the greatness and pathos of human destiny as it was revealed to him in his extraordinary life; and tries to make them see, behind the mere play of cause and effect, the shadows of contingency; and to make them hear, above the rumour of a too busy world, the sweet and alluring song of the blue bird imagination, leading men so very, very far, and filling their hearts with strange courage and their minds with indomitable will.

This ever-present sense of the unreality of reality, this perpetual wonder at existence, has, in Joseph Conrad, an intensity which I would not hesitate to call Slavonic. We Westerners have not introspection enough to wonder eternally at the same problems, and to pass and re-pass in our minds the same questions. When we recognise them as insoluble, we lay them aside, sometimes after having made a theory about them. Conrad was racially incapable of doing this. He was brooding over them throughout his life. At heart, he was a mystic, like Dostoievski.

Human destiny, nothing less, is the theme of his work. His books are no "scenes of nautical life," no impressions of a traveller in tropical countries. Nothing irritated him more than to be called "a novelist of the sea." He was, indeed, before everything else, a novelist of the heart, of the imagination. The sea interested him only by what it reflected, as a mirror.

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The work of Joseph Conrad is always eminently ego-centric. He would not have made imagination the centre of his work, if imagination had not played such an outstanding part in his life. He says himself, in the preface (p. XV) to *A Personal Record*: ". . . I know that a novelist lives in his work. He stands there, the only reality in an invented world, among imaginary things, happenings and people. *Writing about them, he is only writing about himself.*" In *Almayer*, Conrad had recognized himself. "*Qui de nous n'a eu sa terre promise, son jour d'extase, et sa fin en exil,*" he chose these words as a motto for *Almayer's Folly*, because they apply both to the hero of the tale and to the author, because they stress their common bond. *Qui de nous. . . .*, for is not Almayer, like Jim, like the "Rover," like so many, many others, "one of us?"

For reasons of a psychological order (which I shall indicate later), Conrad always sees rather the traits which unite, not those which divide. This put him naturally sometimes in opposition to those of his critics who underlined his "foreign origin," his "exotic atmosphere," his "Polish temperament." As he wrote in 1919 in his "Author's Note" to *A Personal Record*, many critics "ascribed to racial and historical influences much, of what, I believe, appertains simply to the individual." When Conrad wrote these lines, the great battle was won. His reputation as one of the foremost English writers was firmly established. The critics no longer ascribed anything to racial influences.

The situation was very different at the beginning of his career. During his seafaring life, and probably

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still later, Conrad must have often suffered from the hostility which sailors and others evinced to the "furriner" whom an unfortunate accent betrayed almost at once. In the *Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* we have a distinct echo of this inferiority or "alien" complex (to use the psycho-analytical terminology) in the opposition between the pensive and sympathetic Finn (he is really Conrad himself¹) and the turbulent venomous Donkin, who hates "the blooming square-head" with all his soul, and who declares to the "blanked deaf and dumb fool": "I am an Englishman, I am" (p. 12). And with a badly contained resentment, Conrad adds the following "tendencious" scene:

"Those damned furriners should be kept under," opined the amiable Donkin to the forecandle. "If you don't teach 'em their place, they put on you like anythink."—(p. 13.)

This is, I think, one of the best examples of how Conrad "abreacted" (to use another technical expression) in his books a personal complex, or to use a more familiar language, of how he revenged himself. And, as if this were not enough, he gives the "Englishman" Donkin the very characteristics which the average Westerner attributes to Poles. Conrad makes him lazy, turbulent, loquacious, and theatrical.

¹The Finn is an idealized Conrad. He comes from a country under Russian rule, and, like Conrad, has a dreaming temperament. Compare the passage in *The Mirror of the Sea* (p. 122) where Conrad speaks of "my pensive habits, which made me sometimes dilatory about the rigging," and T. Bobrowski's letter (published in Aubrey I, p. 148), where his uncle speaks of "that habit of reverie which I have observed to be part of your character."

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Another echo can be found in *Victory* (pp. 125-126), where Ricardo, "connoisseur in gentlemen," tries to impose upon Schomberg:

"A foreigner can't be expected to know any better. I am an Englishman, and I know a gentleman at sight. I should know one drunk, in the gutter, in jail, under the gallows. There's a something—it isn't exactly the appearance, it's a—no use me trying to tell you. You ain't an Englishman. . . ."

Similar remarks still can be found on pp. 296 and 300. It is hardly necessary to add that the loquacious Ricardo has, to say the least, all the defects of Donkin.

The "alien complex" is still more visible in Conrad's letters. In January, 1898, he writes to R.B. Cunninghame Graham:

. . . . I would be very glad, very, to see him—in any case. But you know I am shy of my bad English. At any rate, prepare him for a "b . . . y furriner" who will talk gibberish to him at the rate of 10 knots an hour. If not forewarned the phenomenon might discourage him to the point of kicking me downstairs.—(Aubry I, p. 221.)

In December of the same year, Joseph Conrad says in a letter to H. G. Wells:

Thanks ever so much for the *Invisible Man*, I shall keep him a few days longer.

Frankly, it is uncommonly fine As to

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b . . . furriners, they ain't in it at all.—(Aubry, I, p. 259.)

Conrad did not always use such strong expressions. In 1910, he writes to John Galsworthy the following reflection, which shows that resignation has taken the place of the former irritation:

I suppose that I am now the only human being in these isles who thinks Meyerbeer a great composer: and I am an alien at that, and not to be wholly trusted.—(Aubry II, p. 110.)

As I remarked before, his resentment was strongest soon after the beginning of his literary career. This was also the moment when he felt the need of choosing intermediary persons like Marlow (who developed out of Lingard), of Dr. Kennedy, and others. It was easier for Marlow to be sarcastic than for Conrad. The first book of his which had a distinct success with the public (*Chance*) is the last in which Marlow appears. It is like dropping a mask. Of course, Marlow is (as Galsworthy remarks in his *Castles in Spain*) only English in name, not in nature. And this is so true that *when* Conrad wants to make him very English, he only succeeds in making him more Catholic than the Pope.¹

So in the following passage (quite unnatural in the mouth of a cosmopolitan like Marlow):

You understand it was a Continental concern, that trading society; but I have lots of relations living

¹ These lines had been written before R. Curle's book, *The Last Twelve Years*, had appeared. It was not with little surprise that I read on p. 186 of that book on Conrad's attitude towards England:

"Like a convert to Roman Catholicism, Conrad was in some respects more Roman than the Pope."

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on the Continent, *because it's cheap and not so nasty as it looks, they say.*—(*Youth*, p. 53.)

Marlow resembles Conrad in all essential traits of character. Besides being a cosmopolitan, he is a fascinating story-teller, with a strong sense of romance, and a marvellous power of intuition, observation and imitation. He is really the "projection" of Conrad's best qualities.

As to Dr. Kennedy, Conrad has tried to make him much more English. But he still resembles Conrad:

He had begun life as surgeon in the Navy, and afterwards had been the companion of a famous traveller in the days when there were continents with unexplored interiors And now he had come to a country practice—from choice. (*Typhoon*, p. 106.)

It is really Conrad's career transposed into the medical field. And the two sentences which follow may be taken of what Conrad thought of certain traits of character of his own:

The penetrating power of his mind, acting like a corrosive fluid, had destroyed his ambition, I fancy. His intelligence is of a scientific order, of an investigating habit, *and of that unappeasable curiosity which believes that there is a particle of a general truth in every mystery.*

The existence of Marlow and Kennedy is certainly another proof of Conrad's deep introspection.

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But if their history and their characters are very similar, this does not exclude that Dr. Kennedy, in face of the Pole Yanko (whom the doctor takes for a Basque), is sometimes so little Conrad's double—that we almost feel the mental strain it must have cost the author to differentiate himself so completely from him. For instance, when Kennedy, more Catholic than the Pope, speaks of the Polish *language* as a *dialect* (as if Polish were not a highly developed literary language!) how must Conrad Korzeniowski have raged inwardly! But such was the tragedy of his life: never to be able to be quite himself, but ever to have to play a part, be it the part of the Englishman, or the part of the noble Polish refugee, without being at heart either of them. He could talk to nobody about his native country, because nobody would have understood him. Is it not characteristic that under his pen the old count in "Il Conte"¹ (*A Set of Six*) becomes a Spaniard, although the original was an authentic Pole?

Psychologically, Joseph Conrad belonged to the *intuitive type*, as C. G. Jung describes it in his masterful book *Psychological Types* (see Appendix I.) His intuition he certainly inherited from his father, who was also a very distinct intuitive man.

The intuitive type possesses in a remarkable degree the faculty of putting himself in the place of others, or rather, of feeling as if he were some third person, of "identifying himself" with others, as the technical

¹ The title "Il Conde" (still reproduced in all editions) is a slip of Conrad's, *il* being Italian, and *conde* Spanish, and Conrad himself considered it as such, as a careful perusal of the "Author's Note" to the book will show. Another misspelling occurs in the text. Riviera de Chiaia (not Riviera de Chiaja) is the name of the famous avenue in Naples.

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expression is. The consequence is that he adapts himself very easily to whatever appeals to his imagination and that he understands and penetrates and literally "makes his" the motives and enthusiasms of all sorts of men (for him, there is always a "common bond"), of saints as well as of rogues, of Eastern as well as of Western people, of sailors and soldiers as well as of explorers and generals. The intuitive type has not always the stable personality of other types. His mind, to use R. Curle's expression, seems composed of a series of different levels from any one of which he may suddenly jump. Intuitive types have the faculty of viewing things from different angles (always provided it appeals to their imagination), and they can play more than one part. To use the precise language of analytical psychology: they often give up one identification for another. They apprehend reality by means of identifications. Where identification is impossible, the process of understanding is greatly hindered, in which case much verbiage, or a theory, is often put forward to mask the difficulty. But identification does not only mean understanding, it means still more sympathy. Whatever or whomever we love, we always love in them the projection of desires which are our very own. In other words: sympathy is impossible without some sort of identification, and identification is impossible without some sort of sympathy, or at least a great amount of indulgence related to sympathy. Hamlet's "morbid" indulgence for his uncle is characteristic of the intuitive type, to which Hamlet belongs. The man who invented the phrase *Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner* was an intuitive. *Tout pardonner*, not necessarily in grandiloquent words or with great

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gestures, but more often unconsciously or half-consciously, as Conrad pardons Lord Jim. The greatest intuitive mind in the history of our civilization is Jesus Christ. That is why forgiveness has become the central idea of the Christian religion.

Conrad's intuitive nature explains why many of his portraits are so exceedingly true to life, while others, especially portraits of women, are rather vague. Joseph Conrad could not identify himself with women. His motherless youth, his seafaring life, and a pronounced masculine nature are responsible for the lack of inner experience of the feminine character. Conrad's intuitiveness also accounts for the wide range of his mind, his receptiveness, and his gift of languages. His violent dislike for Dostoievski, on the other hand, is very probably the expression of the will not to identify himself with (as much as not to be identified with) a mind to which he was akin. For without Dostoievski, *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes* would not have been written. (It must be remembered that Dostoievski hated the Poles, a fact which partly accounts for Conrad's violent dislike of that Russian writer.)

I cannot but quote here what R. Curle says about Conrad's position to Dostoievski:

I sometimes wonder whether his extreme antipathy to the work of Dostoievski, to which I have already referred, was not really based upon the fact that he saw in this Russian novelist the most formidable of all antagonists to his own theories of a world governed by sanity and method. . . . I have an idea that his real hatred for Dostoievski was due to an appreciation of his power. It is on record that he once

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told Mr. Galsworthy that Dostoievski was "as deep as the sea," and for Conrad it was the depth of an evil influence. *Dostoievski represented to him the ultimate forces of confusion and insanity, arrayed against all that he valued in civilization.* He did not despise him as one despises a nonentity, *he hated him as one might hate Lucifer and the forces of darkness.*—(*Last Twelve Years*, pp. 28-29.)

I think that R. Curle is perfectly right. Only, he ought to have added that these "ultimate forces of confusion and insanity" more than once almost broke through the safeguards of Conrad's theories "of a world governed by sanity and method." *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim*, *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* *The Shadow Line*, and so many other Conrad books are there to prove that Conrad was a familiar in that truly Dostoievskian underworld, where the devils have intercourse with men. The difference between the two writers is that while Dostoievski accepts these phenomena in their entirety, Conrad tries to objectivate them, to keep them at arm's length, so to speak. The air of indulgent detachment which he assumes so often (especially under the cover of Marlow) is hardly more than a mask, and not more genuine, in fact, than the somewhat artificial irony which he adopts when speaking of revolutionists.

All boys pass, between the age of nine and fifteen, through the "intuitive phase" of their development. At that moment, they may be in turn engine-drivers, robbers, policemen, airmen, captains, Robinson Crusoes,

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giants, saints, or murderers. Their mind is really composed of "a series of different levels," and they easily leap from one to another. The adult intuitive type could therefore be defined as a type which has retained its faculty of identification. Intuition might then be considered as a useful "fixation," developed and elevated sufficiently to make it an instinctive way of apprehending reality. It may be suggested here that Conrad's longing for the sea (which I defined as the longing for identification with heroes) would perhaps have been considerably weaker, if he had had in his youth the opportunity of playing often with other boys. Except for a few happy months in the Ukraine, Conrad was a lonely boy, who had to keep to himself his longings and his enthusiasms.

Be that as it may, the continuity of the boy and the man is very visible in Conrad's case. A boyish strain within him was ever alive. It can be traced in his last books as well as in his first. The plot of *The Rover*, for instance, is quite that of a boy's book of adventure. The beginning of *Suspense* is the relation of a young man's adventurous expedition in war-time. Conrad was always yearning for change, for adventure. I have shown in a preceding chapter how intensely he identified himself in his youth with heroes, adventurers, and explorers. For him, the study of geography meant to re-live the lives of the great explorers and navigators, just as later the writing of novels meant re-living the life of his heroes. His enigmatical remark, made to A. Symons (p: 9): "I do not create, I invent," has no other meaning. He did not create the hero and his destiny (for the hero was always part of himself, and his destiny but a variation

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of his own), but he only invented the setting, the details, the variations. And just as one can always recognize a well-known melody in any of its variations, the unchanging Conradesque theme is visible in any of his books, in spite of the variety of his invention.

Conrad's heroes can all be brought under one formula. They are outcasts, living far from their home or in strange surroundings, and there is little or no hope for them ever to return. *If* they return home, it is only to die there. They have been lured away from home by all sorts of inexplicable impulses and longings, or by very peculiar circumstances, to find, only too late, that destiny had trapped them into a situation from which there is no way out. And then follows the final tragedy which brings out, even in the most mediocre of them, their finest human qualities. They die, and with their death pay off the debt contracted in life. Their defeat is really their victory.

Conrad's heroes are all more or less his doubles, and their fate is modelled on his own or *on what he feared his own fate might be*.

Like his heroes, like Almayer, like his unfortunate countryman Yanko Goorall, Joseph Conrad had to fight alone, frightfully alone, and he knew it. In his work, the enormous conflicts which he had to repress in order to become an English writer are piled up on a gigantic scale. He had started on a literary career in a spirit of adventure which ignored the immense difficulties. But, in his literary career, as in his seafaring life, he was to find out soon enough that adventure was not enough to live on. And resolutely, the man of thirty-five takes up the new burden, and, ever faithful to his new duty, realises a work which puts

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many a "born" man of letters to shame. He worked like a miner in a coal-pit, not only because he had to live, but because he felt that time was short, and that his work was really his justification. He had to justify himself, in the eyes of others and still more in his own. Had not Poles spoken of desertion? The question occupied Conrad not a little, for the reproach was very serious. A curious passage in *A Personal Record* reflects these meditations (at a moment, it is true, when success had smoothed over the conflict), and shows that Conrad found a relief in the argument of general human inconsistency, which is a fact to be accepted and to be borne with charity. *Who of us. . . .*

. . . why should I, the son of a land where such men as these have turned up with their ploughshares and bedewed with their blood, undertake the pursuit of fantastic meals of salt junk and hard tack upon the wide seas? On the kindest of views, it seems an unanswerable question. *Alas! I have the conviction that there are men of unstained rectitude who are ready to murmur scornfully the word desertion. Thus the taste of innocent adventure may be made bitter to the palate. The part of the inexplicable should be allowed for in appraising the conduct of men in a world where no explanation is final. No charge of faithlessness ought to be lightly uttered. The appearances of this perishable life are deceptive like everything that falls under the judgment of our imperfect senses. The inner voice may remain true enough in its secret counsel. The fidelity to a special tradition may last through the events of an unrelated existence, following faithfully, too, the traced way of an inexplicable impulse.—(pp. 35, 36.)*

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Those, then, are the excuses which Conrad has to offer. It will be remarked that they all belong to an irrational order, and that they are rather long-winded, for we have to add a whole paragraph which I quote below. *Qui s'excuse, s'accuse.*

The reasons which he gives cannot do away with the fault, nor even excuse it. They are not convincing enough. Nobody, in the Western world, at least, believes in the absolute supremacy of inexplicable impulses over our personality, nor do we, like the Easterners, place the unconscious over the conscious. If we did, our material achievements and our laws would be quite different from what they are. If what Conrad says in the passage above were absolutely true, no judge, for instance, could condemn a criminal. Although, as Pascal said, the heart may have reasons which reason cannot understand, it does not necessarily follow that the heart has rights of which reason cannot approve. Conrad, descending from a race which is Eastern at heart, naturally stresses the point of the inexplicable impulse. Even tradition, according to him, is based on such an impulse. It is only natural that impulses should play such an important part in the works of Joseph Conrad, beginning with *Almayer's Folly*, *An Outcast of the Islands*, *Lord Jim*, *Tales of Unrest*. The story of *The Return*, is all built around such impulses. It is as if Conrad had wanted to prove himself and others, that *he* was not alone to give way to such forces. In *A Personal Record*, this intention is quite evident. He compares himself (or better: he identifies himself) with Don Quixote. The case is now quite clear: Don Quixote (i.e. Joseph Conrad) *was faithful to his ideal, becoming thereby unfaithful to his village* (i.e. native country). And Conrad explains that

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there are two sorts of fidelity: the fidelity to a personal, unselfish ideal, to one's call, and the fidelity to a family tradition, and that there are cases when the latter must needs give way to the former. This is how Conrad expresses it:

It would take too long to explain the intimate alliance of contradictions in human nature which makes love itself wear at times the desperate shape of betrayal. And perhaps there is no possible explanation. Indulgence—as somebody said—is the most intelligent of all the virtues. I venture to think that it is one of the least common, if not the most uncommon of all. I would not imply by this that men are foolish—or even most men. Far from it. The barber and the priest, backed by the whole opinion of the village, condemned justly the conduct of the ingenious hidalgo who, sallying forth from his native place, broke the head of the muleteer, put to death a flock of inoffensive sheep, and went through very doleful experiences in a certain stable. God forbid that an unworthy churl should escape merited censure by hanging on to the stirrup-leather of the sublime caballero.¹ His was a very noble, a very unselfish fantasy, fit for nothing except to raise the envy of baser mortals. But there is more than one aspect to the charm of that exalted and dangerous figure. He, too, had his frailties. After reading so many romances he desired naïvely to escape the intolerable reality of things. He wished to meet eye to eye the valorous giant Brandabarbaran, Lord of Arabia, whose armour is made of the skin of a dragon, and whose shield, strapped to his arm, is the gate of

¹ The very thing Conrad is about to do.

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a fortified city. O amiable and natural weakness! O blessed simplicity of a gentle heart without guile! Who would not succumb to such a consoling temptation? Nevertheless it was a form of self-indulgence and the ingenious hidalgo of La Mancha was not a good citizen. The priest and the barber were not unreasonable in their strictures. Without going so far as the old King Louis Philippe, who used to say in his exile: "the people are never in fault"—one may admit that there must be some righteousness in the assent of a whole village. Mad! Mad! He who kept in pious meditation the ritual vigil-of-arms by the well of an inn and knelt reverently to be knighted at daybreak by the fat, sly rogue of a landlord, has come very near perfection. He rides forth, his head encircled by a halo—the patron saint of all lives spoilt or saved by the irresistible grace of imagination. But he was not a good citizen.—(pp. 36, 37.)

I have italicized, in this paragraph, all the passages in which Conrad alludes to himself, and where excusing Don Quixote is only a way of excusing himself. But I agree that I might as well have italicized the whole paragraph. When Conrad says, for instance, that indulgence is the most intelligent of virtues, this implies that only the *indulgent* (not the *just*), the *intuitive* (not the *logical*) will understand *him*. And when he goes on: "I venture to think that it is one of the least common, if not the most uncommon of all," he again alludes to his own experience. He was easily and often misjudged. Did not "the barber and the priest," backed by the whole opinion of his "village," condemn the conduct of the ingenious hidalgo

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Korzeniowski, who, wanting to escape from the intolerable reality of things, sallied forth from his native place, and went through many bad adventures and experiences in the wide world? No wonder Conrad defends the immortal caballero with such eloquence. We feel it: he is all the time defending himself. That's why he insists upon a point which is quite secondary in Cervantes' narrative, but which serves well Conrad's purpose: *Don Quixote is not a good citizen because he follows an inexplicable impulse, an invisible voice, the call of his life.* Such is the opinion of the village and of its spiritual leaders, the barber and the priest. *But, Conrad pursues, they are wrong in spite of contrary appearances. Their mistake consists less in judging as they do, than in judging at all.¹ For the mark of the transcendental is stamped upon the desire which drives him out into the world, and the part of the inexplicable must be allowed for in what he does.* Indulgence (i.e. intuition) is the only way to understand a conduct which mere reason would condemn. Only, indulgence is a very rare virtue. One does not often meet with the attitude which voluntarily refrains from judging what cannot be judged *objectively*, but only intuitively. To the few intuitive who, like Marlow and Stein, possess it, it confers the power of penetrating deeper into the irrational than the mere thinking type can even contemplate doing.

Here again we have evidence that Conrad belongs to the intuitive type. How else could he have known (by intuition) with such certainty, that intuition can open gates at which thinking (and judging) knocks in

¹ Like Lord Jim (p. 93), "he did not want a judge. He wanted an ally, a helper, an accomplice."

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vain, gates of inner knowledge, gates to the hearts of men *whose lives might have been saved but for the lack of comprehension*, gates to that inner side of reality which can only be expressed by symbols coming to us we do not know why and whence, symbols sometimes as shortlived as flowers, and sometimes more eternal than ideas.

In the case of young Conrad as in that of Don Quixote, the trouble started by their reading books of adventure. Too many heroes, appealing to their imagination, were offered for identification. Their call was all the more irresistible as the intuitive type easily overestimates his capacities and aspirations. The wonderful adventures described in books were as many promises to them, whose fulfilment was to be sought for in the wide world. The most important objects of Conrad's desire (but I am not sure whether such a desire can have any definite object) were the immensity of the world still unknown to him, the Mediterranean with its historical associations, the East with its innumerable mysteries, and the heart of Africa. The desire itself (or the "inexplicable impulse," as Conrad liked to call it) might be defined as a longing for a *more complete identification* with the heroes of his imagination. He wanted to know what it was *really* like to be a sort of Ulysses, a sort of Cook, a sort of Torres, a sort of Tasman. He wanted more than to visit the scenes of their exploits. He wanted to re-feel their enthusiasms, to re-live their triumphs, to share in their success and fame. And in doing so, he secretly hoped to discover the mystic truth of existence, the

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essence of imagination ("the great master of men's lives and hearts"), to find the blue flower of the romantics, to learn the great lesson of life not, as at school, by abstract wisdom, but by losing himself in the object, by becoming one with wind and waves, with human hearts, passions and ambitions, with the reckless and the delicate, with peoples speaking incomprehensible languages, with men fighting with bow and arrow, with pirates, with the fortunate and the unfortunate, with the old and the young, the honest and the dishonest, the content and the ever dissatisfied, the orthodox and the blasphemer, the active and the passive, the dense and the clever, the rich and the beggar, in order to discover the meaning of his own life, the constant factor in the ever-changing turmoil of existence, the timeless element in men's souls, the universal law regulating the rhythm of their hearts.

There was more than the lure of adventure in the desire which drove Conrad to the sea. During the few months he stayed in and around Marseilles, he had so many serious adventures that he might just as well have gone back at once had he come in search of adventure only. To find that adventure was not half as pretty in reality as it was in books was Conrad's first disenchantment on his arrival in the promised land, and the second was the discovery that things had changed not a little since the days of the great travellers. How prosaic looked the shores of the once-enchanted Mediterranean! In later years, Conrad has written, with the humorous indulgence that the mature have for the naïveté of youth, an account of his first Mediterranean impressions, and in them the note of disenchantment is dominant.

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This is what Conrad writes about 1905:

I lived to watch on a strange shore a black and youthful Nausicaa, with a joyous train of attendant maidens, carrying baskets of linen to a clear stream overhung by the heads of slender palm trees. The vivid colour of their draped raiment and the gold of their earrings invested with a barbaric and regal magnificence their figures, stepping out freely in a shower of broken sunshine. The whiteness of their teeth was still more dazzling than the splendour of jewels at their ears. The shaded side of the ravine gleamed with their smiles. They were as unabashed as so many princesses, but, alas! not one of them was the daughter of a jet-black sovereign. *Such was my abominable luck in being born by the mere hair's breadth of twenty-five centuries too late into a world where kings have been growing scarce with scandalous rapidity,* while the few who remain have adopted the uninteresting manners and customs of simple millionaires. Obviously, it was a vain hope in 187— to see the ladies of a royal household walk in chequered sunshine, with baskets of linen on their heads, to the banks of a clear stream overhung by the starry fronds of palm trees. It was a vain hope. If I did not ask myself whether, limited by such discouraging impossibilities, life was still worth living, it was only because I had then before me several other pressing questions, some of which have remained unanswered to this day. The resonant, laughing voices of these gorgeous maidens scared away the multitude of humming-birds, whose delicate wings wreathed with the mist of their vibration the tops of flowering bushes.

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No, they were not princesses. Their unrestrained laughter, filling the hot, fern-clad ravine, had a soulless limpidity, as of wild, inhuman dwellers in tropical woodlands. Following the example of certain prudent travellers, I withdrew unseen—and returned, not much wiser, to the Mediterranean, the sea of classic adventure.—(*The Mirror of the Sea*, pp. 154-5.)

This passage is preceded by a paragraph in which Conrad says of his ambitions at that moment (December, 1874): "I yet longed for the beginning of my own obscure Odyssey." In other words, two months after his arrival in Marseilles, disenchantment had not yet quite done its work. He *still* longed for the beginning of his own Odyssey. But the time was already near when the growing interest *in the craft* supplanted more and more his craving for adventure. By the force of circumstances, Conrad came to the conclusion that his was not the destiny of a great traveller and adventurer. "Since leaving the sea . . . I have discovered that there is in my composition very little stuff from which travellers are made," he was to write later in *Poland Revisited* ("Notes," p. 145). This gradual transference of his interests upon a new subject lasted many years, but certain phases of it left him a stronger impression than others. In *The Shadow Line* he relates one of the last phases. The passage from youthful desire for change and, perhaps, for adventure, to a position of great responsibility, where adventure becomes the most undesirable thing, represents the final big step to Conrad's philosophy of manhood. We do not know how many of such decisive moments he passed in all.

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When he left his balancelle and his barque in order to serve on a bigger ship, where there was certainly more work and less adventure, he crossed his first shadow line. At that moment he seems to have given up the principle of adventure for adventure's sake. The art of the craft, "the fine art" as he was to call it later, attracted him now. The following passage from *The Mirror of the Sea* throws some light upon this experience:

It was written that there [on the Mediterranean], in the nursery of our navigating ancestors, I should learn to walk in the ways of my craft and grow in the love of the sea, blind as young love often is, but absorbing and unselfish as all true love must be. *I demanded nothing from it—not even adventure.* In this I showed, perhaps, more intuitive wisdom than high self-denial. No adventure ever came to one for the asking. He who starts on a deliberate quest of adventure goes forth but to gather dead-sea fruit, unless, indeed, he be beloved of the gods and great amongst heroes, like that most excellent cavalier Don Quixote de la Mancha.—(p. 155.)

This passage, it must be pointed out, is not absolutely in harmony with certain facts of Conrad's life. Not "I demanded nothing from it—not even adventure," Conrad ought to have said, but "I *soon* demanded nothing from it—not even adventure." He soon ceased to long for his own private Odyssey. Only then, the poetic hyperbole of the unselfishness of his love for the sea would have had to be dropped. There is another sentence which strikes me as misleading.

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When Conrad goes on: "No adventure ever came to one for the asking. He who starts on a deliberate quest of adventure goes forth but to gather dead-sea fruit, unless, indeed, he be beloved of the gods and great amongst heroes . . .", he obviously alludes to his own experience. A boy of seventeen hardly has so much "intuitive wisdom." Who started on a deliberate quest of adventure to find only that he gathered dead-sea fruit, if not Conrad? But he, who longed for the adventures promised in his books and the heroship it entailed, was soon to find out that, after all, he was only "a common mortal of a mediocre animus."

The glamour of adventure soon gave place to the glamour of sea-life. *Youth* is a brilliant monument to the spirit which animated the twentyfour-year-old Conrad, a spirit whose transmutation into the sense of responsibility forms the theme of *The Shadow Line*.

In *The Mirror of the Sea*, we find another instance of such a shadow-line, where the adventurous spirit of Conrad's youth transforms itself into a deep sense of duty, responsibility and craftsmanship. The passage forms a great part of Chapter xxxvi of the book. Conrad relates how his boat's crew rescued the men of a wreck floating on the way of the ship. Conrad's captain has ordered the boats to be lowered.

Before I jumped into mine, he took me aside, as being an inexperienced junior, for a word of warning:

"You look out as you come alongside that she doesn't take you down with her. You understand?"

He murmured this confidentially, so that none of the men at the falls should overhear, and I was

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shocked. "Heavens! as if in such an emergency one stopped to think of danger!" I exclaimed to myself mentally, in scorn of such cold-blooded caution.

It takes many lessons to make a real seaman, and I got my rebuke at once. My experienced commander seemed in one searching glance to read my thoughts on my ingenuous face.

"What you're going for is to save life, not to drown the boat's crew for nothing," he growled, severely, in my ear. But as we shoved off he leaned over and cried out: "It all rests on the power of your arms, men. Give way for life!"

When approaching the wreck, they see the men there, in ragged clothes, working like convicts at the pumps. When the boats lie alongside the half-submerged deck, the captain of the wrecked ship gives, in a single word, the order to leave the ship, and the exhausted men tumble into the boats like corpses.

The clatter they made tumbling into the boats had an extraordinarily destructive effect upon the illusion of tragic dignity our self-esteem had thrown over the contests of mankind with the sea. *On that exquisite day of gentle breathing peace and veiled sunshine, perished my romantic love to what men's imagination had proclaimed the most august aspect of Nature. The cynical indifference of the sea to the merits of human suffering and courage, laid bare in this ridiculous, panic-tainted performance extorted from the dire extremity of nine good and honourable seamen,*

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revolted me. I saw the duplicity of the sea's most tender mood. It was so because it could not help itself, but the awed respect of the early days was gone. I felt ready to smile bitterly at its enchanting charm, and glare viciously at its furies. In a moment, before we shoved off, I had looked coolly at the life of my choice. Its illusions were gone, but its fascination remained. I had become a seaman at last.

As I brought the boats under the falls, my captain, in high good-humour, leaned over, spreading his red and freckled elbows on the rail, and called down to me sarcastically out of the depths of his cynic philosopher's beard:

“So you have brought the boats back after all, have you?”

It was not for him to discern upon me *the marks of my recent initiation. And yet I was not exactly the same youngster who had taken the boat away—all impatience for a race against Death,¹ with the prize of nine men's lives at the end.*

Already I looked with other eyes upon the sea. I knew it capable of betraying the generous ardour of youth as implacably as, indifferent to evil and good, it would have betrayed the basest greed or the noblest heroism. My conception of its magnanimous greatness was gone. And I looked upon the true sea—the sea that plays with men till their hearts are broken, and wears stout ships to death. Nothing

¹ Remark this expression testifying to Conrad's sporting spirit.

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can touch the brooding bitterness of its soul. Open to all and faithful to none, it exercises its fascination for the undoing of the best. To love it is not well. It knows no bond of plighted troth, no fidelity to misfortune, to long companionship, to long devotion. *The promise it holds out perpetually is very great, but the only secret of its possession is strength, strength—the jealous, sleepless strength of a man guarding a coveted treasure within his gates.*

F. M. Hueffer writes in his book on Conrad that Conrad "hated" the sea. But then, Hueffer writes as an impressionist, not as a critic. "To love it is not well," is Conrad's mature opinion of the sea, because the sea knows no faith, and does not keep what it promises.

The young Conrad had been brought up in the Roman Catholic religion which, especially in Poland, repudiates the "good for the good's sake" principle. He expected, as most children do, that, in this life, every good action shall have its reward, and that every bad action shall be punished. The miserable death of his father (who was a "good" man if ever there was one) shattered his religious belief to its foundations. From that moment, his "pessimistic" outlook was fixed in its main lines. Experiences like the rescue of the nine shipwrecked men only served to consolidate it, while the same event might have inspired an optimist quite differently. What a wonderful instance the episode would have become in the hands of an "optimistic" writer, to illustrate the principle that one must never lose hope! At the very moment when all seems lost, the help arrives.

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Conrad's pessimism could not be based on the experiences of his seafaring life. Personally, he had amazing good luck. His strongly intuitive nature enabled him to adapt himself easily to very different conditions. He began to write at a moment when the public began slowly to be interested in exotic literature. As a boy and a sailor, he escaped from unusually great dangers. I only need mention his illness (inflammation of the brain) when he accompanied his father into exile, his adventure on board the *Palestine* (the *Judea* in *Youth*), and the great dangers of the Congo expedition. In 1914 again, when Conrad was caught with his family by the outbreak of the war in Austrian territory, he escaped, by an extraordinary chance, internment till the end of the war. Of these experiences Conrad never speaks with scorn. His pessimism is obviously not due to the many obstacles he found on his way to success, but to his Polish reminiscences and first and foremost to that first eye-to-eye meeting with destiny, by the death-bed of his father. There the young soul (sophisticated, we may infer, by well-meaning people) lived through its first disenchantment, the bitterness of which was too hard for him to bear. His generous heart revolted against the cruelty of his father's tragedy. There the resolution "never, never to be caught again" was taken and held to the letter throughout his life. There the channel was formed in which similar feelings and impressions could form themselves, impressions of the "revolting," "blind," "cruel" nature of destiny. His *sea* is very often but a symbol for destiny playing with men's lives, and his desire to go to the sea may well have been due to an unconscious urge to master his fate.

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The pessimistic strain in Conrad was strengthened by the necessity of repressing that Polish part within him, which had to be sacrificed to an English career, but which, had Poland been a free country, would have made a soldier—most probably a sort of lieutenant Réal—of him.

Another important element in the formation of Conrad's personality is his long contact with the East. Had Joseph Conrad not become so intimate with Eastern countries and Eastern types, he would never have gained his deep insight into the unconscious or half-conscious motives of man.

The reason for this is easy to see. There is in many ways a gulf between an Eastern and a Western mentality. To pass from one to the other at an age when impressions are vivid and expectations high, gives a shock which will be remembered during one's lifetime. This will be quite ineradicable if the traveller belongs (like Count Keyserling, to quote an extreme instance) to the intuitive type of man who is able to penetrate Eastern mentality better than the usual kind of globe-trotter. The Eastern type of man is the very best subject a psychologist could wish to study. Just as Freud and his followers discovered and analysed the working of the unconscious in the neurotic type where it lies bare, so Conrad gained part of his psychological insight by studying the Eastern man, or at least, the Western man with Eastern morals. In these, instincts and impulses work quite at the surface, masked only by the transparent veil of make-believe, which is a characteristic of any Eastern type. Not unlike a child, he has great difficulty in co-ordinating his impulses and desires with reality, and make-believe

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is the principal, because the easiest, means to attain that end. It allows of co-ordinating both—without having to modify either.

The qualities and defects of the Eastern man are strongly pronounced. Nowhere are resentments deeper, memories stronger, traditions holier than in the East. No part of the world has produced so many high-minded idealists, so many founders of religions, so many self-sacrificing saints. Unreliability and bad faith are commonly considered as the mark of the Eastern man, and yet, who can be more inhumanly faithful than the Easterner? We do not dream of burning the widows, nor have we a tradition of hara-kiri. In the Eastern soul, the "all-human" elements present themselves with a crudeness which strikes even the inexperienced eye. To study them is like observing the subdued potentialities of the Western man under a strong magnifying glass. It is true that most of us fail, at first, to recognize our own nature in Eastern souls, and that some never recognize it at all. The difference in size is too great and the stress is put on details which seem to us quite unimportant. Conrad passed through these stages of bewilderment, indulgence, and comprehension, and part of this development can be followed in *Karain*. In this story, Conrad relates first his surprise at the discovery that an intelligent fellow like Karain could be tortured by what could only be looked upon as a most stupid superstition. But the surprise soon gives place to the typically intuitive indulgence for the weaknesses of those we love, culminating in the conclusion that, after all, we, too, have *our* superstitions, that *some of us* suffer and even die of remorse, of lost honour, of lack of faith in life, of unhappy temperamental

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dispositions, of imaginative wrongs, and that there may even be a greatness in such a fate, a greatness, a pathos, and an inspiration for others. To the man who has reached this intuitive stage of perception, the differences of race and colour seem to vanish like mist before the sun. This passage from *Karain* expresses wonderfully well that communion with another soul of a different race:

There are those who say that a native will not speak to a white man. Error. No man will speak to his master; but to a *wanderer and a friend*, to him who does not come to teach or to rule, to him who asks for nothing *and accepts all things*, words are spoken by the camp-fires, in the *shared solitude* of the sea, in riverside villages, in resting-places surrounded by forests—words are spoken *that take no account of race or colour. One heart speaks—another one listens*; and the earth, the sea, the sky, the passing wind and the stirring leaf, hear also the futile tale of the burden of life.—(*Tales of Unrest*, p. 26.)

This was more than a passing mood of Joseph Conrad, it was his way of looking at the world. This is what he wrote, in his "Authors' Note" (1919) to *Almayer's Folly*:

The picture of life, *there as here*, is drawn with the same elaboration of detail, coloured with the same tints. *Only in the cruel serenity of the sky, under the merciless brilliance of the sun, the dazzled eye misses the delicate detail, sees only the strong outlines, while the colours in the steady light seem crude and*

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without shadow. Nevertheless, it is the same picture. And there is a bond between us and that humanity so far away. I am speaking here of men and women—not of the charming and graceful phantoms that move about in our mud and smoke and are softly luminous with the radiance of all our virtues; that are possessed of all refinements, of all sensibilities, of all wisdom—but, being only phantoms, possess no heart.

The sympathies of those are (probably) with the immortals: with the angels above or the devils below. *I am content to sympathise with common mortals, no matter where they live; in houses or in tents, in the streets under a fog, or in the forests behind the dark line of dismal mangroves that fringe the vast solitude of the sea. For their land—like ours—lies under the inscrutable eye of the Most High. Their hearts—like ours—must endure the load of the gifts from Heaven: the curse of facts and the blessing of illusions, the bitterness of our wisdom and the deceptive consolation of our folly.*

In a different story, *The Return*, Conrad shows up the dark "Eastern" stream of life, breaking through pleasantly arranged Western conventions:

They skimmed over the surface of life hand in hand, in a pure and frosty atmosphere—like skilful skaters cutting figures on thick ice for the admiration of the beholders, and *disdainfully ignoring the hidden stream, the stream restless and dark; the stream of life, profound and unfrozen.*—(*Tales of Unrest*, p. 123.)

In another tale, entitled *The Partner*, Conrad shows that even at home Eastern corruption is possible. It

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is really the story of *The End of the Tether* placed in an English *milieu*. Conrad was only anticipating the readers' feeling when he wrote:

For it is too startling to think of such things happening in our respectable Channel, in full view, so to speak, of the luxurious continental traffic to Switzerland and Monte Carlo. *This story, to be acceptable, should have been transposed to somewhere in the South Seas. But it would have been too much trouble to cook it for the consumption of magazine readers.*—(*Within the Tides*, p. 128.)

But the great experience of the East contained yet another lesson for Conrad. In totally different surroundings, under a blazing sun, by an enchanting blue sea, he found men whose adaptation to life did not differ essentially from that which characterizes the Poles. Poland, indeed, is the borderland between East and West, and its inhabitants present a great many Eastern traits which foreign visitors can hardly fail to notice. Joseph Conrad was no exception in this respect. He distinctly possessed most of these characteristics. R. Curle (p. 10) has noted his "almost Oriental lavishness," and Edgar Garnett speaks of "his Polish habit of paying everybody compliments." Mrs. Conrad sees very rightly a Polish trait in his "curious way of shrinking from actualities when it came to facing suffering."—(p. 2.)

I will now give some opinions of Western travellers on the Poles. It will be seen that they all agree in noting the numerous Eastern traits of this people.

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The Count d'Etchegoyen who lived some time in Poland as a member of a French military mission, resumes his impressions as follows:

The Slav peoples, whilst possessing distinctive qualities of their own, nevertheless resemble the Orientals in many respects. They have the same habit of indulging in interminable palavers, the same indolence; something of the fatalism, the warlike spirit, the adaptability, the poetic feeling, the passion for great displays which appeal to their simple souls, the taste for pomposity and metaphor, the love of bright colours, the power of dissimulating, and the childish pride of the Easterners.—(pp. 82, 83.)

Those are, in his opinion, the traits which the Poles share with the Russians. The typically Polish (as distinct from the Russian) characteristics he reviews as follows:

An insurmountable indolence, an immense dilatoriness in all circumstances, a kind of fatalism, makes them wish to leave everything undone until events force them into action. Every question is shelved until to-morrow, then to the next day, and thus from day to day, in the hope that time will solve the difficulty.—(p. 96.)

A few pages farther on, the same author notes that "the Pole is always playing to the gallery."

Mr. Bruce-Boswell, in a book entitled *Poland and the Poles* (1919), gives a more favourable (because based on pre-war impressions) picture of the Polish character,

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but he, too, notes that the Pole presents a good many Eastern traits, which, as will be seen, can easily be traced in Joseph Conrad himself.

First of all, Bruce-Boswell noted the Pole's sturdy individualism (too often untempered, alas! he might have added, by any public spirit), his racial tenacity, his spirit of toleration, his lively imagination, leading sometimes to a "complete absence of will-power." The Poles, according to him, are "great travellers." They are "a ubiquitous people." He found their buccaneering spirit still alive, and the "incurably romantic type still common." Poland's greatest poets, her classics, were romantic without exception. Finally, Bruce-Boswell noted "the deep-rooted attachment of the Poles to ideas and phrases, where the reality was absent."—(p. 46.)

Mr. Guibal-Roland (who lived in Warsaw as a man of business) underlines also, in his *Vie Polonaise* "l'amour chez certains Polonais pour les expéditions lointaines, pour une sorte de chevalerie errante dont on voit constamment la trace dans leur histoire."—(p. 49.)

It is when reading statements like these that one really wonders how it is that the myth of Conrad's "miraculous" vocation to the sea (a myth which is almost an article of faith with most of his critics and biographers) has become so tenacious. Why! Conrad's roving instinct is but typically Polish, and his absolute surrender to imagination is a national characteristic of the Poles. Of course, Conrad had unusual capacities—and an unusually comprehending uncle. He could choose his own road. The sea attracted him as Africa attracted Livingstone. The great distance was but one enticement more.

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The essential traits of the Polish character are so eminently Eastern that one instinctively asks oneself how it is that the Poles, on the other hand, always claim to be a Western people. Joseph Conrad himself, writes Mrs. Conrad, "held tenaciously to Poland's Western temperament, traditions and culture being altogether removed from Slavism, except geographically" —(p. 56.)

The truth of the matter (apart from Conrad's substitution of *slavism* for *muscovism*) is that, Polish culture having grown largely under the influence of the West, it imitates Western models too much to be quite autochthonous. Sometimes, it reminds one of the "French culture" in vogue in Germany during the eighteenth century. No doubt the day will come when an autochthonous Polish culture will supersede the imitation of foreign culture (and there are many signs that this process has already begun), but up to the present moment Polish culture depends too much on the West to be quite in harmony with the national temperament. For, as I have shown, Polish adaptation to life is Eastern. Eastern unreliability, Eastern solidarity in good and evil with the friend and relative, Eastern imagination and absence of what we call the sense of realities are the striking traits of Polish social life. Read, for instance, on pp. 49-53 of *A Personal Record*, the very Polish and very Eastern story of Conrad's relative X, who entered against all justice into possession of an estate belonging to his stepsons, and who lived on it till his death, a happy and much-envied man. Or take Korolenko's *History of My Contemporary*, full to the brim of stories where Eastern duplicity can be studied at its best. I will only

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mention one, that of "Pan" (Lord) Antoni Bonkiewicz, the "professional intriguer."

The whole village was afraid of him except Korolenko's uncle, a Pole having obtained the rank of sub-lieutenant in the Russian army. One day, Bonkiewicz had cut, for his own use, a cartload of the sub-lieutenant's wheat, and his men were just passing before the sub-lieutenant's corn-barn with their booty, when the big doors of the barn were thrown open, giving way to a body of the sub-lieutenant's peasants. An attack was made on the cart, and it was triumphantly brought into the shed. The effect on Bonkiewicz of this youthfully romantic *coup* was very curious:

As always in such grave affairs, Bonkiewicz went first on a pilgrimage to the Holy Mother of God. After his return, the reflection of the lamp shining upon the flowers before his window was visible throughout the night, and everybody could see the "professional intriguer" absorbed in writing. From time to time, when his inspiration seemed to abandon him, he threw himself on his knees, before the Holy Image to pray. The cocks started their morning cry, when the window was opened, and the flushed face of Bonkiewicz appeared with the visible signs of his enthusiasm. He was triumphantly holding a sheet of paper into the air All these details a neighbour hastened to relate "very confidentially" to my uncle.

In his petition, Bonkiewicz called himself "the orphan-nobleman," whilst his adversary was alluded to as "the so-called lieutenant"

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whose possessions were "unjustly acquired" and whose peasants, it was difficult to tell why, were "unbelievers."

He read the petition himself to the inhabitants of the village. It made a great impression. All were of the opinion that the sub-lieutenant had a hard nut to crack.

But the sub-lieutenant was not as easily frightened as that. He started at once to write a "reply" to the Court of Justice, in which he accused Bonkiewicz of theft and calumny:

He carried the "reply" to town in person. For the circumstance, the uniform, the epaulettes, the red-striped trousers, the spurred boots, and the casque with the big feather were taken out of coffers and cases and put upon a hedge to be aired and dusted. The whole attire made a deep impression on the village folk. In the eyes of the public, the chances of the sub-lieutenant had improved not a little.

The sub-lieutenant also read his "reply" to his friends and acquaintances, who were very much impressed, for "they would slap their thighs and laugh noisily."

The professional intriguer lost his process. His paper and ink were confiscated, and he was no longer allowed to keep such. For a long time he was quite broken down but . . .

. . . some time afterwards he went on a pilgrimage

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and returned very much comforted. What happened next was that in a dark autumn night a dog began to bark in the sub-lieutenant's yard, followed by another. One of the men woke up, and after a while discovered that a strong light was burning behind the shed the very shed, which had been the cause of the quarrel, was in flames.

The next morning, Pan Antoni was sitting peacefully before the door of his house, as he used to do in olden times, his hands folded over a big stomach and twirling his thumbs. The neighbours had seen him coming out of the house at the beginning of the fire, undressed and rubbing his eyes for sleep. There were no proofs against him. But he made no secret of how he had prayed to the Holy Mother of God for revenge, and that the Blessed One had promised him that the tears of a defenceless orphan would not remain unrevenged. When telling the story, the eyes of the deeply moved "orphan-nobleman" sparkled, and a curious smile curled his lips. The neighbours thought it expedient to greet Pan Antoni with greater signs of respect than before

This event, of which the young Conrad might have heard, since it happened in 1860 in the neighbourhood of Jitomir, was by no means an exception. In spite of his reticence on Polish affairs, Joseph Conrad himself mentions in his works two very Polish and Eastern stories: that of the 'dishonest X in *A Personal Record*, and that of the bogus emigration agencies in Galicia (*Amy Foster*).

In a curious passage which reminds one strongly of Korolenko's narrative, Conrad relates a similar story,

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adding a few reflections which show that this story, heard somewhere in the Malay Archipelago, had brought the truth home to him that men were fundamentally alike in Poland (and perhaps the West) and in the East:

Banjer and his two brothers were Bajow vagabonds It was well known that they had stolen a boat from Hinopari, who was very aged and feeble and had no sons; and that afterwards, by the truculent recklessness of their demeanour, they had frightened the poor old man into holding his tongue about it. Yet everybody knew of it. It was one of the tolerated scandals of Sambir, disapproved and accepted, a manifestation of that base acquiescence in success, of that inexpressed and cowardly toleration of strength, that exists, infamous and irremediable, at the bottom of all hearts, in all societies; wherever men congregate; in bigger and more virtuous places than Sambir, and in Sambir also, where, as in other places, one man could steal a boat with impunity while another would have no right to look at a paddle.—(*An Outcast of the Islands*, p. 309.)

The ease with which Conrad penetrates Eastern characters, is certainly due to the fact that *Eastern mentality was already familiar to him before he arrived in the East*. I venture to think that the Western business man, for instance, remained more impenetrable to him than the Malay chief, in spite of his long sojourn in England. There was a common bond between him, the Pole and man of imagination, and the Eastern soul, while there was none between him and the man

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of facts of the West, whose qualities seemed to him (like MacWhirr's) all on the negative side. All typically Western men in Conrad's books are mere abstractions: Mr. Travers, Alvan Hervey, MacWhirr, and portrayed with visible contempt. They and the globe-trotters "as insensible as their trunks upstairs," who form the background to Marlow's first meeting with Jim, represent Conrad's conception of the Western Man.¹ And so the polonity of Joseph Conrad discloses itself, contradicting in his Western manners, in his constitutional inability to identify himself with the Western type.

A word ought to be said in this connection about the relationship of Conrad's position to England and English life. R. Curle has devoted a whole chapter of his *Last Twelve Years of Joseph Conrad* to the subject. Not having known Conrad personally, I can only pass under review the principal facts noted by R. Curle and some other writers.

What strikes me most in these facts is that they prove clearly that Conrad had not disowned his Polish past nor his Polish origin. He was not untrue to himself in liking England. What he appreciated most in England and English life were those very qualities which the English share with the Poles (Bruce-Boswell makes a special point of the similarity of the English and Polish characters): their stubborn individualism, their gallant sporting spirit, their racial tenacity. What he liked also (this is not a Polish trait) was the

¹ In a letter to J. Galsworthy, dated January, 1898, Conrad wrote:

A fairly prosperous man in the state of modern society is without depth—but he is complicated—just in the way you show him. I don't suppose you admire such beings any more than I do. Your book is a dispassionate analysis of high-minded and contemptible types. . . .

—(Aubry I, p. 224.)

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Englishman's mistrust of theories, political and economical, and his belief in the absolute value of experience and slowly matured competency. In this, Conrad was very true to his uncle's ideals and to the lessons of his seafaring life. After he had adopted the British nationality from necessity, he gradually became, as the years advanced, an Englishman from conviction. Joseph Conrad was also very true to himself when settling down in Kent, for Kent, more than other parts of England, reminded him (as he sometimes told his friends) of the undulated plains of Ukraine, all covered with fields and meadows, where he had grown up.

If Conrad's mannerisms were un-English, his attachment to England was as strong as his attachment to the English language. His spirit of loyalty, his (not at all shortsighted) conservative outlook, and his sympathy for the youthful sporting spirit which accounts for so much in English history, attached him to England more and more. And finally, the steadily growing number of his friends and admirers formed a bond which consecrated definitely his spiritual naturalization.

All this, of course, did not do away with the dualism Polish-English in his nature. The cleavage remained evident. The voice of the past spoke sometimes at inopportune moments, and would not be silenced. And yet circumstances favoured greatly the appeasement of the conflict. Towards the end of his life, Joseph Conrad was comparatively a happy man. He deserved to win because he had been so near defeat. As a man and as a poet, his figure commands the greatest respect. He was a great man, for he suffered much.

NOSTROMO

It seemed to him that every conviction, as soon as it became effective, turned into that form of dementia the gods send upon those they wish to destroy. But he enjoyed the bitter flavour of that example with the zest of a connoisseur in the art of his choice.—(*Nostramo*.)

A CURIOUS legend has formed around *Nostramo*, the legend that this novel is based mainly on Conrad's impressions received during a two days' visit to Venezuela, in 1876. The whole legend (for it is nothing else, as we shall see) has arisen from Conrad's own ambiguous statements, and has come to be accepted simply because of the insufficient knowledge of Conrad's Polish past, on which the novel is really built.

When Conrad was working on *Nostramo*, he wrote to R. B. Cunninghame Graham, in a letter dated 8th July, 1903:

I am dying over that cursed *Nostramo* thing. All my memories of Central America seem to slip away. I just had a glimpse twenty-five years ago¹—a short glance. That is not enough *pour bâtir un roman dessus*. And yet one must live.—(Aubry I, p. 315.)

¹ 27 years ago.

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The idea has been taken up by John Galsworthy, who wrote in his *Reminiscences of Conrad* that "in *Nostromo* Conrad made a continent out of just a sailor's glimpse of a South American port, some twenty years before."—(*Castles in Spain*, p. 93.)

This view does not stand a closer examination of the facts. Very few things in that novel can be called typically Central American, and even these Conrad might have got to know through his reading. All the really important facts, and, what is more, all the characters are taken from Polish or Mediterranean, reminiscences. The revolution theme itself, which might seem to be so characteristic of Latin America, reminds one distinctly of the struggle between Poles and Russians.

The key to the understanding of *Nostromo* can be found in its "Author's Note" where (in a passage which has already been quoted in Chapter III) Conrad states distinctly that Antonia Avellanos was modelled on that Polish girl ("my first love") who gave him, on his departure for France, a final hand-squeeze which he was to remember his whole life. If that be so, then Martin Decoud would be Conrad himself as a youth, for Antonia is to Martin Decoud exactly what her Polish model was to young Conrad. This supposition is fully confirmed by a close study of this curious character. Conrad has drawn a parallel between himself and Decoud in his "Author's Note," and a study of Martin Decoud throws a new light on his youth, his relations to Poland, and his patriotic sentiments.

Don Martin Decoud (so Conrad disguises himself), "a dilettante in life," "the adopted child of Western

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Europe," has been living in Paris for several years. There he had been "an idle boulevardier, in touch with some smart journalists, made free of a few newspaper offices, and welcomed in the pleasure haunts of pressmen." All this is closely modelled on Conrad's own life in Marseilles, as he describes it in *The Arrow of Gold*, and this manner of existence has the effect on Decoud's character it had had on Conrad's:

This life induced in him a Frenchified—but most unFrench—cosmopolitanism, in reality a mere barren indifferentism posing as intellectual superiority.—(*Nostramo*, p. 152.)

It is true that the young man does not then see himself as he is:

He imagined himself French to the tips of his fingers. But far from being that *he was in danger of remaining a sort of nondescript dilettante all his life.*—(p. 153.)

Exactly as in Conrad's case, a more active life and a complete change of scene save him. He helps to sell arms to the silver mine in San Tomé and, moved by a curious impulse, decides to accompany the precious consignment to Sulaco himself. The cause of this unexpected zeal is the longing to see Antonia again, whom he "used to know when she wore her hair in two plaits down her back" (p. 155). Eight years had passed since he had seen her for the last time, but he had never forgotten that "girl of sixteen, youthfully austere, and of a character already so

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formed that she ventured to treat slightly his pose of disabused wisdom." This is most certainly a personal reminiscence, as a comparison with the "Author's Note" will show, and the same may be said of what follows:

On one occasion, as though she had lost all patience, she flew out at him about the aimlessness of his life, and the levity of his opinions. He was twenty then, an only son, spoiled by his adoring family. This attack disconcerted him so greatly that he had faltered in his affection of amused superiority before that insignificant chit of a school-girl. But the impression left was so strong that ever since all the girl friends of his sisters recalled to him Antonia Avellanos by some faint resemblance, or by the great force of contrast.—(p. 155.)

Once back in his native country, to which he had grown a stranger, his cosmopolitan superiority and superficiality soon gives way to patriotic feelings. He is "moved in spite of himself by that note of passion and sorrow unknown on the more refined stage of European politics" (p. 156). *Passion* and *sorrow*, the very words one would be tempted to use when characterizing the Polish risings of 1831 and 1863!

Decoud had only meant to come on a short visit, but once landed, his country claims him irresistibly, and the very embodiment of that claim is the beautiful Antonia:

But when the tall Antonia, advancing with her light step in the dimness of the big bare Sala of

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the Avellanos' house, offered him her hand (in her emancipated way), and murmured, "I am glad to see you here, Don Martin," he felt how impossible it would be to tell these two people that he intended to go away by the next month's packet . . .—(p.156.)

The pressure of Antonia's hand was so frank, the tone of her voice was so unexpectedly unchanged in its approving warmth, that all he found to say after his low bow was:

"I am unexpressibly grateful for your welcome; but why need a man be thanked for returning to his native country? I am sure Doña Antonia does not think so."—(p. 157.)

The importance of this passage cannot be over-rated. It is, I think, *nothing less than the exact picture of what Conrad thought would happen to him if he returned to his native country*, a picture expressing, as do certain dreams, a definite psychological situation, namely his apprehension that a day would come when his country would claim him in the name of bonds which are stronger than practical resolutions.

So Decoud stays in Sulaco. He puts his talents as a journalist at the service of a patriotic cause by taking the direction of the newspaper *El Porvenir* ("The Future"). When the revolution breaks out, and the troops of the dictator Montero are approaching, he is the only one who urges resistance upon the frightened Sulaco notabilities, and who refuses to submit to the authority of the new ruler. This episode is very significant. With all the recklessness which youth

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and love can inspire, Decoud-Conrad steps into the middle of these weaklings and opportunists and pours out upon them all his scorn and contempt for their undignified behaviour.

The notabilities are assembled in a big room in Avellanos' house. Decoud comes in, asking bluntly: "What are you deliberating upon, gentlemen?" Several voices reply at once: "On the preservation of life and property," and Don Juste adds: "Till the new officials arrive." And then follows a great scene in which Joseph Conrad "dreams" that he is playing the heroic and patriotic part which it was not given to him to play in reality:

I walked up to the table blindly, as though I had been drunk. "You are deliberating upon surrender," I said. They all sat still, with their noses over the sheet of paper each had before him, God only knows why. Only Don José hid his face in his hands, muttering, "Never, never!" But as I looked at him, it seemed to me that I could have blown him away with my breath, he looked so frail, so weak, so worn out

"Do you know," I cried, "what surrender means to you, to your women, to your children, to your property?"

"I declaimed for five minutes without drawing breath, it seems to me And then for another five minutes or more, I poured out an *impassioned appeal to their courage and manliness*, with all the passion of my love for Antonia. For if ever man spoke well, it would be from a personal feeling, denouncing an enemy, defending himself, or pleading for what really may be dearer than life *I absolutely*

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thundered at them. It seemed as if my voice would burst the walls asunder, and when I stopped I saw all their scared eyes looking at me dubiously. And that was all the effect I had produced! Only Don José's head had sunk lower and lower on his breast. I bent my ear to his withered lips and made out a whisper, something like, "*In God's name, then, Martin, my son!*"—(pp. 235, 236.)

Decoud-Conrad had insisted on action. He had exclaimed, alluding to a well-known proverb: "There is never any God in a country where men will not help themselves" (p. 237). And now he is challenged by Don José himself to show the way. He is called to lead the people, to organize resistance, to lay the foundations of the new Occidental Republic!

Coming out of the assembly, he perceives Antonia in the gallery:

As I opened the door, she extended to me her clasped hands.

"What are they doing in there?" she asked.

"Talking," I said, with my eyes looking into hers.

"Yes, yes, but"

"Empty speeches," I interrupted her. "Hiding their fears behind imbecile hopes. They are all great Parliamentarians there—on the English model, as you know." I was so furious that I could hardly speak. She made a gesture of despair

"It is a surrender," I said . . . "But it's more than talk. *Your father told me to go on in God's name.*"

. . . there is that in Antonia which would make me believe in the feasibility of anything

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"Your father himself, Antonia," I repeated, "your father, do you understand? has told me to go on."—
(pp. 237-239.)

Martin Decoud *goes on* indeed, but the way he carries out his glorious mission is very Conradesque and very Polish. He is a true Korzeniowski. His real achievement stands in a strange contrast with his exalted plans. It is true that the Occidental Republic is formed in the end (obviously a creation of no stability), but even that little is done without Decoud.

Immediately after having been called upon to organize the resistance against the approaching tyrant, Decoud has a meeting with Mr. and Mrs. Gould and Antonia. As the best means of dealing with the situation, they hit upon the idea of exporting the silver lying in the Custom House near the harbour, in order to get the support of a foreign man of finance. Decoud, assisted by Nostromo, is to accompany the silver himself to the next port beyond the frontier. The two leave Sulaco that very night with their precious cargo. The description of the voyage through the dark night, of the two men without a lamp on board a treasure ship, and always on the look-out for the ship of an enemy, is obviously based on reminiscences of Conrad's Mediterranean voyages on the *Tremolino*, in which the old Dominic (really the original of Nostromo) and the young Conrad were smuggling arms to Spain. In the following passages, for instance, Joseph Conrad most certainly records his personal experience of his early seafaring life:

It seemed to him that the wharf was floating away into the night; but it was Nostromo, who was already

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pushing against a pile with one of the heavy sweeps. Decoud did not move; the effect was that of being launched into space . . .

The two men, unable to see each other, kept silent till the lighter, slipping before the fitful breeze, passed out between almost invisible headlands into the still deeper darkness of the gulf. For a time the lantern on the jetty shone after them. The wind failed, then fanned up again, but so faintly that the big, half-decked boat slipped along with no more noise than if she had been suspended in the air.—(pp. 260, 261.)

It was a new experience for Decoud, this mysteriousness of the great waters spread out strangely smooth, as if their restlessness had been crushed by the weight of that dense night.—(p. 261.)

And this passage again, describing the effect of the night upon the waters on the novice, is certainly a personal reminiscence dating back to Conrad's first voyages:

. . . the enormous stillness, without light or sound, seemed to affect Decoud's senses like a powerful drug. He didn't even know at times whether he were asleep or awake. Like a man lost in slumber, he heard nothing, he saw nothing. Even his hand held before his face did not exist for his eyes. The change from the agitation, the passions and the dangers, from the sights and sounds of the shore, was so complete that it would have resembled death had it not been for the survival of his thoughts.

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In this foretaste of eternal peace they floated vivid and light, like unearthly clear dreams of earthly things that may haunt the souls freed by death from the misty atmosphere of regrets and hopes. Decoud shook himself, shuddered a bit, though the air that drifted past him was warm. He had the strangest sensation of his soul having just returned into his body from the circumambient darkness in which land, sea, sky, the mountains, and the rocks were as if they had not been.—(p. 262.)

The end of the lighter is very much like the end of the *Tremolino*, related in *The Mirror of the Sea* (p. 179). In the *Mirror*, Dominic and Conrad, chased by a ship of the Customs, wreck their boat on a rock near the coast and escape by swimming ashore. In *Nostromo*, the appearance of Montero's (the usurper's) steamboat which nearly runs the lighter to the bottom, obliges the two men to bring the leaking ship ashore on the near island. Decoud stays with the treasure while *Nostromo* returns to Sulaco under cover of the night.

And now begins the tragedy of loneliness and despair for poor Decoud. Stranded on an island, unable to get back to Sulaco (where, by the way, he would have been shot by the usurper's mercenaries), he loses more and more the control over his nerves and finally commits suicide. He puts four silver ingots into his pockets, rows out to sea in the dinghy and, leaning overboard so as to fall into the water as soon as his hands would lose their grip on the gunwale, he shoots himself. An empty dinghy with a stain of blood, floating on the waters of the gulf, are the only traces of the incident.

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Even this suicide, which at first sight seems wholly invented, is based on reminiscences of Conrad's Mediterranean voyages to Spain, as he relates them in *The Mirror of the Sea* and *The Arrow of Gold*. In the latter, Joseph Conrad speaks of the shipwreck of the *Tremolino* in these words:

At last came the day when everything slipped out of my grasp. The little vessel, broken and gone like the only toy of a lonely child, the sea itself, which had swallowed it, throwing me on shore after a shipwreck that instead of a fair fight *left in me the memory of a suicide*.—(p. 256.)

Decoud's idea of weighting himself with silver is very probably derived from an episode which happened during the shipwreck of the *Tremolino*. According to what we read in *The Mirror of the Sea* (pp. 176-182), Dominic had decided to *kill* their ship, and Conrad went in consequence down to the cabin in order to fetch ten thousand francs in gold which he kept there in a locker. The money was in a belt (the same belt which we shall meet again in *The Rover*), but when Conrad came down he found that belt and money had gone. He went at once on deck and told Dominic:

"What did you want to do with it?" he asked me, trembling violently.

"Put it round my waist, of course," I answered, amazed to hear his teeth chattering.

"Cursed gold!" he muttered. "*The weight of the money might have cost you your life, perhaps.*"—(p. 178.)

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The thief was Cesar, who played on the *Tremolino* very much the same part as Hirsch on the lighter in *Nostramo*. But Dominic knew how to deal with Cesar. He knocked the fellow overboard, and "the wretch went down like a stone with the gold."—(p. 181.)

A few other details in the description of Decoud's suicide are such distinct reminiscences that their study actually throws fresh light on the character of Conrad himself and on his romanticism. Decoud cannot bear to be alone:

The brilliant "Son Decoud," the spoiled darling of the family, the lover of Antonia and journalist of Sulaco, was not fit to grapple with himself single-handed. Solitude from mere outward condition of existence becomes very swiftly a state of soul in which the affectations of irony and scepticism have no place. *It takes possession of the mind, and drives forth the thought into the exile of utter unbelief. . . . In our activity alone do we find the sustaining illusion of an independent existence as against the whole scheme of things of which we form a helpless part.* Decoud lost all belief in the reality of his action past and to come. On the fifth day an immense melancholy descended upon him palpably.—(*Nostramo*, p. 497.)

And now, as would a true romantic, Decoud *absorbs himself in his melancholy*. He derives from the painful analysis of his own state of mind a sort of sensuous pleasure, as certain people experience when ruminating over imaginary wrongs. He sees his mistake as if through a magnifying glass. He had believed in action, in effort, in a future for his country, in his own exalted

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mission. In the bustle of life, in the midst of persons who inspired him, who told him to go on, he had not seen the monstrosity of his audacity. But now that he was alone with himself, these illusions dispersed and he saw himself as he was, "a victim of the disillusioned weariness which is the retribution meted out to intellectual audacity" (p. 501), and the sense of the "utter uselessness of all effort" is brought home to him:

. . . as if to escape from this solitude, he absorbed himself in his melancholy. The vague consciousness of a *misdirected life given up to impulses whose memory left a bitter taste in his mouth was the first moral sentiment of his manhood*. But at the same time he felt no remorse. What should he regret? *He had recognized no other virtue than intelligence, and had erected passions into duties. Both his intelligence and his passion were swallowed up easily in this great unbroken solitude of waiting without faith*. Sleeplessness had robbed his will of all energy, for he had not slept seven hours in the seven days. *His sadness was the sadness of a sceptical mind. He beheld the universe as a succession of incomprehensible images.*—(p. 498.)

Three days afterwards he commits suicide. His last words are "It is done" (the very words in which Conrad had learnt the death of his father), and then the waves cover "the talker, the novio of Doña Antonia."

Decoud and Antonia are not the only familiar figures which we can recognize in *Nostromo*. The striking similarity between a remark of Conrad's on Garibaldi

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and a remark of Bobrowski's on Apollo Korzeniowski has already been mentioned. Another interesting character is Don José Avellanos whose life-story and portrait bear many traits borrowed from Conrad's father and Conrad's uncle. He is Antonia's father, and therefore (since Antonia is Decoud's *novio* or cousin) Decoud's (i.e. Conrad's) relative, perhaps his uncle. He is described as a "genuine old Roman—*vir Romanus*—eloquent and inflexible", as a "man of good counsel, though rendered timid by his horrible experiences of Guzman Bento's time" (pp. 169 and 93), as a sincere patriot of the prudent kind. Don Avellanos has a nephew, Moraga, to whom he writes many letters (p. 93). He is a man of great influence in the whole province, and has written a book of memoirs, political and social, which was never published, but whose MS., entitled *Fifty Years of Misrule*, the author of *Nostromo* is supposed to have used. This is most certainly an allusion to Bobrowski's *Memoirs*, which were not published until six years after their author's death, but of whose existence Conrad had known long before through his uncle. Other traits again are borrowed from Apollo Korzeniowski. Don José Avellanos founds a newspaper (*El Porvenir*) just as Conrad's father founded the fortnightly *Slowo*. Don José has been an ardent patriot in his young days, he has "displayed in the service of the endangered Ribiera Government an organizing activity and an eloquence of which the echoes reached even Europe." He has been working for the "establishment of that national self-respect without which—he declared with energy—'we are a reproach and a byword amongst the powers of the world'." (p. 137.) He loved his country with sincerity and uninterested

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and "had served it lavishly with his fortune during his diplomatic career." . Everybody had heard of his subsequent captivity and barbarous ill-usage under Guzman Bento." This savage dictator, who is presented as having overthrown the national Ribiera Government, has all the traits of the "Muscovite" type of Russians as Conrad sees them in *Under Western Eyes* :

Guzman had ruled the country with the sombre imbecility of political fanaticism. The power of Supreme Government had become in his dull mind an object of strange worship, as if it were some sort of cruel deity. It was incarnated in himself, and his adversaries, the Federalists, were the supreme sinners, objects of hate, abhorrence, and fear, as heretics would be to a convinced Inquisitor.—(*Nostromo*, p. 137.)

It is easy to see how well this applies to the struggle between the Poles ("Federalists") and the Russians. What follows is obviously modelled on Apollo's life-story. Avellanos is made a prisoner by the Army of Pacification (the very word Conrad uses when speaking of the repression of the Polish rising, *see* p. 194 of this volume), and is driven about with many others at the rear of this army, in chains and half-naked. So terrible are his sufferings that he seems "only to exist in order to prove how much hunger, pain, degradation, and cruel torture a human body can stand without parting with the last spark of life."—(pp. 137, 138.)

There is still another figure in *Nostromo* presenting an unmistakable likeness to Conrad's father: Giorgio Viola, the Garibaldino. Conrad calls him "the Idealist

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of the old humanitarian revolutions" and characterizes him as a "man of the People as free as possible from his class-conventions and all settled modes of thinking" (p. XI). He is not a leader above the others, not a general or a commander, but simply a man exercising over his equals that irresistible influence which an uncommonly strong belief confers:

He does not want to raise himself above the mass. He is content to feel himself a power—within the People.—(p. XII.)

In his firm grip on the earth he inherits, in his improvidence and generosity, in his lavishness with his gifts, in his manly vanity, in the obscure sense of his greatness, and in his faithful devotion with something despairing as well as desperate in its impulses, he is a man of the People, their very own unenvious force, disdaining to lead but ruling from within.—(pp. XII-XIII.)

This curious man considers himself as an exile (the word is used on p. 32), for he had come to Costaguana because he could "not live under a king" (p. 25). He had taken an active part in Garibaldi's struggle for a united and republican Italy. "He had lived amongst men who had declaimed about liberty, died for liberty, with a desperate exaltation, and with their eyes turned towards an oppressed Italy." He had passed the best years of his life in an atmosphere of armed struggle, of sacrifice, of patriotic appeal. The clash of arms and the inflamed language of proclamations had been the most familiar sounds to his ear.

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And all the time he had been keeping his eyes on the great leader Garibaldi (Italy's Kosciuszko), the man who symbolises the Republican liberty:

He had never parted from the chief of his choice—the fiery apostle of independence—keeping by his side in America and in Italy till after the fatal day of Aspromonte, *when the treachery of kings, emperors, and ministers had been revealed to the world in the wounding and imprisonment of his hero—a catastrophe that had instilled into him a gloomy doubt of ever being able to understand the ways of Divine justice.*—(p. 29.)

The spirit of self-forgetfulness, the simple devotion to a vast humanitarian idea which inspired the thought and stress of that revolutionary time, had left its mark upon Giorgio in a sort of austere contempt for all personal advantage. This man had all his life despised money. The leaders of his youth had lived poor, had died poor. It had been a habit of his mind to disregard to-morrow. It was engendered partly by an existence of excitement, adventure, and wild warfare. But mostly it was a matter of principle. . . it was a puritanism of conduct. . . This stern devotion to a cause had cast a gloom upon Giorgio's old age. It cast a gloom because the cause seemed lost.—(p. 31.)

Giorgio's exterior also resembles strongly that of Conrad's father. The most striking feature about the Garibaldino is his "shaggy, white leonine head" (p. 16), which is mentioned again and again, on p. 20 ("leonine face"), p. 25 (id.), p. 26 (id), p. 32 ("white

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mane," "old lion"), p. 337 ("white leonine mane") and p. 466 ("leonine white head").

Other Polish traits and reminiscences have gone into the making of *Nostromo*. The general Barrios, for instance, represents that type of soldier-gambler which was not uncommon in the Korzeniowski family:

All his life he had been an inveterate gambler. He alluded himself quite openly to the current story how once, during some campaign (when in command of a brigade), he had gambled away his horses, pistols, and accoutrements, to the very epaulettes, playing *monte* with his colonels the night before the battle. Finally, he had sent, under escort, his sword (a presentation sword, with a gold hilt) to the town in the rear of his position to be immediately pledged for five hundred pesetas with a sleepy and frightened shopkeeper. By daybreak, he had lost the last of that money, too, when his only remark, as he rose calmly, was, "Now let us go and fight to the death." —(p. 162.)

A few remarks may also be made on the fictitious Central American state that forms the scene of the novel. The word Costaguana is obviously formed on the model of Costarica, but the name is less flattering, since it is derived from guano. (It may be a mere coincidence that *guana* is the Polish genitive of *guano*.) That Conrad should have chosen rather a contemptuous expression to design his fictitious state, may seem very questionable, since Costaguana stands for Poland, but the difficulty is more apparent than real. Conrad loved Poland as Antonia and Decoud love Costaguana (the

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latter actually dies for it), but he hated like poison the usurpers who ruled the country, together with the incapable and weak opportunists or the blind idealists and makers of new eras and new revolutions. And these types obviously formed the majority in Costaguana, as they formed the majority in the Poland of 1870, or, for that matter, of 1903. This character sketch of the Costaguanero, which Conrad puts into the mouth of Decoud, applies very well to the Poles:

There is a curse of futility upon our character: Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, chivalry and materialism, high-sounding sentiments and a supine morality, violent efforts for an idea and a sullen acquiescence in every form of corruption.—(p. 171.)

Eastern corruption, indeed, is not at all absent from Costaguana. Mr. Gould, on his arrival in the country, finds "circumstances of corruption . . . naively brazen" (p. 142). Conrad even tells at length the complicated story of an attempt at bribery. The bribery could not succeed because its object preferred the satisfaction of a personal revenge to a pecuniary advantage. Mr. Gould had had the misfortune of offending the present Minister of Finance and

it so happened . . . that the Finance Minister . . . was a man to whom, in years gone by, Mr. Gould had, unfortunately, declined to grant some small pecuniary assistance, basing his refusal on the ground that the applicant was a notorious gambler and cheat, besides being more than half suspected of a robbery with violence on a wealthy

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ranchero in a remote country district, where he was actually exercising the function of a judge.—(p. 54.)

Once in power, this man revenged himself by burdening Mr. Gould with a silver mine which, to an incompetent man like Mr. Gould, could only bring losses, especially as heavy taxes were immediately levied on it. Mr. Gould naturally tried to bribe the mistress of the Minister,¹ but in vain:

“*Pas moyen, mon garçon,*” replied that florid person.
“*C'est dommage, tout de même. Ah! zut! Je ne vole pas mon monde. Je ne suis pas ministre, moi! Vous pouvez emporter votre petit sac.*”—(p. 55.)

Another Polish reminiscence seems to underlie Mrs. Gould's description of Sulaco:

. . . we are very proud of it. It used to be historically important. The highest ecclesiastical court, for two vice-royalties, sat here in the olden time.—(p. 35.)

Now, one has only to read the article *Cracow* in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* to see at once the resemblance with Cracow. Cracow was once the most important town in Poland, the seat of the first bishopric, and the residence of several kings. After the partitions, it became the capital of Galicia, and the rallying point of the Polish patriots.

¹ Compare the passage from Conrad's tale *Prince Roman* which I quote on p. 196, and in which a similar story of bribery is related. In *Prince Roman*, the mistress of a certain senator receives a large sum of money.

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On p. 479 of *Nostromo* may be found another Polish reminiscence. Every year the owner of a famous coffee plantation sends three sacks of coffee beans to a patriotic society in remembrance "of the third of May," the date of an important battle. Now it so happens that the third of May (the only date mentioned in *Nostromo*) is one of the most important dates in Polish history, so important, indeed, that it is now the National Day. On that day, in 1791, the famous "Constitution of the Third of May" was adopted by the Diet, converting Poland into a hereditary limited monarchy with ministerial responsibility, and abolishing the *liberum veto* and other anomalies.

And finally, the "alien complex" is not absent from *Nostromo*. It is easy to imagine how often Conrad's Polish name must have been not only mispronounced but sneered at during his seafaring life. Conrad never says a word about it (a hint may be found on p. 119 of *A Personal Record*), but this does not mean that he did not resent it. He did certainly mind it, since he adopted the name Conrad long before his first book was published. (John Galsworthy, who met him on board the *Torrens*, knew him as Mr. Conrad.) But if Conrad's resentment was repressed, it expressed itself all the better in an indirect way. The name *Nostromo* is a corruption of the Italian *Nostro uomo*, and it is an Englishman, Captain Mitchell, who is responsible for it. Conrad insists several times upon the fact:

The Italian sailor, *whom all the Europeans in Sulaco, following Captain Mitchell's mispronunciation, were in the habit of calling Nostromo* (p. 43).

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He whom the English called Nostromo (p. 29).

"You mean Nostromo?" said Decoud.

"*The English call him so, but that is no name either for man or beast*" (p. 232).

". . . . the praise of *people who have given you a silly name—and nothing besides—in exchange for your soul and body*" (p. 256).

"Who are you?"

Already Nostromo had seemed to recognize Dr. Monygham. He had no doubt now. He hesitated the space of a second. The idea of bolting without a word presented itself to his mind. No use! *An inexplicable repugnance to pronounce the name by which he was known kept him silent a little longer.* At last he said in a low voice:

"A Cargador" (pp. 424, 425).

Nostromo is not only a remarkable achievement from a literary point of view, but also full of significance for the psychologist. It is one of the best examples of the compensatory function of artistic creation. All the repressed Polish reminiscences, sentiments, aspirations and resentments, lying deep under the surface of the artist's conscious mind, had their day of rehabilitation when this book was written. Disguised in the robe of fiction, and speaking a different tongue (though not an unfamiliar language), they rose to the daylight to amuse the onlooker and to tell of things far off, long gone by, but never forgotten. Without them, there would be no *Nostromo*.

"LORD JIM"

Faust to Mephisto : Thou call'st thyself a part, yet seem'st a whole to be?

(GOETHE.)

Je crois que ce que j'aimais le plus en lui, c'était une sorte de native noblesse, âpre, dédaigneuse, et quelque peu désespérée, celle même qu'il prête à Lord Jim.

(ANDRÉ GIDE on Conrad.)

Lord Jim is more than a novel, it is a confession. As a confession of a man tortured by doubts and nightmarish fears it must be understood, if it is to be understood at all. Such is, at least, my strong conviction, sprung from a psychological analysis of the novel.

Among the works of Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*, in many respects, stands apart. This is so evident that people frequently asked Conrad if it were not the one he preferred most of all. Those who asked the question received (in his "Author's Note") but an evasive answer.

The method that I am going to employ in the analysis of the novel is based on the psychology of Freud and Jung. For this is a case where no other method would do. If we are ever to solve the riddle which surrounds *Lord Jim*, we must succeed in tracing the unconscious forces guiding Conrad in the choice of his subject and in the development of its theme.

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It would take a whole book to give the complete theory (and practice) of what I call the "biology of artistic creation," let it suffice here to explain its general principles.

If we want to understand fully any given artistic creation (especially if it belong to the "mystic" kind), we must admit that besides the intention to please, there is always, in very variable a degree, the tendency to move, to persuade, to teach, to give to the reader's thoughts a new direction. In other words, besides the æsthetic element which is static, there is a "dynamic" intention. A book, the publication of which did not change just the least bit the face of the world, would be meaningless. The proportion between the two opposites, beauty and force, is not invariable. Sometimes one of them is so strong that the other merely appears to be its servant.

This "dynamic" intention of artistic work can express itself unconsciously or half-consciously. In both cases, the process can be described as follows:

Whatever repressed conflicts, fears, wishes, hopes, or joys there happen to be in the artist's soul will be exteriorised (or *sublimated*) in his work. These unconscious elements constitute so many forces guiding him in the choice of his subject, in the invention of the plots, in the treatment of his characters, and in a hundred small details, thus leading him to treat those problems which he cannot solve in his conscious life. The solution will be symbolical, as in dreams and fairy tales. This is the only possible way, since the conscious mind cannot solve problems to which it attributes insolubility. On the other hand, repressed conflicts

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must be solved, if they are not to endanger the mental well-being of the person concerned.

The exteriorization (or *sublimation*) of conflicts takes place through the medium that responds most easily. Artistic creation, religious fervour, dreams, a sudden enthusiasm for some ideal or some hobby are the most common of mediums. Goethe explained the secret of his inspiration by the fact that *he was able to express what he suffered*. Beethoven's superhuman greatness is ultimately due to titanic conflicts, the sublimation of which, in a man like him, was only possible in music. The writing of a book or of a piece of music often means, therefore, a relief to the artist, just as church-going ought to be a relief to us who sing: "*Lift up your hearts. . . .*"

It may sound improbable that the repressed part of ourselves, our savage or shameful or childish or insane complexes, the very refuse of our personality, should go into the making of the highest art. Nevertheless it is so. Just as even the finest flowers live on dirty matter, on refuse, so artistic creation draws its force and its inspiration from the otherwise useless or dangerous by-products of our conscious life.

In the whole of modern fiction I could not wish for a better example to illustrate this than *Lord Jim*.

The plot of the novel may be recalled here: A young man ("not yet four-and-twenty"), Jim by name, is suddenly confronted with the temptation of his life while serving as chief mate on board an old steamer. On her way across the Indian Ocean, the ship has touched some floating derelict, and when the engines have been stopped, her condition seems so precarious

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that the disreputable gang who serve as officers decide to clear out as quickly and noiselessly as possible, under the cover of a dark night, leaving the eight hundred Moslem pilgrims on board to their fate. Jim does not mean to accompany them, but, in a moment of excitement, and urged by a voice in the darkness calling insistingly: "Jump! Jump!" he deserts the *Patna* in the firm belief that she is already sinking under his feet. They are picked up by a ship, and as to the abandoned vessel, it is sighted and towed to Aden by a French gunboat. A court of inquiry is held, and the officers of the ship, Jim included, have their certificates cancelled. From this moment, in spite of the sympathetic support of friends, Jim finds it impossible to "live it down." Wandéring from port to port, and chased everywhere by the echoes of a past which he dares not face, he is finally sent to Patusan. In that forlorn corner of the East, his arrival means the beginning of a New Era. He soon exercises a great authority over the natives. He lives for some time in the illusion of having mastered his fate, of having forgotten his past.

Jim's illusions are shattered by the arrival of a white outcast, "Gentleman Brown." It would be easy for Jim to disarm him and to send him away, or, in case of resistance, to let him die of starvation. But Jim does nothing. Overcome by a curious weakness, he remains passive. When making off, Brown shoots some volleys into a camp of Jim's Malays, and Jim, feeling that his attitude is responsible for the tragedy, delivers himself up to the relatives of the victims, who kill him.

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Lord Jim has often been called a psychological novel, because the source of the conflict resides within the tortured soul of the hero, but those who bestowed this epithet upon the book expressed only very vaguely the nature of Conrad's psychology, and seemed to ignore altogether the important fact that *Lord Jim* is eminently autobiographical and symbolical, that it is built up of the same elements as a dream.

Before discussing the symbolical bearing of the novel, a preliminary point must be made clear. It is the influence of Brown upon Jim which brings about the final tragedy. Before Brown's arrival, Jim was living in an atmosphere of faith and trust. His past was forgotten. Nothing reminded him of what he had done. He was the undisputed king of Patusan. But then, as if to prove that such an ideal state of affairs could not last long, Brown appeared. In the eyes of the natives, he is Jim's rival. The more they fear Brown, the less they will respect Jim. Brown's apparition is Jim's supreme test. A duel fought with spiritual weapons must ensue. If Jim wins, he is forever the master of hearts and arms in Patusan, but if he loses, it will be a proof that he did not deserve the high situation he had acquired.

And Jim loses. To him, Brown is the embodiment of that unforgettable and unforgiving past which stands up against him in the very moment when he expected it least. Brown, on the other hand, realizes Jim's situation with a remarkable intuition. He understands at once that Jim's past is the weapon that will give him the final victory over his adversary.

Already, at the first of his meetings with Brown, Jim is disarmed by an allusion to his past:

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“‘Who are you?’ asked Jim at last, speaking in his usual voice. ‘My name’s Brown,’ answered the other, loudly; ‘Captain Brown. What’s yours?’ and Jim after a little pause went on quietly, as if he had not heard: ‘*What made you come here?*’ ‘You want to know,’ said Brown, bitterly. ‘It’s easy to tell. Hunger. *And what made you?*’

“‘*The fellow started at this,*’ said Brown . . . ‘*The fellow started at this and got very red in the face. Too big to be questioned, I suppose.*’”— (pp. 380, 381.)

In their second meeting, Brown pushes his point much farther. The following is his own account:

“‘We aren’t going into the forest to wander like a string of living skeletons dropping one after another for ants to go to work upon us before we are fairly dead. Oh! no!—————’ ‘You don’t deserve a better fate,’ he said. ‘*And what do you deserve,*’ I shouted at him, ‘you that I find skulking here with your mouth full of your responsibility, of innocent lives, of your infernal duty? *What do you know more of me than I know of you?* I came here for food. D’ye hear?—food to fill our bellies. *And what did YOU come for? What did you ask for when you came here?* We don’t ask you for anything but to give us a fight or a clear road to go back whence we came—————’ ‘I would fight with you now,’ says he, pulling at his little moustache. ‘And I would let you shoot me and welcome,’ I said. ‘*This is as good a jumping-off place for me as another.* I am sick of my infernal luck. *But it would be too*

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easy. There are my men in the same boat—and, by God, I am not the sort to jump out of trouble and leave them in a d—d lurch,’ I said. He stood thinking for a while and then wanted to know what I had done (‘out there,’ he says, tossing his head downstream) to be hazed about so. ‘*Have we met to teach each other the story of our lives?*’ I asked him. ‘*Suppose you begin. No? Well, I am sure I don’t want to hear. Keep it to yourself. I know it is no better than mine. I’ve lived—and so did you, though you talk as if you were one of those people that should have wings so as to go about without touching the dirty earth. Well—it is dirty. I haven’t got any wings. I am here because I was afraid once in my life.*¹ Want to know what of? Of a prison. That scares me, and you may know it, if it’s any good to you. I won’t ask what scared you into this infernal hole, where you seem to have found pretty pickings. That’s your luck and this is mine. . . .’—(pp. 382, 383.)

Brown is obviously feeling his way better and better. By an extraordinary piece of luck (it is just his “infernal luck”), he hits upon the very words which will paralyse Jim’s will-power. His allusion to “a jumping-off place,” to the “men in the same boat” whom he is not going to “leave in a d—d lurch,” his well-assumed indifference to the story of Jim’s life, bring back to Jim a past which had to remain buried if he were to live. Jim falls silent with the silence of guilt.

¹This is exactly the case of Jim. Compare the conversation between the French officer and Marlow: “And after all, one does not die of it.” “Die of what?” I asked swiftly. “*Of being afraid*” (p. 146).

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It may seem unnatural that Jim should at first want to know what Brown had done "out there," for to touch Brown's past is to touch his own. It seems that the initiative to speak of the past ought to come from Brown alone. I think that what makes Jim really ask this last question is fear, and what may be called "the fascination of fear." There are things which attract because they are dangerous.

When Brown started to talk with Jim, he did so without much hope, just to gain time. To his great surprise, he was to find an adversary whom he could easily impress and even frighten. Just like his "infernal luck!" Feeling that he is becoming the master of the situation, Brown goes straight ahead, *alluding only to what is common to them both*, and leaving out whatever enormous differences exist between them.

When he [Brown] asked Jim, with a sort of brusque despairing frankness, whether he himself—straight now—didn't understand that *when "it came to saving one's life in the dark, one didn't care who else went—three, thirty, three hundred people"*—it was as if a demon had been whispering advice in his ear. "I made him wince," boasted Brown to me. "*He very soon left off coming the righteous over me—* He just stood there *with nothing to say*, and looking as black as thunder—not at me—*on the ground.*" He asked Jim *whether he had nothing fishy in his life to remember that he was so damnedly hard upon a man trying to get out of a deadly hole by the first means that came to hand—and so on, and so on.* And there ran through the rough talk *a vein of subtle reference to their common blood, an assumption of*

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common experience; a sickening suggestion of common guilt, of secret knowledge that was like a bond of their minds and of their hearts—(pp. 386, 387.)

Jim's final and deadly mistake, the permission to let Brown and his men go away *in possession of their arms*, is due to the paralysing influence of this identification. Jim's attitude reminds us of that of Hamlet who cannot bring himself to avenge the murder of his father, and who does not know "why yet I live to say 'This thing's to do,' sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means, to do't."

After this mistake, Jim's fate is settled. His past has proved stronger than his will to live. "Henceforth events moved fast without a check, flowing from the very hearts of men like a stream from a dark source."

When identification becomes as complete as in the case of Jim and Brown, there is neither choice nor free will. We find an illustration of this not only in *Lord Jim*, but in the tale *The Secret Sharer*, which is one of Conrad's best psychological tales. It is really the story of the identification between the "captain" (he is obviously Conrad himself) and a murderer, Legatt, whom the captain gives the hospitality of his cabin for some time. There is another example of an identification in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, if we make Sir Ernest Jones' view (which is not necessarily opposed to Bradley's) our own. Hamlet's will-power is completely paralysed by his identification with his uncle, who appears to him as a sort of lower self. Their "common bond" is their common love for the queen. In all cases of identification, the unconscious wish becomes the master of men's lives and deeds. Jim's unconscious wish is

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to see Brown (i.e. himself) go off free and powerful, the captain's is to see the murderer Legatt escape, Hamlet's to see his uncle live and enjoy the fruit of his crime. Brown is Jim's other self as certainly as Legatt is the captain's "secret self" or "own reflection" or "double." It might be Jim speaking of Brown when the captain says of Legatt: "He appealed to me as if our experiences had been as identical as our clothes (*'Twiixt Land and Sea Tales*, p. 102), and "a mysterious communication was established already between us two" (p. 99).

Identification is characterized always by an extraordinary indulgence for the second self, an indulgence which must of necessity remain incomprehensible to any other person. When we feel a profound sympathy with or pity for somebody, we identify ourselves always *more or less* with the person who inspires us with these feelings, but the identification hardly ever becomes so complete that the subject loses himself in the object. Jim is an extreme case, a neurotic, while the captain in *The Secret Sharer* is a more normal character.

Jim's indulgence for Brown is typical. He simply cannot resist the evil *because the evil is within himself*. Being acutely aware of his own sins, he cannot throw stones at Brown. To a question of Jewel, if Brown was a very bad man, he gives, "after some hesitation," the answer: "Men act badly sometimes without being much worse than others" (p. 394), a definition which is evidently so formulated as to fit himself as well as Brown. Of necessity, he cannot think of Brown's past without thinking of his own, nor judge Brown without judging himself. To condemn the outcast would be to condemn himself. His effort in excusing Brown is a last desperate

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attempt to save his own moral integrity, one of those fifth-act attempts that are doomed to fail. And so Jim dies ultimately of this identification with Brown, that is, he dies of the mistake of his life, for that mistake alone explains why the first outcast coming along and greeting him as a brother on grounds of their common experience, appears to him fatally as his own hideous self.

A person acting under the influence of a strong identification is incapable of giving the true reasons for his or her behaviour. To themselves, their acts seem inexplicable but absolutely compelling and obeying a logic of their own, to their environment they seem inadequate and foolish, if not downright mad. Everybody thinks that Hamlet is mad, the crew in *The Secret Sharer* suspect their captain of drunkenness, and wonder at his violent temper. In *Lord Jim*, the natives cannot understand Jim's sudden partiality for a handful of common robbers. The reasons which Jim gives for his decisions are strangely inadequate. His declaration (that the robbers are not to be disarmed) naturally produces an "immense sensation." Tamb' Itam, Jim's most faithful servant, is "thunderstruck" at his master's folly. Had Jim been at all capable of listening to common sense then, these unmistakable signs of dissent would have enlightened him. But he did not want to know better. Following a dark and compelling impulse, he did not care, just as Hamlet did not care. "His fate, revolted, was forcing his hand."

It is not without interest to discuss the resemblance between the young man who served as a model to Jim and the hero of the novel. Conrad states himself (in his "Author's Note"): "one sunny morning in the

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common-place surroundings of an Eastern roadstead, I saw his form pass by—appealing—significant—under a cloud—perfectly silent.” But this statement, made in reply to critics who had called Jim “a figure of the Northern mists,” proves or disproves singularly little. Aubry has identified the young man as a certain Jim Lingard (the same who served as a model to Tom Lingard in Conrad’s Malay novels) and has come to the conclusion that “the real Jim Lingard and the Lord Jim of the novel have nothing in common except their name and physique” (I, p. 97).

What was Lord Jim’s physique then? He was tall (“an inch, perhaps two, under six feet”); powerfully built; had a youthful (“boyish”) face, and enjoyed marvellous good health. All these qualities, Jim Lingard may have possessed, but that is not as interesting as the fact that these very qualities Conrad *had not*. Joseph Conrad was rather little, he looked in his youth considerably older than his age (this may be seen by the photograph taken of him when 26 years old, and reproduced in Aubry I), and his health, after the Congo adventure, was always rather precarious. As far as his figure, his youthfulness, and his health were concerned he must have often experienced a feeling of inferiority, and the fact that he chose as a model for Jim a fellow who had in a remarkable degree those qualities in which he was lacking, may be put down to his unconscious wishes for compensation. Men with youthful faces are exceedingly frequent in Conrad’s books.

(That Conrad experienced a feeling of inferiority with regard to tall men is shown in the following anecdote reported by F. M. Hueffer (p. 109):

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Over and over again he related how overwhelming *with his small stature*, he found negotiations with heavy spars, stubborn cordage and black weather. He used to say, half raising his arms: "Look at me How was I made for such imbecilities?"

A man with Jim's physique is, moreover, not unfit to undergo a psychological tragedy. Hamlet is also a strong and healthy young man. It is a fact of everyday experience that tall, well-built men have often a character curiously delicate and introvert.

Using the psychoanalytical terminology, it may be said that *physically* Jim is the projection of Conrad's unconscious wishes for compensation. Mentally or morally, he is, on the other hand, the projection of Conrad's repressed fears.

The novel *Lord Jim* is eminently symbolical. The circumstances leading up to Jim's "jump" are modelled on those leading to Conrad's naturalization as a British subject. Jim's father is a parson. We know that in Conrad's writings a clergyman easily stands for a man believing too blindly in Providence. Apollo Korzeniowski belonged to that very type. He was, it has been shown in a previous chapter, a great religious idealist. Of Jim we read that "after a course of light holiday literature his vocation for the sea had declared itself." We recognize in this sentence the slightly ironical tone Conrad uses when speaking of himself. Jim's youth is but a humorous version of his own. In fact, his readings, and not the sight of the sea nor the call of any family or national tradition, awoke in him the desire to become a sailor. Jim is sent to a training

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ship. Conrad's relations wanted first to send him to the Austrian Naval School at Pola (Aubry I p. 28, *A Personal Record* p. 121), but they finally decided to let him go to Marseilles.

Jim's first voyage to the East takes place in very much the same circumstances as surrounded Conrad's early voyages. Jim was "not yet four-and-twenty," Conrad's age was respectively twenty-one and twenty-three when he made his first two voyages to Australia. Jim is disabled by a falling spar and has to lie for weeks in an Eastern hospital (p. 11): it is Conrad's accident on board the *Highland Forest*. (*The Mirror of the Sea*, p. 54, Aubry I, p. 93.) Jim's library, like that of Joseph Conrad, consists mainly in a green one-volume set of Shakespeare's works. (*Lord Jim*, p. 237, *A Personal Record*, p. 72.) And similar to Conrad, Jim is reckless, without fear, and sometimes "a regular devil for sailing a boat." The smuggling adventures of Dominic and Conrad, the dangerous manœuvres of the Captain in *The Secret Sharer* and Conrad's Torres Straits episode, as related in *Geography and Some Explorers* (Last Essays, p. 18-21), belong to the same order. F. M. Hueffer (p. 107) says that he knows from several officers who sailed with Conrad that he "would indulge in extremely dangerous manœuvres, going about within knife-blades of deadly shores." The natives of Patusan called Conrad's hero *Tuan Jim*, "as one might say—Lord Jim," just as the Polish peasants and servants must have called the young Conrad *Pan Józef*, an expression meaning literally *Lord Joseph!* Jim had particular reasons to use only his Christian name and to drop his surname. The same was true of Joseph Conrad Korzeniowski. One

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may or may not admit the significance of these facts, it is interesting to note the extreme shyness with which Conrad mentioned his real name. When about to arrange the journey to Poland in 1914, according to Mrs. Conrad (p. 63) "he had forgotten some important formality as to the date of his naturalization, and he had omitted to put his full name, Korzeniowski." It is true that Conrad signed his *Polish* letters always with his full name, only, in these, he appears distinctly as a Pole, not as an Englishman.

Finally, when Jim asks himself so anxiously whether public opinion will back him up, whether the sanction of his foreign friends will be absolute enough to absolve him in his own eyes, we again recognize in Jim Conrad himself. Jim's authority over the "natives" stands really for Conrad's success in the English-speaking world.

In spite of his origin and of his careful education, Jim "jumps." In all probability, he would not have done it, had not his very superiors urged him to go, and had not the ship been sure to sink the next moment. This is exactly what happened to Joseph Conrad. *The sinking ship is Poland.* The very names are similar. *Patna* is the name of the ship, and *Polska* the (Polish) name of Poland. *Poland* (i.e. polonity) is doomed to disappear in a short time. There is, rationally speaking, no hope whatever for her. Such was at least the opinion of Jim's superiors, i.e. of Conrad's uncle and guardian, T. Bobrowski. The machines have been stopped, i.e. the independent Polish Government has ceased to exist. At this moment, Jim's superiors advise him to "jump," but Jim did not want to for a long moment. As a matter of fact, Conrad's uncle

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urged him during more than seven years to become a British subject.¹ And finally, Jim yielded and jumped, i.e. Conrad became a British subject.

But then, the ship is successfully towed to Aden by a French gunboat. This is the expression of the repressed hope that every genuine Pole ever cherished at the bottom of his heart (Nicholas B. for instance, who prophesied that Conrad would see "better times"), the hope that the day would come when Poland would be saved. That is why of all things it is a *French gunboat* that rescues the *Patna*. Ever since the rise of Napoleon, the Poles have expected their help to come from France. The Polish national anthem "Poland is not yet lost" is a song which originated in the Polish legions serving under Napoleon.

These are the facts of Conrad's life, and his wishes and fears which underlie the first part of *Lord Jim*. The second part of the book (from chapter 19 onwards) is not less symbolic than the first. But while the first part is the representation of a real state of affairs, the second part is the expression of Conrad's fear that the desertion of his native country might ultimately prove a fault by which he had forfeited his honour. The final destruction of Jim consecrates the author's triumph over the guilt-complex. Tuan Jim's defeat is Joseph Conrad's victory. A man who, like Jim, has suffered so much, and who has paid off his debt with his death,

¹ Joseph Conrad was not at all in a hurry to become a British subject, as this passage from a Bobrowski letter shows: "One cannot be 'Vogel Frey' one's whole life, one must belong to some nation or other. Sooner or later you will have to take a decision, but in any case it is always better to do it when one is free, instead of waiting till the circumstances force a decision upon one." These lines were written on the 30th of May, 1880, five years before Conrad's naturalisation!

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is no longer guilty. His death adds much to the poignancy of his fate, it really makes him *a hero*. If we did not regret Jim's fate (though feeling its inevitability), the novel would have missed the mark. This is the reason why *Lord Jim* must of necessity have what is called "an unhappy ending." In fact, Jim's death is the only satisfactory closing note. Now we can absolve Jim entirely. His memory will be that of a man of unstained honour. This ending is also logical, since Conrad assumes from the very beginning that the conflict is insoluble.

R. Curle made (in his *Joseph Conrad* 1914) a remark which is strangely inadequate, when he wrote that Jim is "not an Englishman at all, but a passionate and melancholy Pole." Jim, like Hamlet, is the personification of that brooding part which every introvert possesses, and which will govern him if he does not govern it. All the difference between a normal person and a neurotic is that the former can keep that part in its proper place, that, unlike Jim (but very much like Conrad), he masters his fate. That is why Jim is not a Pole, but simply a neurotic and, as such, a perfectly true and convincing character. There are thousands of English men and women like him, thousands whose lives are obscured and sometimes destroyed by guilt-complexes. They do not, as a rule, die in such romantic circumstances as Jim or Hamlet, but end by suicide or in a lunatic asylum. Their fate may be less pathetic because it is not grasped and expressed by the mind of an artist, but it is just as real.

Lord Jim is unique amongst Conrad's books. It is perhaps not his best, but his most intimate. It is a book in which he tells us more about the darker sides

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of his personality than in *A Personal Record* and the *Mirror of the Sea* put together, for in these two books Conrad has taken great care that no "Conrad en pantoufles" (to use his own expression) should appear before the public. In *Lord Jim*, Joseph Conrad exteriorized, in a symbolic form, the deepest conflicts that arose from the dualism Polish-English within himself.

Lord Jim is more than a psychological novel, it is a psychoanalytical novel written before psychoanalysis was founded. It appeared in 1900, the very year when Freud published his first book *Interpretation of Dreams*, which indirectly helps us to explain the novel. Both books, one in a subjective, the other in an objective form, threw light upon "that side of us which, like the other hemisphere of the moon, exists stealthily in perpetual darkness, with only a fearful ashy light falling at times on the edge." (*Lord Jim*, p. 93.)

It was only in the nature of things that Conrad should dislike Freud intensely, as he disliked Dostoievski. Freud was in possession of the same truths as himself, but he appeared to him as a too crude, a too explicit double of himself.¹

¹ In the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, December, 1924, M. Lenormand relates how he started once to speak to Conrad of Freud, but Conrad changed the conversation at once. M. Lenormand attributes this very rightly to the fact that Conrad did not want to know the objective truth about his own work.

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Lydia : How strange my tastes are
in mysterious garments
I clothe my thoughts, my dreams,
Gay colours I dislike, and live amongst
shades,
The unexpected only charms, the unusual
delights me.
(A. KORZENIOWSKI, *A Comedy*.)

In the cemetery of Winchelsea, Sussex, there is a recent tomb without a name. Nobody knows who was the man lying there, nor what he was, nor what had driven him from home. He came from the sea to die there. A nameless stranger, buried to-day, forgotten to-morrow.¹

And before that grave, another man is standing whose home lies far away. He stands and muses over many things. His thoughts go back to the mountains sheltering the town of his boyhood, and, like a vision, there appears

¹ The first part of this chapter is based on the information given by Mrs. Conrad, in her book on Joseph Conrad:

This book *Typhoon*, contains also the story, "Amy Foster." F. M. H[ueffer] claims that the plot was his in *A Personal Remembrance*. The only foundation for this claim is that there is in Winchelsea churchyard a grave which bears on the head-stone no name, but recording the fact that the bodies of one or two foreign seamen are buried there, after being washed ashore. I very well remember F.M.H. pointing this grave out to us one day. This fact, and a story—a mere fragment heard during a meal in a country inn—gave Conrad the material he needed. The actual character, Amy Foster, was for many years in our service, and it was her animal-like capacity for sheer uncomplaining endurance that inspired Conrad. That and nothing else.—(pp. 117-118.)

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before his eyes the figure of a barefooted Polish peasant, who dreams of going into the wide world to find his fortune. Yes, the man lying now beneath the earth had been a man like himself, whom fate had lured away with promises as false as the song of the sirens, and who had died miserably on his arrival in the promised land. And the man before the grave still muses. It is his fate, too, to die in a foreign country. The soil which covers the stranger from the sea will cover him. And so vivid are these thoughts that he involuntarily asks himself why *he* should be still alive, why *he* did not die, like his brother without a name, on his very arrival in the foreign country, and with a shudder he perceives the closeness of the shave. By a mere hair's breadth he escaped the poignant fate of the nameless sufferer. The net of fate had been drawn closely round him, but he had apparently escaped through one of the meshes. And yet, he was not less guilty than this stranger. His only merit (and he knows that it is *not* a merit) was that he was strong, and the other man weak. Strength! Strength! The promise of foreign lands had not been less immense than that of the sea, and not less false. "The only secret of its possession is strength, strength—the jealous, sleepless strength of a man guarding a coveted treasure within his gates."

Strength—to force the foreign lands to keep their promise. Strength—to master one's fate. The man before the grave, lifting up his head, as if in defiance, walks quickly out of the cemetery. Life claims him. But the mystery which he had met eye to eye entralls him still. It directs his thoughts, it dictates his words, and there arises out of the impressions of this afternoon a mystic work: the tale of the man who could not bear

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to live and to love in a foreign country: "Yanko Goorall."

But I forget. The title is not "Yanko Goorall," but "Amy Foster." As if the girl who *lives* were the hero of the tragedy, and not the man who *dies!* Conrad knew, of course, why he wrote what he wrote. He knew that explicitness is fatal and that too much introspection is dangerous. He also knew what he owed to his public, who prefer the story of a girl to the story of a nondescript, barefooted foreigner. The Polish translator also knew what *she* owed to *her* public, for she corrected Conrad's mistake, and boldly put over her translation "Yanko Goorall."

For Dr. Kennedy and Amy Foster are but secondary characters, destined to mask what the author is after: *to write the tragedy of a man who could not acclimatise himself in a foreign country.* The man is a Pole, and the foreign country is England. That's plain enough, I suppose.

And what is plain also is that the Pole is a Pole at his best, while the English people are English people at their worst. It would indeed be hard to imagine a man more deserving of our sympathy than Yanko, and a more unimaginative and heartless lot than the Colebrook people.

Yanko Goorall (Polish *Janko góral*) was fated, as most of Conrad's heroes, to become a victim of his imagination. A fabulous country, America, attracted him, a sort of promised land where "true gold could be picked up on the ground." His father, accordingly, sold "an old cow, a pair of piebald mountain ponies of his own raising, and a cleared plot of fair pasture land on the sunny slope of a pineclad mountain pass,"

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in order to pay the emigration agents who were to take the young men over to America. A romantic start indeed! "He must have been a real adventurer at heart, for how many of the greatest enterprises in the conquest of the earth had for their beginning just such a bargaining away of the paternal cow for the mirage of true gold far away!"

Here the student of Conrad will certainly exclaim how true all this is of Conrad himself! "A real adventurer at heart" is just the definition one would be tempted to apply to young Conrad. Even the touching detail of the bargaining away of the paternal cow is not wholly invented. *Conrad's romantic enterprise was financed by a capital produced in agriculture.*¹

Yanko's journey is related with some detail. With the other emigrants, he reached Hamburg through Cracow and Berlin. It is exactly the same route that Conrad took with his family when he visited Poland in 1914. It is as if Joseph Conrad had wanted to follow the path of his unfortunate countryman, the hero of his tale, just as in his youth he had yearned to re-tread the path of the explorers, the heroes of his readings. One might even think that he was conscious of his wish, for he makes (in *Poland Revisited*) a special point that

¹ Conrad's journey to Marseilles and the monthly allowance which he received from his uncle were paid out of a small capital Conrad had inherited from his grand-uncle Nicholas Bobrowski (Aubry I, p. 13, note). This man, a familiar figure to the readers of *A Personal Record*, had been a soldier most of his life, but had finally settled down as an estate manager. "The terms of the lease were very advantageous, but the retired situation of the village and a plain comfortable house in good repair were, I fancy, the greatest inducements. He lived there quietly for about ten years . . .", Conrad writes on p. 57 of *A Personal Record*, using the information given in his uncle's *Memoirs*. Conrad's case was therefore not as dissimilar from that of Yanko as it might seem at first sight.

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it was not himself but his wife who chose the unusual route through Hamburg:

For reasons which at first seemed to me somewhat obscure, that one of my companions whose wishes are law, decided that our travels should begin in an unusual way by the crossing of the North Sea.—
(*Notes*, p. 147.)

Even if we had not Mrs. Conrad's statement to the contrary, it would seem very probable, from internal evidence, that Conrad, repressing a dimly felt truth, attributed a wish of his own to his wife. This is what Mrs. Conrad writes on the subject (p. 62):

In Joseph Conrad's account of this journey, he says that it was my wish that we should take the unusual route across the North Sea. It was, as a matter of fact, his own suggestion. I welcomed it because it seemed to make the journey more of an adventure.

Yanko had embarked, with the other emigrants, on a big ship, which met subsequently with a heavy gale and was shipwrecked near the English coast. Of all the passengers, Yanko alone escaped with his life, but only to taste the bitterness of foreign bread, and to die, very soon, from the hostility of his new surroundings and that of the climate.

His first experiences in the foreign land were to leave a deep mark in his brain. "They seemed to have seared into his soul a sombre sort of wonder and indignation." And this was only natural. Had he

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not asked in vain (an unheard-of occurrence in his country!) for food and shelter "for the love of God?" Who were these heathens who treated him like a common thief? Did these unbelievers not know that it is a sin to turn out a miserable man asking for help in Christ's name?

What happened to him was indeed strange enough to make him see with wonder that the sacred law of hospitality was apparently unknown to the people in this foreign country:

It was he, no doubt, who, early the following morning, had been seen lying (in a swoon, I should say) on the roadside grass by the Brenzett carrier. . . . As the day advanced, some children came dashing into school at Norton in such a fright that the schoolmistress went out and spoke indignantly to a "horrid-looking man" on the road. He edged away, hanging his head, for a few steps, and then suddenly ran off with extraordinary fleetness. The driver of Mr. Bradley's milk-cart made no secret of it that he had lashed with his whip at a hairy sort of gipsy fellow who, jumping up at a turn of the road by the Vents, made a snatch at the pony's bridle. And he caught him a good one, too, right over the face, he said, that made him drop down in the mud a jolly sight quicker than he had jumped up; but it was a good half a mile before he could stop the pony. . . . Also three boys confessed afterwards to throwing stones at a funny tramp, knocking about all wet and muddy, and, it seemed, very drunk, in the narrow deep lane by the limekilns. All this was the talk of three villages for days; but

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we have Mrs. Finn's (the wife of Smith's wagoner) unimpeachable testimony that she saw him get over the low wall of Hammond's pig-pound and lurch straight at her, babbling aloud in a voice that was enough to make one die of fright. Having the baby with her in a perambulator, Mrs. Finn called out to him to go away, and as he persisted in coming nearer, she hit him courageously with her umbrella over the head, and, without once looking back, ran like the wind with the perambulator as far as the first house in the village. . . . —(*Typhoon and other Stories*, pp. 118-19.)

The hunted outcast ran then to the house of a certain Smith, where his arrival created no small commotion. Smith, coming home in the evening, found "his dog barking himself into a fit, the backdoor locked, his wife in hysterics; and all for an unfortunate dirty tramp." He went at once, all in a fury, to the stack-yard, where "the sight of some nondescript and miry creature" astonished him not a little. The funny speech of the intruder persuaded him at once that he had to do with an escaped lunatic, and his only idea was to do his duty to the community by locking up this dangerous and wandering maniac, and, indeed, he managed to bundle him headlong into the woodlodge and to shut the bolt. It never occurred to him that this man might be dying of hunger, cold, and despair, in that place which presented "the horrible aspect of a dungeon."

Yanko was asking himself what they would do with him next. He passed a horrible night, but, as in fairy tales, the door opened in the early morning and

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a young woman entered. Who was this fairy? He was very astonished to see that the "gracious lady" gave him, with her own hands, a big piece of white bread, "such bread as the rich eat in my country." After what had happened, so much pity overwhelmed him. Tears rolled down his cheeks and fell on the crust, and then, he expressed his thanks and his respect by seizing her wrist and imprinting a kiss on her hand, after the manner of his own countrymen.

Amy Foster was not frightened. She was intuitive enough to know that this man would do her no harm. She had observed that, in spite of appearances, he was good-looking and honest. She believed in him.

From this moment, Yanko was saved. He was taken care of. He earned his living on Swaffer's farm. He lived and worked, but he also wondered. It was his fate ever to wonder at the strangeness of things in this new country. He could not understand it. He could not get rooted in the new soil. He could not get hold of it. Everything was different. Only Miss Swaffer's steel cross and three Norway pines before the house reminded him of his country.

At first, it looked as if he were going to acclimatise himself. He learned to speak English, as a baby learns to speak, with a soft intonation and an accent of his own. He married the young woman with "a golden heart" who had been the first to show him any sympathy. But this marriage, which ought to have been the very consecration of his acclimatisation, brings about a situation that soon becomes hopeless. The child that comes in due course, instead of uniting their hearts, divides them. Yanko wants, in his simple way, to make a little Pole of him, to teach him Polish

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prayers, Polish songs, Polish dances. Amy's maternal instinct is roused by this, as if a great danger were lurking behind Yanko's paternal joys in which she could not share. And soon the estrangement grows into fear, and the fear grows into terror, "the unreasonable terror of that man she could not not understand." Yanko becomes depressed by his domestic worries. He falls ill. A lung trouble is developing. And now, the same Amy Foster who had shown so much pity to the poor foreigner, the girl with "a golden heart," cannot bring herself to have her husband in her room and nurse him. And so he lies downstairs, like a wounded animal, like "a bird caught in a snare," awaiting his death. And like Almayer, he wants to know, in a last outburst, the reason of all this:

"Why?" he cried, in the penetrating and indignant voice of a man calling to a responsible Maker. A gust of wind and a swish of rain answered.—(p. 141).

But this revolt does not last, and with the shadows of death already closing round him, one word escapes his lips, a word not of protest but of submission: "merciful," and then he dies.

And so the vision retreats into darkness. The curtain has gone down to the accompaniment of a few closing notes which still linger in the air. And we cannot but sit still a moment longer to muse over what we have seen and heard. A vision only, a romantic vision, a small tragedy out of thousands—and yet, infinitely more poignant by its close relationship to the author. For have we not seen Conrad, the "repressed" Conrad?

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Whenever Dr. Kennedy looks at little Johnny, he seems to see again "*the other one*, the father, cast out mysteriously by the sea to perish in the supreme disaster of loneliness and despair." Whenever *we* think of Yanko, we also see *the other one*, the author, very different from the man he was in the eyes of the world—but how much more true! The author, "cast out mysteriously by the sea," to perish or to win in the supreme test of loneliness and despair. Yanko died and Joseph Conrad lived. And yet the difference is small. The mere hair's breadth of a little more strength

And again the curtain rises, disclosing this time a tropical landscape with its dark-blue sea, its flaring sunshine, its luxurious vegetation. The scene is on an island. In the foreground we distinguish a dilapidated landing-stage, behind it forests, in the background a volcano smoking peacefully, detachedly. For the whole landscape illustrates the main ideas of the book: peace, detachment, the futility of human effort, and the ever-present, too little-made-of danger of a deadly cataclysm lurking under a pleasant surface.

The island is inhabited by a white man. The man is Heyst the stoic and son of a stoic. For Heyst is essentially the son of his father and more than his son, his disciple. And again, the symbol of this dependence is not absent. The portrait of old Heyst hangs in the sitting-room like the very embodiment of the father's posthumous authority over the son.

In several books of Conrad, the father-daughter problem has been studied. In *Victory*, it is the father-son problem stated exactly as it had confronted Conrad himself: Shall I be faithful to my father's ideas?

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Heyst is older than Conrad when his father dies, and therefore can choose deliberately which course to take.

He decides to follow the example of his father, and to keep away from the illusions of the world:

The dead man had kept him on the bank by his side. And now Heyst felt acutely that he was alone on the bank of the stream. In his pride, he determined not to enter it.—(pp. 175-6.)

But the day was to come when fate tempted him in a moment of weakness to depart from his father's wise rule of "look on and never make a sound." He was not aware then that this was nothing less than a breach of faith which would inevitably lead to his perdition. He just let himself be caught "like the silliest fish of them all" by "the commonest of snares," the belief in human effort. Following the advice of an excellent man, Heyst takes an active part in a coal-mine business, and soon becomes the tropical manager of a London concern. From a stoical onlooker, he turns into a successful man, and he is not a little astonished at the change himself. Being of an intuitive nature, he adapts himself easily to the new conditions. "I was never so well thought of in the islands till I began to jabber commercial gibberish like the veriest idiot," he tells Lena. "Upon my word, I believe that I was actually respected for a time. I was as grave as an owl over it; I had to be loyal to the man." Here again, how much of Conrad has gone into the making of Heyst!

Heyst's second mistake is but a consequence of the first. The coal company having been liquidated, one would think that nothing could prevent him now from

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going back to his father's philosophy, and to his ideal island. These are indeed his intentions, but he commits the mistake (moved again by pity), to come back not alone but in company of a girl. For the second time, Heyst had become unfaithful to his father's memory by believing in life, and pity, and love. In the quiet atmosphere of the island, he soon sees his mistake, and he sees the danger. He tries to outplay fate. In his conversations with Lena, he endeavours to make her a disciple, an ally, an accomplice of his father's philosophy, to persuade himself of its truth, by persuading *her*. For he does not seem to believe in what he is advancing. His actions are not in accordance with his words.

By carrying off Lena, Heyst had made a ferocious enemy in the person of a German hotel-keeper at Surabaya. This man (who, like most of Conrad's characters, is a victim of his imagination) sends two desperadoes after him. The appearance of the two outcasts makes the same impression on Heyst as the appearance of "Gentleman Brown" on Jim. An obscure sense of guilt paralyses Heyst. The disappearance of his revolver is but a symbol for the loss of his will-power. The girl, on the other hand, takes it upon herself to play a desperate game with the enemy and to disobey his strictest orders. She pays for her mistake (also an unconscious breach of faith) with her life. After her death, the bungalow is burnt, and Heyst throws himself into the purifying flame in order to atone for his (and her) guilt.

There is a profound psychological truth in the behaviour and fate of Heyst, and a truth which Conrad felt by analogy with himself. How was it that the example of his father had not sufficed to keep *him* from throwing himself from the bank of stoicism into the

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bustle of life, into adventures, hardships, into places from which there was no way back to the patriotic resolutions of his childhood, to the unfinished task of his father? He might have known better. There was ever within him a voice warning him against the illusions of life, against the final disenchantment, against the uselessness of struggle, and condemning his exuberant imagination, his youthful enthusiasms, his hopes, and mocking his attempts to get on, to create, to be happy. Just to fold his arms in utter scepticism or in utter weariness and to give it up and look on, like Willems, like Jim, like Heyst, like his father, was what that inner voice must have whispered over and over again into his ear in those frightful moments of loneliness and dejection which were frequent with him. It is all to his honour that he had the almost superhuman power to repress these thoughts, and to do his duty. His sufferings are expressed in a symbolical form. By the intensity of similar feelings in his heroes and by the pathos with which they are expressed, we can judge of the overwhelming importance they must have had in Conrad's most intimate life.

There are, in the portrait of Heyst, many traits which no reader will hesitate to identify with Conrad's own. Heyst, "the man of universal scorn and unbelief," is nobody else than the *sarcastic* Conrad (a true son of his father) as we know him from a good part of his writings. Heyst wrote to a great extent *Heart of Darkness*, *The End of the Tether*, *Freya*, *An Outpost of Progress*, *The Idiots*, and so many other episodes. Heyst looked with ironical (but not quite genuine) detachment at the absurd doings of bomb-throwing anarchists. Heyst lent his name to that scornful and venomous sally in which Conrad ridicules the optimism of Christian religion as

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"The Great Joke." Heyst took it upon himself to throw other provocative ideas at people's heads, ideas which would have offended had they come directly from Conrad. And finally, the tragic figure of Heyst symbolizes, in its rise and fall, the central idea of the whole work of Joseph Conrad, that a breach of faith can only be atoned for by death.

Towards the end of his life, in the last novel which he could finish, Conrad has fixed a vision which had been the great vision of his boyhood: that of a free Rover going out into the world in search of adventure and glory, fighting his way all over the seas, and finally coming home again, white-haired but still strong, admired but modest, and with a bag of money. For this figure, symbolizing his youthful enthusiasms and aspirations, the old Conrad finds a significant and befitting end. A better fate awaits the Rover at home than the usual well-deserved rest and freedom from material cares—it is given to him to die for his country.

It is certainly more than a coincidence that in the very year when Conrad began to make plans for *The Rover*, in 1920, Polish patriots were shedding their blood, fighting against the Russian invader. Conrad took a great interest in that war and wrote several letters on behalf of Poland during that crucial year. In one of them, addressed to an American friend (John Quinn) and published in the *New York Tribune*,¹ he says: "I confess to some little gratification at the thought that the unbroken Polish front keeps bolshevism off and that apparently the re-born state has one heart and one soul, one indomitable will, from the poorest peasant

¹ Aubry, II, p. 237.

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to the highest magnate." Perhaps Conrad knew that four members of the Bobrowski family were fighting as officers in the Polish ranks, and that one of them had received the cross *Virtuti Militari*. In these moments when Poland, fighting for her new existence, was calling for all her sons, he felt, like the Rover, "the grip of his origins from the crown of his head to the sole of his feet," and had he been still a Pole, he would have wanted to take his part in the struggle.

The first note struck in *The Rover* is indeed that of the sweetness of return. Passing through the Straits of Gibraltar, he feels with tenderness the attraction of the Southern Shore "that had called to him irresistibly" (p. 98). Meeting the first French people, it strikes him that "any woman, lean and old enough, might have been his mother," that he himself "might have been any Frenchman of them all, even one of those he pitied, one of those he despised."

After leaving Toulon, where he had landed, he follows first the road and then a path leading to the very spot where he had lived as a boy. And the strong man, whom the manifold experiences of an extraordinary life had made undemonstrative, feels a strange emotion:

Every feature of the country, with the darkly-wooded rises, the barren flat expanse of stones and sombre bushes to his left, appealed to him with a sort of strange familiarity, *because they had remained unchanged since the days of his boyhood.*—(p. 6.)

On the way, the Rover stops to exchange a few words with a peasant, and instantly he reflects: "If I had stayed in this country, I would be talking like this fellow."

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But Peyrol does not only feel the familiarity of things that have not changed since his boyhood, he also feels the strangeness of things that have changed. Stepping on the native ground, he perceives that "he had grown a stranger to his native country." The greatest changes were of the political order. The political and social conditions into which the Rover returns, were very much like those Conrad would have found in Poland, had he returned after the war. Like the Rover, he would have found the word *liberty* on every lip, a strong, newly-awakened, patriotic feeling, a war raging against an invader, and depreciated paper-money. Like Peyrol, he would have been able to buy a whole village with his foreign currency. And finally, the problem of how to adapt himself to the new conditions would have confronted him as inevitably as it confronted the Rover. As inevitably, but perhaps more tragically, for in the novel the problem is easily and optimistically solved by the assumption that *true patriotism must needs be above political divisions*. Lieutenant Réal expresses this thought very clearly, while unfolding to Peyrol a secret plan to deceive the English fleet in the Mediterranean:

"It's another stroke to help us on the way towards a great victory at sea."

"Us!" said Peyrol. "I am a sea-bandit and you are a sea-officer. What do you mean by us?"

"I mean all Frenchmen," said the lieutenant. "Or let us say simply France, which you too have served."—(p. 118.)

The lieutenant trusts the old sea-bandit just because the latter has remained, in spite of his "cosmopolitan

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associations," a good Frenchman. And his opinion is right. Peyrol proves a better Frenchman than most of those whose business it is to keep the state-machinery going. Of his own free will, the Rover sails out in his tartane on a very special and dangerous mission, and gets killed after having attained his end. Like so many of Conrad's heroes, he dies victoriously, paying off with his tragic death the transgressions of his former days. No greater homage could be paid to his memory than Réal's reflection: "*But the only certain thing we can say of him is that he was not a bad Frenchman.*" This is his only title of honour, and it is the best, for, as another patriot adds, "*everything's in that.*"

It would be impossible to point out here the many analogies between the Rover's past and that of Conrad. But some of them deserve our attention. The most important events of Peyrol's boyhood are reminiscent of Conrad's, but the Rover's character may be said to be derived at least as much from Nicholas Bobrowski's as from Conrad's own:

Having learned from childhood to suppress every sign of wonder before all extraordinary sights and events, all strange people, all strange customs, and the most alarming phenomena of nature (as manifested, for instance, in the violence of volcanoes or the fury of human beings), he had really become indifferent—or only perhaps utterly inexpressive.—(p. 24.)

One of the extraordinary events of his childhood was the death of his mother, which struck him with terror; another, shortly afterwards, was the outbreak of the revolution that he witnessed in Marseilles:

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The last thing which had *ouched him with the panic of the supernatural* had been the death, under a heap of rags, of that gaunt, fierce woman, his mother, and the last thing *that had nearly overwhelmed him at the age of twelve with another kind of terror* was the riot of sound and the multitude of mankind on the quays of Marseilles, something perfectly inconceivable.—(p. 24.)

Twelve was the very age when Conrad passed those unforgettable, terror-stricken moments, during his father's decline and agony which left the impressions which I tried to characterize in another chapter.

But Peyrol's later life reminds us also of Conrad's as well as of that of taciturn Nicholas Bobrowski:

The course of his life, which, in the opinion of any ordinary person, might have been regarded as full of marvellous incidents (only he himself had never marvelled at them) had rendered him undemonstrative.—(p. 1.)

When we compare the respective ages of Conrad and of the Rover, we come across a curious coincidence. On his return to France the Rover is 58, while Joseph Conrad had made his last journey to Poland at the age of 56. Of course, this is a difference of two years, but this very difference seems to serve our point, since Conrad was never good at remembering dates, and since, according to Mrs. Conrad (p. 18) "everything happened two years earlier than he says, almost without exception." Consciously or unconsciously, Conrad has given the Rover exactly his age when revisiting Poland. And this is not very surprising, since some of his most

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intimate impressions (which one looks for in vain in his official account of that journey) have gone into the making of *The Rover*.

Another curious Polish association can be found on page four of the novel. When, immediately after his arrival in Toulon, the free sea-rover steps into the Port Office, a high official addresses him with the words: "As a matter of fact you have been for the best part of your life *skimming the seas*, if the truth were known. *You must have been a deserter from the Navy at one time, whatever you may call yourself now.*" And Peyrol replies honestly: "*If there was anything of the sort, it was in the time of kings and aristocrats And now I have brought in a prize, and a service-letter from Citizen Renaud, commanding in the Indian Seas. I can also give you the names of good republicans in this town who know my sentiments . . .*"

This scene is manifestly inspired by impressions in Conrad's own life. Had his first English ship not been called the *Skimmer of the Sea*? Had Poles not charged him with want of patriotism, with desertion? And could he not reply to such a charge that, if there had been anything of the sort, it had been in the time of the Tsar, not of the republic? And could he not (and actually did so) justify himself by referring to his written work, to his reputation abroad, and by giving the names of very good Poles in the town (i.e. in Poland) who could testify to the purity of his intentions?

On page seven of *The Rover* there is another Polish association which may well have remained wholly unconscious to Conrad himself. After the death of his mother, young Peyrol had run away, terror-struck, to hide himself in a tartane. But in the night there was

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another awful scare, and the boy found himself "being hauled out by the scruff of the neck and *being asked who the devil he was, and what he was doing there.*" This last sentence is a reminiscence from Molière's comedy *Les Fourberies de Scapin* where the repeated question of an irritated father *Que diable allait-il faire dans cette galère?* is amongst the funniest effects. But, to Conrad, this was more than a literary reminiscence. *He had once been asked, in a letter from his uncle, the very question shortly after his arrival at Marseilles, as we know from the Mirror of the Sea.*¹

Before closing this chapter, I should like to mention the possibility, that, in close analogy with the words *Patna* and *Patusan* in *Lord Jim*, the name *Peyrol* and that of the island *Porquerolles* (where the Rover was born) were chosen because of their unconscious association with the words floating then through Conrad's mind: *Poland*, *Pole*, *Rover*, or their Polish equivalents: *Polska*, *Polak*, *korsarz*. And a still more evident association underlies the Rover's official title (*Master-Gunner*). Joseph Conrad's title had been *Master-Mariner*, and, on the other hand, the word *master* (and still more the French *maître* or the Polish *mistrz*) is a title of esteem given to great artists.

¹ The passage (p. 153) runs as follows:

. . . I knew generally very little, and least of all what I was doing in that *galère*.

I remember that, exactly as in the comedy of Molière, my uncle asked the precise question in the very words, not of my confidential valet however, but across great distances of land, in a letter. . .

This allusion to Molière's comedy does not find itself in any of the Bobrowski letters which I have read. But then, most of the letters which Conrad received from his uncle during his first year in Marseilles are lost.

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I knew what I was doing in leaving the facts of my life, and even of my tales in the background. Explicitness, my dear fellow, is fatal to the glamour of all artistic work, robbing it of all suggestiveness, destroying all illusion nothing is more clear than the utter insignificance of explicit statement and also its power to call attention away from things that matter in the region of art.—(Conrad to R. Curle.)

BESIDES the many invisible ties which connected Joseph Conrad with Poland, there were also a few visible bonds between the English author and the Poles.

During his sea-faring life, Joseph Conrad kept up a frequent correspondence with his uncle, which was only interrupted by the latter's death in 1894. These letters from the young man to his guardian had been carefully preserved at the Bobrowski estate Kazimierówka, and they still existed in 1914, but no attempt has been made, so far, to ascertain their fate, and to rescue them if possible. This is due to the fact that Kazimierówka is an out-of-the way place, some thirty miles from Jitomir, and belongs to Soviet Russia.¹ But although the war and the revolution have been raging over that part of the country, these letters need not be lost

¹ See General Staff Map of Russia, series 22, sheet 7.

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It is true that such was Conrad's opinion, but Conrad easily anticipated the worst, or else had, perhaps, good reasons for wishing that they should be left alone.

Another Polish correspondent of Joseph Conrad was his cousin, Aniela Zagórska. Part of this correspondence has appeared in Aubry's biography, and in what has been published there, there is one letter which is very characteristic of the oversensitive intuition of Conrad's mind, as I tried to define it in chapter III, a mind yearning for communication with a kindred soul. There were moments when Conrad believed that a Pole only could be that soul, and Charles Zagórski was not only a Pole, but a relative. When he died, in 1898, the distressed Conrad wrote to the widow a letter culminating in the following statement:

. when I saw him for the first time, fourteen years ago, I was overcome with affection for him, *as the man most akin to me in thought and by blood*—after my uncle, who took the place of my parents. Not a single day passed but I found myself thinking of you both—and during the most painful moments *l'idée qu'il y aurait un jour où je pourrais lui confesser ma vie toute entière et être compris de lui: cette pensée était ma plus grande consolation.*¹

Joseph Conrad went even further, and made over to Mrs. Zagórska and her daughter all the rights for the translation of his works into Polish and Russian. The question whether he did it just to help the widow out of a difficult situation, or whether he decided that no

¹ See Aubry I, p. 228. The last part of the quotation is in French in the original, the rest in Polish.



TADEUSZ BOBROWSKI

“The wisest, the firmest, the most indulgent of guardians, extending over me a paternal care and affection, a moral support which I seemed to feel always near me in most distant parts of the earth.”—(*A Personal Record*, p 31.)

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Polish money should enter his pockets, must remain open.

A third Polish correspondent was a young dramatist called Bruno Winawer, whose play, *The Book of Job*, was translated into English by Conrad himself. This translation has never been published, nor has the play been produced in English.

An interesting letter in Polish is that addressed by Conrad to the writer Stefan Żeromski. The facsimile of this letter was published for the first time in the Warsaw review *Naokolo Swiata* (Spring, 1925), and later in Aubry's biography (II, p. 298), where it is accompanied by an English translation. Żeromski¹ had written a preface to the Polish translation of *Almayer's Folly* (it is mainly a short biography of Conrad) and Conrad wrote to thank him. This is the main passage from that letter:

I admit that I cannot find words to describe my deep emotion in reading this appreciation of yours, by which I feel profoundly honoured, *appreciation coming from my country*, voiced by you, dear Sir, who are the greatest master of its literature.

Please accept, dear and esteemed Sir,² my most affectionate thanks for the time, the thought, and the work you have devoted to me and for your most sympathetic comprehension *which has discovered the compatriot behind the author*.³

¹ Joseph Conrad had not a too great idea of Żeromski's work, as he wrote in a letter to Ed. Garnett (p. 309) of one of Żeromski's best works: "The whole thing is disagreeable and often incomprehensible in comment and psychology. Often it is gratuitously ferocious."

² The usual form of Polish address.

³ Aubry's translation.

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This letter, and more especially its last words, form the subject of an article by Żeromski, "The Compatriot behind the Author" (*Autor Rodak*), which was published in the same number of *Naokoło Swiata* as the facsimile of Conrad's message. Żeromski concluded in this study (which the reader will find in Appendix II) that Conrad was "as much a Polish as an English writer."

The same letter to Żeromski is also interesting from the point of view of handwriting, for it shows that Conrad wrote the most complicated Polish signs, as the "barred" l for instance, (which the Poles have a curious way of writing by flinging the bar over the l) without the slightest hesitation.

In 1908 and 1909, the *English Review* published Conrad's work of retrospect which we know under the title *A Personal Record*, but which was called then *Some Reminiscences*. This work, although allowing of an interesting deeper glimpse here and there into the formation and evolution of Conrad's character, is, on the whole, disappointing. The reader feels too much that Conrad hides much more than he reveals. The work was obviously not to be a volume of confessions, nor even of memories, but only a book containing, as Conrad wrote to a friend, "all that is worth knowing of me," with a very modest conception of what the public deserved to know of him. Judging from a critical point of view, one might be tempted to say that the work was written by fits, without the faintest hint of a directing idea, in that nonchalant, haphazard way which Poles (including Żeromski) are prone to mistake for a sign of elegance, if not of high art. But perhaps that work is not to be judged

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according to critical standards, but to be understood by intuition. Would it not have been artificial (the intuitive will say), to present these memories in a chronological or, indeed, in any order but that which co-ordinated his feelings? And Conrad's obvious reticence about certain facts in his past, does this not do him more honour than if he had adopted the shamelessly outspoken tone of Rousseau? To these objections I would reply that the subject and the nature of the present book compels me, in this instance, to be rather critical than intuitive, and to point out the fact that in his *Personal Record* Joseph Conrad *fails to do justice to the Polish part within himself*, making much too little of the memories of his childhood, of the influence of Polish society, of his Austro-Polish training. We hear in *A Personal Record* of many things, of Conrad's first experiences at sea, of the circumstances in which *Almayer's Folly* was written, of a journey to his Ukrainian uncle, of his tour to Switzerland as a boy of fifteen, of his parents and his relatives (where Conrad mostly contents himself with transcribing literally certain passages from his uncle's *Memoirs*), but in spite of a few genuine notes, the critical reader is left with the uncomfortable impression that he is being shown a number of carefully selected and retouched photographs. One feels too much the censorship that Conrad imposed upon his emotions and thoughts when composing the book. He is talking at length about *Almayer's Folly*, but he never touches the cardinal fact that Almayer appealed to him as the man who, like "enchanted Heyst," *could never get back to his country*, as the outcast gesticulating: "Why! I have been trying to get out of this infernal place for twenty years,

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and I can't. You hear, man! I can't, and never shall! Never!"

In 1911 the *Oxford and Cambridge Review* published Conrad's story, now included in *Tales of Hearsay*, of a Polish patriot: *Prince Roman*. Conrad had seen the man in his boyhood, and was to read later the history and legend of his life in Bobrowski's *Memoirs*. It is probable that without these, *Prince Roman* could not have been written, for in Bobrowski's letters to Conrad I could not trace any allusion to this personage. Inspiration has very little to do with the tale, and if it were not for the sincerity of the beginning and the interesting description of Polish country-life and other recollections from his childhood, it would hardly be worthy of Joseph Conrad.

Prince Roman is written very much in the same mood as *A Personal Record*, but its impersonal character allowed Conrad to bring out better a typically Polish fate, and a typical state of Polish society during Poland's darkest years. As Mrs. Conrad writes, *Prince Roman* was to be part of a second volume of reminiscences. For this reason and because it is Conrad's only patriotic and Polish tale, it deserves greater attention.

When reading about the Prince in his uncle's *Memoirs*, Conrad remembered vividly the short meeting he had had with him long ago, and he felt again that youthful revolt at the thought of the brutality of political circumstances which made devotion, heroism, and patriotism appear as sheer lunacy, unworthy of any but visionaries. In no other work of his do we find such noble scorn and sincere patriotism. Nowhere in his work has he expressed his indignation so well for that cannibalistic feast which is known in history as the partition of

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Poland, nor his love for his native country. "That country which demands to be loved as no other country has ever been loved, with the mournful affection one bears to the unforgotten dead, and with the unextinguishable fire of a hopeless passion which only a living, breathing, warm ideal can kindle in our breasts for our pride, for our weariness, for our exaltation, for our undoing."—(*Tales of Hearsay*, p. 51.)

The story of Prince Roman Sanguszko (to give him his full name) is related by Bobrowski with his usual soberness and conciseness, on pp. I. 30; I. 132, and II. 372-374. In the second of these passages, Conrad's uncle destroys the legend, according to which a friend of the Prince had involuntarily betrayed him.

Their [the Rzewuskis'] only son lived under the terrible self-reproach that he had betrayed the real name of the friend of his childhood and contemporary Prince Roman Sanguszko, who had been imprisoned during the rising of 1831 Prince Roman returned to his country only in 1842, when Rzewuski already lived in Lithuania, and he absolutely contradicted the story of Rzewuski's betrayal (which the latter had told me himself in 1839), explaining the whole incident very simply. After having been brought with many others to the main quarters of the regiment, whose commanding officer was Rzewuski, the latter, seeing the Prince, forgot himself so much as to exclaim: "Roman, you here!" But this could not be a betrayal, since the Prince's companions, who had been arrested with him, knew who he was. Nevertheless, Florian Rzewuski remained all his life under this awful self-reproach, and it is quite

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possible that after this his whole life was marred for this reason. May the present statement remove this stain from his memory!

It may be regretted that Joseph Conrad did not resist the temptation of exploiting the dramatic legend of the betrayal. Without its romantic make-up, the tale would have gained in conviction and sincerity. This is what the above passage becomes under Conrad's pen:

During the whole campaign, the Prince, exposing his person conscientiously on every occasion, had not received a scratch. No one had recognized him or at any rate betrayed his identity. Till then, as long as he did his duty, it had mattered nothing who he was.

Now, however, the position was changed. As ex-guardsmen and as late ordnance officer to the Emperor, this rebel ran a serious risk of being given special attention in the shape of a firing squad at ten paces. For more than a month he remained lost in the crowd of prisoners packed in the casemates of the citadel, with just enough food to keep body and soul together, but otherwise allowed to die from wounds, privation or diseases at the rate of forty or so a day.

The position of the fortress being central, new parties, captured in the open in the course of a thorough pacification, were being sent in frequently. *Amongst such newcomers*¹ *happened to be a young man, a personal*

¹ It will be remarked that, according to Bobrowski, the young man was serving in the Russian army and had to supervise the prisoners. Conrad makes him a soldier fighting in the Polish ranks.

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friend of the Prince from his school-days. He recognized him, and in the extremity of his dismay cried aloud: "My God! Roman, you here!"

It is said that years of life embittered by remorse paid for this momentary lack of self-control. All this happened in the main quadrangle of the citadel.¹ The warning gesture of the Prince came too late. An officer of the gendarmes on guard had heard the exclamation. The incident appeared to him worth inquiring into. The investigation which followed was not very arduous because the Prince, asked categorically for his real name, owned up at once.—(Tales of Hearsay, pp. 49, 50.)

The third passage relating to Prince Roman in Bobrowski's *Memoirs* runs as follows:

Prince Roman Sanguszko was the son of Prince Eustache² . . .

[He] was serving in the Russian Guards, and when on a visit with his parents in Volhynia, passed over to the rising, and subsequently was made prisoner. *When the instruction officer, informed by the parents of Prince Roman, suggested in his question that, depressed by the death of his wife, and without realising the consequences, he joined the rising, Prince Roman replied by writing: "I joined the rising from conviction." I heard people say that the last words of this answer were adopted for a device by the Princes Sanguszko, but I never saw it on the seal of the Prince himself.*

¹ Bobrowski wrote: "in the main quarters of the regiment." Conrad probably used the word citadel, because his father had been imprisoned in the Warsaw Citadel, and this obliged him to substitute quadrangle for quarter.

² Conrad replaces the unfamiliar name by John.

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Joseph Conrad has freely enlarged upon the sober narrative of his uncle. The above passage from the *Memoirs* expands under his pen to fully four pages, of which I will quote the most characteristic passages. Bobrowski's simple statement that the instructing officer had been "informed by the parents of Prince Roman," becomes, under Conrad's pen, a minute description of all sorts of intrigues, a description in which Conrad's dislike for the Russians has free play:

The news of his captivity was a crushing blow. Directly, nothing could be done for him. But the greatness of their name, of their position, their wide relations and connections in the highest spheres, enabled his parents to act indirectly, and they moved heaven and earth, as the saying is, to save their son from the "consequences of his madness," as poor Prince John did not hesitate to express himself. Great personages were approached by society leaders, high dignitaries were interviewed, powerful officials were induced to take an interest in that affair. The help of every possible secret influence was enlisted. Some private secretaries got heavy bribes. The mistress of a certain senator obtained a large sum of money.

But, as I have said, in such a glaring case no direct appeal could be made and no open steps taken. All that could be done was to incline, by private representation, the mind of the President of the Military Commission to the side of clemency. He ended by being impressed by the hints and suggestions, some of them from very high quarters, which he received from St. Petersburg. And, after all,

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the gratitude of such great nobles as the Princes S—— was something worth having from a worldly point of view.—(*Tales of Hearsay*, pp. 50, 51.)

Conrad then passes on to the description of the room in which Prince Roman was to be tried by a commission of three officers and to the trial itself:

What happened in this preliminary examination is only known from the presiding officer. Pursuing the only possible course in that glaringly bad case, he tried from the first to bring to the Prince's mind the line of defence he wished him to take. He absolutely framed his questions so as to put the right answers into the culprit's mouth, going so far as to suggest the very words: how, distracted by excessive grief after his young wife's death, rendered irresponsible for his conduct by his despair, in a moment of blind recklessness, without realising the highly reprehensible nature of the act, nor yet its danger and its dishonour, he went off to join the nearest rebels on a sudden impulse. And that now, penitently——

But Prince Roman was silent. The military judges looked at him hopefully. In silence he reached for a pen and wrote on a sheet of paper he found under his hand: "I joined the national rising from conviction."

. . . . Such was the written testimony of Prince Roman in the supreme moment of his life. I have heard that the Princes of the S—— family, in all its branches, adopted the last two words: "From conviction" for the device under the armorial

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bearings of their house. I don't know whether the report is true. My uncle could not tell me. He remarked only that, naturally, it was not to be seen on Prince Roman's own seal.—(Id., pp. 52, 53.)

The rest of the story is exactly as Bobrowski tells it, and all the details given by Joseph Conrad are warranted by his uncle. So when Conrad writes that "Emperor Nicholas, who always took personal cognizance of all sentences on Polish nobility, wrote with his own hand in the margin: 'The authorities are severely warned to take care that this convict walks in chains like any other criminal every step of the way'," he is taking but small liberties with his uncle's report which says: "Emperor Nicholas, who had a good memory, confirmed himself the sentences touching the [Polish] nobility. So after the condemnation of Prince Roman, he remembered that his parents might induce the authorities to let him do the journey by cart, and sent an intelligent messenger with an order in his own handwriting that not the slightest indulgence should be granted—and that man walked, very erect, to the place of his exile, together with criminals, and chained to a small cart." It is true, also, that Prince Roman's daughter was "married splendidly to a Polish Austrian *grand seigneur*" (Bobrowski gives his name, Alfred Potocki), and that the returned exile looked after her estates while she was amusing herself abroad.

What seems to have tempted Conrad to draw this picture of the Polish Prince is his extraordinary likeness to his own father. As it stands, the tale is an indirect plea for his father and a reaction against the worldly wisdom of his uncle, so similar to the worldly wisdom

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of Prince John. T. Bobrowski was, before everything, a man of hard facts, not of sentiment. Prince Roman's weary words which close the tale, "they think that I let myself be guided too much by mere sentiment," might have been Apollo Korzeniowski's reflection referring to his Bobrowski relatives.

It has been shown throughout this study how eloquent Conrad could be when he expressed his feelings and thoughts in an impersonal, intuitive, symbolic way, but how, whenever he becomes explicit, and tries to define objectively what he feels, to *think it out*, so to speak, inspiration fails him utterly. This is due to the special cast of his mind which did not permit of creation unless moved by the pressure of dammed-up tendencies in his unconscious. The conscious Conrad is discursive and dull. These are the reasons why *Prince Roman* ultimately fails to move us. The patriotic tendency is too visible, the story itself too second-hand, the intention too conscious, the allusions to, and reminiscences of, his father too obvious to make of this story one of Conrad's "inspired" tales, which have been modelled and remodelled in an unconscious process before emerging. Read, for instance, the short lecture on patriotism at the beginning of *Prince Roman*. Truly, one might have expected from the son of Apollo Korzeniowski something more explicit than this: "It requires a certain greatness of soul to interpret patriotism worthily."

The same remark on Conrad's conscious writing holds true of his two articles on behalf of Poland, and written respectively in the years 1916 and 1919. They have been reprinted in *Notes on Life and Letters* under the titles: "A Note on the Polish Problem" and "The

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Crime of Partition." These articles are well written, and inspired by the sincere thought of dispelling the wrong idea with which ignorance and foreign propaganda had surrounded the Polish question, but Conrad does not and evidently cannot give his full measure in the form of political articles.

As to his longer work, *Poland Revisited* (*Notes*, pp. 141 ff.), it is very disappointing to anyone who wishes to study the Polish aspect of Joseph Conrad. *A Personal Record* allowed of a glimpse here and there, but *Poland Revisited* is mainly a record of his personal troubles and worries, not of his impressions. He admits that the thought of visiting Cracow "ended by rousing the dormant energy" of his feelings and explains: "Cracow is the town where I spent with my father the last eighteen months of his life. It was in that old royal city that I ceased to be a boy, had known the friendships, the admirations, the thoughts, and the indignations of that age. It was within those historical walls that I began to understand things, form affections, lay up a store of memories and a fund of sensations with which I was to break violently by throwing myself into an unrelated existence" (p. 145). But for all this, Cracow does not play a great part in these pages, nor indeed Poland. Fully nine tenths of *Poland Revisited* are devoted to irrelevant matter. Mrs. Conrad's account of the same journey reveals indeed more. She tells how deeply moved Joseph Conrad was when he saw the old city again after so many years. Surely, it was otherwise he had dreamed in his youth to come back to his country! Of these impressions and of that deep emotion we feel nothing in *Poland Revisited*.

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Towards the end of his life, when Conrad's thoughts were dwelling more and more on the memories of his childhood, it seemed sometimes to him as though Poland were calling him back, that he ought to go there. When he was ill he would talk to himself in Polish.¹ Of what would he talk, then, if not of his Polish past? (Compare p. 71.)

The writing of *The Rover* marked a turning-point in his mental development. It is the first of his books in which the outcast gets back to his country, and, what is still more significative, in which he proves beyond doubt that he is, in spite of everything, a good patriot. At that moment the possibility of returning to Poland grew obviously less remote, and as the years went by the idea became still more familiar.

In his *Reminiscences* on Conrad, John Galsworthy wrote:

His wife tells me that a sort of homing instinct was on him in the last month of his life and that he seemed sometimes to wish to drop everything and go back to Poland.²

Polish critics, as is natural, immediately took up this statement (*see* Appendix), emphasizing the fact that Poland attracted her son after so many years, while R. Curle, on the other hand, strongly opposes this view in his *Last Twelve Years*:

Shortly after Conrad's death a rumour got about that he had contemplated returning to Poland and

¹ I have this detail from Mrs. Conrad herself.

² Mrs. Conrad was good enough to confirm this statement to me.

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that, had he lived, it is there that he would have spent his last years. I do not know how this rumour started, but I do know that it is utter nonsense. Conrad had the habit of voicing aloud the vague fancies that floated through his mind, and it is just possible that he may have said something that could be interpreted in this light by someone who knew him too little to appreciate the shades of value of his different utterances.—(p. 184).

R. Curle certainly makes too light of what he calls "a rumour," and decidedly underestimates the importance of "the vague fancies" floating through Conrad's mind. Why! *The whole work of Joseph Conrad is based on such vague fancies*, which became more and more conscious as Conrad grew older, and therefore more and more apt to guide him in practical matters.

Not that Conrad would have been entirely happy in Poland. He would have missed England at least as much as he was missing Poland in England. Like the "Rover," he would certainly have had, figuratively speaking, a tartane hidden in a pool somewhere, to remind him of the wide world, scene of his roving adventures, and (who knows?) to allow of an occasional escape.

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I don't know to what an extent your idea of passing to the English Merchant Navy is practicable. The first question will be: Do you speak English? And this I don't know—you never as much as replied to my question whether you were atudying that language.

(T. Bobrowski to Joseph Conrad 1877.)

JOSEPH CONRAD spoke Polish, French and English fluently, and in theory might have written in any of these languages. There were, however, many reasons (mostly of an unconscious nature) which led him to write in English, and in English alone.

French critics, especially those who knew Conrad personally, often discussed the question why Conrad should not have written in French. He had known the language from childhood, and had lived in France and on board French ships for several years before he knew one word of English. Moreover, he had always been greatly attracted by the French genius, and shared with his countrymen that strong partiality for all things French which made Mickiewicz say: "Whatever a Frenchman invents is dear to a Pole." There is a strong temperamental affinity between the Frenchman (especially of the Southern variety) and the Pole (this is a reason why I consider Conrad's return to Southern France in his last writings as a veiled return to Poland), and Conrad had had special opportunities for getting

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acquainted with French people and French culture. The author who seems to have exercised the greatest influence on his style was a Frenchman, Flaubert.

Seen from this angle, Conrad's resolve to write in English may seem puzzling, but if we examine the whole set of circumstances which led him to become an English writer, we find that he had *instinctively* chosen the English language as his most convenient means of expression at a moment when his literary ambitions were still vague. His "Congo Diary" (published in *Last Essays*), although written in a French-speaking country and not intended for publication, is written in English! *Almayer's Folly* was planned from the very start as an English book, although parts of it have been written in France. Conrad's "intuitive" character led him always to be attracted by the new, the unusual, the adventurous, and writing in English satisfied all these conditions. The undertaking gained infinitely by the boldness of the task. The words had a fresher, a more dynamic meaning than in a language familiar from boyhood, and his first writings stimulated him as the first glimpse of the East had done. He was penetrating into a new country where discoveries were made at every step, inspiring him afresh and afresh by their novelty. What a unique, what a glorious experience it must have been that inspired him, to go on writing besides his absorbing work, during five full years, until *Almayer's Folly* was finished! His next book was so intimately related to the first that there could hardly be a question of writing it in a different language. And besides, the die was cast. The spell was broken. The continuity of his work, and artistic as well as material considerations did not allow leaving the way traced by his first books.

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It is true that there were moments when he would exclaim to some Frenchman: *C'est en français que je devrais écrire!* But this was hardly more than just his Polish habit of obliging everyone.

He was, indeed, acutely aware of the elusiveness and conciseness of French style, and of the fact that it would have been almost impossible to write in French in English surroundings. In his "Note" to *A Personal Record*, he says distinctly that he "would have been afraid to attempt expression in a language so perfectly 'crystallized'." English is certainly a more tolerant language than either French or Polish. Its exuberance of synonyms, its rich and everchanging vocabulary, its uncommon elasticity of expression afford to anyone writing in English a latitude that a French author certainly does not possess.

Yet another reason favoured expression in English. Conrad's first books are full of autobiographical elements. A person seen long ago, a conversation or a simple remark overheard on board a ship or in some port, a scene of particular significance observed, or an experience gone through in strange circumstances are the materials out of which his imagination builds up a novel or a tale. But then, the real Almayer spoke English, and so did the real Willems, the real Lingard, the real Jim. As to the character of Marlow, whom Conrad presents as the inexhaustible story-teller he was himself, he is obviously speaking English, just as the French officer in *Lord Jim* is speaking French or translated French. To write *Almayer's Folly* or *Youth* in French would have meant to translate all but the descriptive parts from mental English into written French. And Conrad was too much of a realist to allow of Marlow telling yarns

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to British seamen in the French language. His affinities with French culture manifested themselves in an indirect way. In his latest books he has tried, with an amazing success, to capture the very spirit of French life as well as of French expression. *The Arrow of Gold*, *The Rover* are genuinely French, more truly French, no doubt, than *Under Western Eyes* is Russian.

Conrad's position towards the Polish language is more easily defined. He had left Poland at the age of not quite seventeen. During his seafaring life he had read but few Polish books, while he had been an assiduous reader of French and English literature. At the age when the formation of artistic judgment and the sense of style takes place, Conrad had no Polish models. There are, of course, Polish influences in his style, but these are of spoken, not of written Polish. Joseph Conrad spoke Polish fluently throughout his life, but he never wrote one line for print in that language. And yet the first literary proposition he ever received came from his uncle who wanted him to write for a Warsaw periodical. He may have felt that, although he knew the spoken language, he was far from possessing the literary Polish. Literary Polish, very much like literary French, is a language altogether apart from the everyday language, and it may be safely asserted that only a comparatively small number of Poles master it. The greatest difficulty when writing good Polish is to keep clear of the innumerable corruptions due to the strong influence of French, Russian, and German. Bobrowski's prose, for instance, is saturated with foreign expressions. Apart from this difficulty, the Polish language is too rich and too peculiar of expression, too complicated in construction and too eclectic to be

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mastered easily. Good literary Polish, like Reymont's in the descriptive parts of his *Peasants*, reads like Latin prose. It is an extremely aristocratic means of expression, very rigid and yet infinitely plastic, and altogether different from the idiom full of French and German expressions which fills the columns of certain newspapers, and serves too often as a conversational language. To write in Polish would not only have meant for Conrad to translate into another language (and a language then very poor in nautical terms) events lived in English, but to live in Poland, and to wrestle with the language for years. Conrad could not have risked the adventure of beginning, so to speak, a third career. Once he had started to write in English, the best was to remain faithful to his resolve.

Joseph Conrad's English has often been spoken of with high praise, but also been severely criticized. He certainly could express himself with great ease, especially when inspiration was on him. His choice of words is not only always right, but reveals the most refined feeling for every particular shade of meaning, and for their quantum of energy, if I may express myself so. One peculiarity will be easily noted by his readers: of two words, he will always prefer the more vivid, the fresher, the less usual, and the more "dynamic" expression. His painstaking care to convey just the right shade of meaning and nothing else, reveals itself in a passage like this (from the *Arrow of Gold*):

His hands were spread over his knees and he looked perfectly *insensible*. I don't mean *strange*, or *ghastly*, or *wooden*, but just *insensible—like an exhibit.*—(p. 281.)

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A word may have many meanings (sometimes so many that it can be said to have no meaning at all) and Conrad is only too aware of it. Nothing could be more characteristic of his method than the last words of the above quotation. What always gives his words the right shade of meaning, and at the same time an unusual relief and expressiveness, is the metaphor or the simile that accompanies all his important statements. I have counted as many as 279 similes introduced by *as if*, *as though*, or *like*, in *Lord Jim* alone. The use of the metaphor successfully counteracts the depreciation to which a long currency has subjected the once powerful meaning of words and phrases, filling with the vigour of an image what otherwise would be mere figures of speech, figures similar to "no" and "yes," which are no words in the primitive sense, but mechanical appliances. For the same reason, Conrad likes to choose words and expressions that have something magic, mystic, or enthralling about them, words and expressions, in short, which have retained that primitive energy with which men's first words must have been charged. Conrad's prose at its best is, indeed, rather a series of images to be visualized, than a string of words to be taken notice of. There is something new and at the same time very old about its glamour, a sort of archaic novelty which startles, as would the blare of a post-horn in a railway-station.

The same remark holds true of Polish speech. Polish words have a greater energy than English or French words, and two or three usually suffice to express an idea which we could not condense in less than five. Proverbs, proverbial sayings, and picturesque expressions, mostly of an incredible shortness, take in Polish

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a much greater place than in any language of the West. I have frequently heard Polish boys of ten or twelve use quite intelligently sayings which are current, no doubt, but which it needed not a little imagination to employ on the right occasion. When, after a severe winter, I made the remark to a small boy that it was getting warmer, I received the reply: *Marzec, Starzec* ("[In] March, [Winter is an] old man.") I also remember the case of another boy who was elaborately writing his name on his exercise-book. I asked him why he wrote it so carefully and he replied: "Every dog praises his own tail."

One must have lived on the spot to know the incredible richness of proverbial sayings which are current in Poland, especially in the country, of course, but also in the towns. Joseph Conrad himself quoted many Polish proverbs in his Polish letters. The source of these sayings lies in the picturesque speech of the Polish country-folk, that speech which is so delightfully rendered in Reymont's *Peasants*. Unfortunately, many expressions which are quite natural in the original, seem far-fetched or cryptic in the English translation.

A Pole will not say that bad weather in harvest-time is a nuisance, but will remark dryly that "it is as necessary as a gap in a bridge." To express the idea that somebody looks paler than usual, he will say that "he looks like a mouse that's come out of the flour." He will characterise a curious person by saying that "Eve herself was not more curious." Somebody stares at you in utter astonishment, "he stares like a wolf at his butcher." Two very dissimilar things are "as similar as a dog and a bundle of straw." Something that is lost without leaving traces "fell through like a

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stone in the water." Something is very funny, "it would make a horse laugh."

These examples will suffice to show the grotesquely picturesque character of Polish speech. Proverbs and picturesque sayings exist in any Western language, but they have lost, like the words, their original savour, and those which demand a certain imaginative effort have fallen out of use and have been forgotten.

Joseph Conrad's keen sense of picturesque expression is certainly a Polish hereditary trait, which may have been fostered by his contact with seamen. The sailor is, indeed, after the peasant, most apt to use pictorial (or strong) language,¹ although the evergrowing supremacy of the urban civilisation is rapidly obliterating the taste for originality in speech.

In his work, Joseph Conrad has used a great number of English proverbs (often accompanied by an apologetic "as the saying is"), but he also smuggled into his writings two Polish proverbs under the Russian flag. One of these ("Man discharges the piece, but God carries the bullet") has already been mentioned in Chapter II. The second can be found on p. 358 of *Victory*, where Heyst says: "Our guest! *There is a proverb*—in Russia, I believe—that *when a guest enters the house, God enters the house*. An allusion to a Polish saying underlies the lieutenant's exclamation in "The Duel" (*A Set of Six*, p. 197): "There's some milk yet about that moustache of yours, my boy," and in the old Warrior's indignant remark (*Tales of Hearsay*, p. 1): "Some of you had better wipe the milk off your upper lip before you start passing judgment. . ." Original as these expressions may seem, they are not Conrad's.

¹ See Bowen's book, entitled *Sea Slang*.

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It is indeed quite usual in Polish to say of some *blanc-bec* that "there is still some milk under his nose."

When Conrad does not find a proverb expressing his idea, he occasionally fashions one, as in this passage from *The Secret Agent*:

The conveyance that was awaiting them would have illustrated the proverb that "truth can be more cruel than caricature," if such a proverb existed.

—(p. 155.)

By far the greatest part of Conrad's picturesque expressions have but very vague associations, if any, with current proverbial sayings, and even when he makes use of some expression already existing, he likes to use it in a new sense, and to give it a personal touch of his own.

When something is very beautiful, Poles often say that it is "as beautiful as Polish autumn," alluding to the customary serenity of the Polish sky during that season. Conrad does not employ that saying, but he describes Tomassov's eyes as "blue . . . as the blue of autumn skies."—(*Tales of Hearsay*, p. 5.) What we call a *valley of tears* is modernized by Conrad into a *valley of compromises*. A similar Conradesque touch is visible in sentences like these: "I couldn't imagine what a new bee had stung the mate now," or: "Mr. Verloc, steady like a rock—a soft kind of rock."

Where we would have said that somebody was astonished as if he had fallen from the sky, Conrad says "as though he had tumbled down from a star." He is fond of employing an unusual version of some usual proverb, as when he says: "you shall judge of a man

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by his foes as well as by his friends," or: "Show me a man's friend and. . . ."

And now I shall quote some of the most typical of Conrad's similes and sayings, and if the reader refers to the examples of Polish picturesque speech given above, he will see that they are of the same nature as these. Conrad draws from the same source as the Polish peasant (most of his sayings are borrowed, it will be seen, from country- not from sea-life), and he has the same sense of grotesque picturesqueness.

I will begin with the most simple examples:

- welcome as daylight (1)¹
- dark, like the inside of a cow (2)²
- frank and open as the day (3)
- lonely, like a crow in a strange country (4)
- bare like a barn (5)
- as still as a hare in its form (6)
- as still as death (7)
- as still as a mouse before a cat (8)
- cold like a block of marble (9)
- shrill as a cicada and slender as a match (10)
- he stared like an offended owl (11)
- devouring . . . like the eye of an enemy (12)
- it would blaze like a box of matches (13)

The following examples are more complex:

His face was as unexpressive as a door of a safe³ (14)

¹ The numbers refer to the indication of the source at the end of the volume, pp. 223-224.

² Possibly an allusion to the fairy tale *Hop o' My Thumb*.

³ Possibly due to the similarity of the words *face* and *safe*, one being phonetically the reverse of the other.

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a fist as dumpy and red as a lump of raw meat (15)

[Music] enough to give colic to an ostrich (16)

[Liquor] rotten stuff to make an old he-goat yell
if you poured it down its throat¹ (17)

His incognito which had as many holes as a sieve (18)

I hadn't even the bundle and the stick of a destitute
wayfarer (19)

You needn't stare as if I were breathing fire and
smoke through my nostrils (20)

He got on his feet with a ponderous impetuosity,
as a startled ox might scramble up from the grass (21)

A small bag of silver dollars, which was concealed
in his cabin so "that the devil himself couldn't smell
it out." (22)

It was as if somebody had let off a lot of fireworks
in his brain (23)

Not unlike imaginative youngsters, though naturally
in a much more original way, Joseph Conrad is apt to
emphasize a measure of quantity with some grotesque
exaggeration:

They sent him a big bottle, enough to poison a
wilderness of babies (24)

The sea hissed like twenty thousand kettles (25)

Other expressions again are suggestive because of
their very simplicity. "We haven't kept pigs together,"
says James Wait to the too familiar Donkin (26)² In

¹ Compare the Polish "it would make a horse laugh." The he-goat is a well-known character in Polish sayings.

² This expression is used in Poland.

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the same book, we get a vision of Simpleton at the wheel, during a storm: "[He] flew up and down like a man on a bough." (27)

A few of Conrad's picturesque expressions contain elements from the unconscious, such as one would find in dreams. So in the following, where an unconscious association with the fairy tales of Conrad's childhood seems to combine with some vague medieval idea:

Captain Giles began to haul at his gorgeous gold chain till at last the watch came up from the deep pocket like solid truth from a well (28)

The following vision is one that might occur in nightmarish dreams:

[A big wave] made for the ship, roaring wildly, and *in its rush it looked as mischievous and discomposing as a madman with an axe* (29)

Once or twice, he imitates the form of Polish sayings, and their incredible softness and languid rhythm:

Tell the brook not to run to the river,
Tell the river not to run to the sea. (30)

The following, less lyric, sounds also very Polish:

Even a lizard will give a fly time to say its prayers (31)

But even a spider will give the fly time to say its prayers (32)

Or this, said in answer to a person asking questions to which really no answer can be given:

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What would have happened if the world had not been made in seven days? (33)

Sometimes the idea becomes too conscious, its invention too visible, and we get expressions that no longer remind us of the picturesque speech of the "simple servant of God," the Polish peasant, but which approach the mannerisms of modern fiction:

He picked up the thread of his fixed idea (34)

[Morrison's] mind was like a white walled, pure chamber furnished with, say, six straw-bottomed chairs, and he was always placing and replacing them in various combinations (35)

Conrad's similes, as far as they are put into the mouth of his characters, are always so shaped as to characterise that person. It is a Russian (i.e. a Pole) who says "as the blue of autumn skies," and a Spaniard who uses the expression "as shrill as a cicada." Nobody but a sailor, on the other hand, would relate of the fixed idea of his captain that "a steam windlass couldn't drag it out of him." (36)

The few polonisms which can be traced in Conrad's work occur in the speech of his "Polish" characters, who may be either Poles, or Russians, or South Americans, or Spaniards. When Mr. Blunt in *The Arrow of Gold* refers to himself as "*Américain, catholique et gentil-homme*," this reminds us instantly of the consecrated definition of the Polish nobleman which runs: "Poles, Catholic, and gentleman." When the count in *Il Conte* relates: "I glance down . . . and what do I see? A knife, a long knife——" (37), he is really

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speaking idiomatic Polish. Student Kostia asks: "May one come in?" (38). This is the consecrated Polish and Russian phrase, to which one does not reply: *Come in!* but: *One may*. Another Slavonic expression is "God's creation" (39) for *living being*, which Conrad once uses in the Oriental form: "Allah's creation" (40)

Yanko's speech is saturated with expressions which the Western reader will take for an imitation of childish speech, but which really is imitated Polish. I will give here a few extracts, italicising and explaining the words and phrases which are but translated Polish:

They were driven below into the 'tween-deck and battened from the very start. It was a *low timber dwelling*, . . . but you went into it down a ladder. It was very large, very cold, damp and sombre, with *places in the manner of wooden boxes* where people had to sleep everything was being shaken so that in *one's little box one dared not lift one's head*.

Before that he had been travelling a long, long time on *the iron track*. . . . He gave me to understand that he had on his passage beheld *uncounted multitudes of nations*, all dressed in such clothes as the rich wear.

There was a roof over him, which seemed made of

the common Polish word for apartment is *mieszkanie* lit. *dwelling* (*mieszkać*=to dwell).

literally translated from good Polish.

same remark.
little box: Polish people are very fond of diminutives.

the Polish word for railway, *kolej żelazna*, means literally *iron track* (Compare *chemin de fer*).

nations: literally from the Polish. The Polish word for *nation* (*naród*) is commonly used by country-people to design a crowd.

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glass, and was so high that the tallest mountain-pine he had ever seen would have had room to grow under it.

Steam-machines rolled in at one end and out at the other.

. . . . Then they rang a bell, and another *steam-machine* came in, and again he was taken on and on through a land that wearied his eyes *by its flatness* without a single bit of hill to be seen anywhere . . . There was a *steam-machine* that went on the water

—(*Typhoon*, pp. 114, 115)

machines, not *engines*, because of the Polish *maszyna*.

Imitation of the Polish *instrumental case*?

Amongst Conrad's picturesque sayings are also many Biblical expressions. Their comparative frequency is certainly a proof that, at one time, he must have been a great reader of the Bible—a book which would attract him doubly by its wonderful archaic English and by the Oriental picturesqueness of its expression. Conrad's style has certainly been greatly influenced by the English Bible. So we have the curious fact that while he rejected the doctrine of the Bible as being too much of a ready-made solution, he adopted a style which often reminds the reader of Biblical language. For Joseph Conrad's style betrays truly a prophetic inspiration and if he has not become a prophet, it is because he avoids all solution, all definite judgment, and contents himself to lead the reader, by the scruff of his neck, right into the centre of a burning problem and to abandon him there. His baffling method is but the expression of the will to show the problem under all its aspects.

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Follow the dream and again follow the dream.
—(Stein of Jim.)

JOSEPH CONRAD was an extraordinary and a great man; extraordinary through his extraordinary life, and great with the greatness of those who have to carry a burden that seems too heavy for any mortal.

He was not born a beggar: he had inherited from his father a marked poetic gift, a highly intuitive and comprehensive nature, and that strong capacity for scorn and irony which often accompanies intuition as a safeguard against too complete identification. From his mother, he seems to have inherited the introversion and the mysticism of his mind, and his sense of duty. He would have become a good Pole if it had been at all possible in that time to be a good Pole. It was his fate to be born into circumstances, political and social, which admitted only of a degrading opportunism or of a flight into the lands of phantasy, of fairy tales, of sea-stories, of visions of discoverers and discoveries. We have seen how irresistibly the infinite charm of fairy tales had enslaved the young Conrad. That first surrender before the world of imagination has left strong traces in his work as in his life. His escape from Poland is but the consequence of the same appeal. And what an appeal! No heaping up of superlatives could render the infinite pathos of that escape, nor express

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its spirit of romance. "Youth! give me wings! Let me soar above the heavenly land of illusions, where enthusiasm works miracles, Strews flowers of new things, And clothes hopes in golden pictures!" these lines from Mickiewicz fit the young Conrad well, as they fit so many of his countrymen. Has it not been Poland's fate, in the last hundred and fifty years, to lose her best sons in the same way?

A few years after the death of his father, Conrad spread his wings and flew away, in search of a freer, fuller life, of glory, and of fortune. He drank with full draughts from the stream of new impressions, and so inexhaustible was his enthusiasm that it seemed as if the life of his choice could satisfy him entirely. But, as the years passed, the youthful exuberance ebbed away, and what had been a privilege became a burden. The Congo adventure was the last stage of an evolution that had begun long before. It stripped sea-life of its last remnant of fascination. He had to pay with long months of illness and dejection for having followed a whim of his childhood.

The process, as I have said, had begun earlier. The writing of *Almayer's Folly* had been the first tangible sign of the growing dissatisfaction. Almayer had been to him a revelation of his innermost self. There had been something one-sided, extreme, in his absolute surrender to sea-life, and this passion had dominated for a considerable time feelings within himself which, being rooted in that past with which he had broken, were suffering from starvation. The whole stock of Polish sentiments, which he had brought with him to sea, had been repressed in the interest of his new life, until it broke through in the irrational fear that he

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might never "get back." He begins to write and behold! there arises under his pen a vision, always the same, of some exile, some man without a country, some outcast. Why this extraordinary interest in unhappy, uprooted existences? Why this tendency to lay everything to the account of malignant fate? How is it that the very Polish aphorism of Pilsudski: *être vaincu et ne pas se soumettre est la vraie victoire*, forms the theme of his best works? These are the irrational, hidden ways in which the polonity of Joseph Conrad manifests itself. His works are his confession, and no one who does not see the "repressed," the Polish Conrad, besides the conscious Conrad, can pretend to understand his personality and his work.

Miss Stauffer has written a book on, or rather around, Conrad's romantic realism. I approve of the name without approving of her explanations. The real reason for this dualism in Conrad's works is that these are essentially of the same nature as dreams. Like dreams they are built up with material from everyday life, a material often used without the slightest alterations, but the whole arrangement, the way of choosing and connecting these realistic elements, and the bearing of the whole, are romantic. The conscious Conrad was realistic, the unconscious Conrad, ever dissatisfied and unhappy, was incurably romantic. Joseph Conrad's writings present the same intimate alliance of two very different, not to say contradictory, aspects as his personality. There is reality—but seen with the eyes of a dreamer. There is romance—but romance really felt and lived, not invented, and therefore as real as the material world. The same dualism is the cause of the inappeasable dissatisfaction which

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characterized his personality and spread the sense of utter unrest over his books. There was no means of appeasing the conflict because there was no means of spanning the chasm that separated his conscious from his unconscious self. Two countries, and what is more, two ways of thinking and of feeling claimed him, and being faithful to one meant betraying the other. Many a man would have made light of such a conflict, but the author of *Lord Jim*, and son of a Polish patriot, belonged obviously to another, less rational type. It is true that in 1922 he could write to an American friend that his escape from Poland ("excess of individualism perhaps?") was amongst the things which he had settled with his conscience long ago (41). But the unconscious does not always obey so easily orders coming from the conscious, and in Conrad's case it most certainly did not. His unconscious, more conservative, more rigid, and more attached to the Polish past, formed an opposition which nothing could silence. That which tortured him could be expressed only in an irrational, symbolic form, as we clothe in dreams our most intimate hopes and fears which we dare not avow to others and sometimes not even to ourselves. His "guilt-complex," as the psychoanalyst would call it, expresses itself in all his books, in an indirect way, it is true, but with an eloquence which stands in a strange contrast to the reticence of *A Personal Record* and *Poland Revisited*.

In his works of imagination, not of memories, we find the real and entire Conrad, the Conrad worthy of our admiration, of our comprehension, of our sympathy, and, above everything, of our profound pity.

SOURCES OF THE QUOTATIONS IN THE
LAST TWO CHAPTERS

1. *An Outcast of the Islands*, p. 239.
2. *Lord Jim*, p. 355.
3. *The Secret Agent*, p. 173; *The Arrow of Gold*, p. 194.
4. *Under Western Eyes*, p. 240; *Victory*, p. 22.
5. *Under Western Eyes*, p. 216.
6. *The Rescue*, p. 350.
7. *The Arrow of Gold*, p. 312.
8. *A Set of Six*, p. 55.
9. *The Arrow of Gold*, p. 320.
10. *The Arrow of Gold*, p. 110; compare also p. 329.
11. *The Rescue*, p. 466.
12. *Victory*, p. 185.
13. *Victory*, p. 112.
14. *The Rescue*, p. 15.
15. *Lord Jim*, p. 47.
16. *Victory*, p. 151.
17. *Victory*, p. 147.
18. *Lord Jim*, p. 4.
19. *The Arrow of Gold*, p. 256; compare also p. 117.
20. *Chance*, p. 150.
21. *Lord Jim*, p. 148.
22. *Lord Jim*, p. 354.
23. *The Rover*, p. 182.
24. *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* p. 45.
25. *Lord Jim*, p. 112.
26. *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* p. 23.
27. *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* p. 60.
28. *The Shadow Line*, p. 27.
29. *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* p. 57.

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30. Aissa, in *An Outcast of the Islands*, p. 254.
31. Tengga, in *The Rescue*, p. 174.
32. Jörgenson, in *The Rescue*, p. 446.
33. *The Rescue*, p. 398.
34. *The Arrow of Gold*, p. 319.
35. *Victory*, p. 202.
36. *Typhoon*, p. 98.
37. *A Set of Six*, p. 280.
38. *Under Western Eyes*, p. 309.
39. *The Peasants*, by Reymont, ch. I. The same expression is used in other Catholic Countries, see for instance Hudson's *Purple Land*.
40. *The Rescue*, p. 434.
41. See *Aubry II*, p. 286.

APPENDIX

I

JUNG'S DESCRIPTION OF THE INTROVERT INTUITIVE TYPE (in his *Psychological Types*, p. 508-510, Kegan, Paul)

THE peculiar nature of introvert intuition, when given the priority, also produces a peculiar type of man, viz. the mystical dreamer and seer on the one hand, or the fantastic crank and artist on the other. The latter might be regarded as the normal case, since there is a general tendency of this type to confine himself to the perceptive character of intuition. As a rule, the intuitive stops at perception¹; perception is his principal problem, and—in the case of an artist—the shaping of perception. But the crank contents himself with the intuition by which he himself is shaped and determined. Intensification of intuition naturally often results in an extraordinary aloofness of the individual from tangible reality; he may even become a complete enigma to his own immediate circle. *If an artist, he reveals extraordinary, remote things in his art, which in iridescent profusion embraces both the significative and the banal, the lovely and the grotesque, the whimsical and the sublime.* If not an artist, he is frequently an unappreciated genius, a great man "gone wrong," a sort of wise simpleton, a figure for "psychological" novels.

Although it is not altogether in the line of the introverted intuitive type to make of perception a moral problem,

¹ As opposed to interpretation. In the case of Jim, for example, Conrad has (in the shape of Stein) no other explanation for his behaviour than to call him "incurably romantic."—G.M.

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since a certain reinforcement of the rational functions is required for this, yet even a relatively slight differentiation of judgment would suffice to transfer intuitive perception from the purely æsthetic into the moral sphere. A variety of this type is thus produced which differs essentially from its æsthetic form, although none the less characteristic of the introvert intuitive. The moral problem comes into being when the intuitive tries to relate himself to his vision, when he is no longer satisfied with mere perception and its æsthetic shaping and estimation, but confronts the question: What does this mean for me and the world? What emerges from this vision in the way of a duty or task, either for me or for the world?¹ *The pure intuitive who represses judgment or possesses it only under the spell of perception never meets this question fundamentally*, since his only problem is the How of perception. He, therefore, finds the moral problem unintelligible, even absurd, and, as far as possible, forbids his thoughts to dwell upon the disconcerting vision. It is different with the morally orientated intuitive. He concerns himself with the meaning of his vision; he troubles less about the possible moral effects which emerge from its intrinsic significance. His judgment allows him to discern, though often only darkly, that he, as a man and as a totality, is in some way inter-related with his vision, that it is something which cannot just be perceived, but which also would fain become the life of the subject. Through this realization he feels bound to transform his vision into his own life. But, since he tends to rely exclusively upon his vision, his moral effort becomes one-sided; he makes himself and his life symbolic, adapted, it is true, to the inner and eternal meaning of events, but unadapted to the actual present-day reality. Therewith he also deprives himself of any influence

¹ Joseph Conrad was of those who stop short of these questions, though he more than often fringes them. If he had not repressed judgment, he would have been a prophet more than a poet.—G.M.

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upon it, because he remains unintelligible. His language is not that which is commonly spoken—it becomes too subjective. His argument lacks convincing reason. He can only confess or pronounce. His is the “voice of one crying in the wilderness.”

The intuitive's chief repression falls upon the sensation of the object. His unconscious is characterised by this fact. *For we find in his unconscious a compensatory extra-verted sensation function of a rather low and primitive order.¹ Impulsiveness and unrestraint are the characters of this sensation, combined with an extraordinary dependence on the sense impression.² This latter quality is a compensation to the thin upper air of the conscious attitude, giving it a certain weight, so that complete “sublimation” is prevented. But if, through a forced exaggeration of the conscious attitude, a complete subordination to the inner perception should develop, the unconscious becomes an opposition,³ giving rise to compulsive sensations, whose excessive dependance upon the object is in frank conflict with the conscious attitude. The form of neurosis is a compulsion-neurosis, exhibiting hypochondriacal manifestations, partly hyper-sensibility of the sense organs and partly compulsive ties to definite persons or other objects.*

¹ This tendency is manifested in Conrad's vision of anarchists and of outcasts like Brown, Ricardo, and similar types.—G.M.

² Conrad's taste for sea-life was of this very order.—G.M.

³ In Conrad's case, the unconscious became an opposition, but the conflict was to a great extent sublimated through the medium of his writings. Joseph Conrad not only suffered from gout, but from unwritten books as well. He was ever on the verge of neurosis, and its symptoms, as given by Jung, can easily be traced in Conrad's hypochondria and in his extraordinary attachment to his friends. Every friend of his (and his wife as well) had his or her pet-name, and he was always unhappy when nobody was with him.

This passage from the tale *An Anarchist* is very characteristic of this side of Conrad's mind:

He had entreated me not to leave him; so, as one sits up with a nervous child, I sat up with him—in the name of humanity—till he fell asleep.—G.M. .

II

THE COMPATRIOT BEHIND THE AUTHOR

(THE following article is by a Polish writer, the late Stefan Żeromski, the author of *Ashes* and many other novels, and a personal friend of Joseph Conrad. The article was published in the Warsaw Periodical *Naokoło Świata* ("Around the World") of March, 1925, together with a photograph of Conrad's mother, another of Conrad, and a facsimile of a letter from Conrad to Żeromski.)

I have already written several times about Joseph Conrad, but always at the invitation of publishers and editors, this time I do it of my own free will, inspired by the periodical which I have before my eyes. The publisher of the *Nouvelle Revue Française* has brought out a special number, dated December, 1924, devoted entirely to our great compatriot, and composed of the contributions of about fifteen writers, mostly English and French. In this collective homage there is obviously no Polish voice, although one of the authors, J. Kessel, contributes an article on "Conrad Slave," in which he shows well the near relationship between Conrad and Russian literature. In the other contributions, opinions, reminiscences and criticisms there is so much new, unknown material that the need to examine these informations from a Polish point of view becomes obvious. In an article by André Gide we find the hint that the first who discovered Conrad in France was nobody less than P. Claudel. Himself a great poet and traveller on land and sea, he was the first who fully appreciated in Conrad the great artist speaking, through the subtlety of his poetry,

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of Poland, at a moment when nobody remembered her, when she was an orphan, forgotten by the world at large. Claudel was the first to understand the work, so ubiquitous, so intricate, so full of symbols and enigmas of the Polish herald. When Claudel was asked, during a literary lunch, what one ought to read of the then modest work of Conrad, he replied: "Everything!"

A particular merit of the *Nouvelle Revue Française* was the publication, on the first pages, of an article by John Galsworthy, who had been for thirty years Conrad's companion on land and sea, who had been his friend and fellow-writer, who, as he says himself, possesses over two hundred of Conrad's letters, containing sincere confessions. But the main importance of John Galsworthy's article does not consist in the details given, nor in the descriptions and anecdotes. The excellent English writer defines the genius of Conrad in such well-chosen, precise and adequate words, he shows the components of his soul with a truly Anglo-Saxon truthfulness and care, that our own judgment of Conrad undergoes a change, and we come to believe in Galsworthy's decree, and begin to agree with his definition, since it is based on facts which had escaped us before. It has been said, and universally believed, that Conrad drew his inspiration mainly from the sea, that he was "a writer of the sea." And, in all truth, could one judge otherwise after the reading of *The Mirror of the Sea*? Galsworthy states that the ocean was not at all Conrad's hero, but the man struggling with that treacherous and cruel element. . . . Galsworthy also notes that the name of Dostoievski was in the nature of a red rag to him, and explains that "Dostoievski was too imbued with Russian essence for Polish appetite." The same Russophobia has been noted by R. B. Cunningham-Graham who relates that, having once invited Conrad to some gathering, the latter, grinding his teeth with rage, gave this answer: "Non, il y aura des

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Russes." The most interesting statement we find at the end of Galsworthy's article, where he describes his last meeting with Conrad, and the latter's apprehensions of death. Finally, the article concludes: "His wife tells me that in the last months of his life he sometimes seemed ready to drop everything and go back to Poland."

No doubt, Conrad loved England, and he expressed this attachment more than once in his writings, for he had a noble heart and did not forget the good he had received. But Galsworthy himself states that his was the heart of a sailor and an artist. The heart of the sailor could never forget what it owed to England. But then, could the heart of the artist ever forget Poland? He was a man of noble rank, of gentle birth.¹ His mother was a wonderful, a most distinguished, and a fundamentally good woman. The body that had borne him was animated by a jealous love, by an invincible spirit of sacrifice, and by anxiety, for the enemy was spying before their windows and following each of their steps. Resolute hands were hers, when she pressed him to her breast, in the cart of the exiles, which carried them through immense spaces, through woods and through silent fields, through Moscow, Nowgorod, up to far-off Vologda. Before death closed her eyes in exile, they were resting on his head. Around his cradle, the faithful hearts of exiled Polish knights were beating, a circle of relatives and friends devoted to the common cause surrounded him, the eyes of the "Herald of the rising of 1863," Stefan Bobrowski, had looked at him. His poet-father embellished his infant exile with the master-works of the world literature, which he translated in order not to succumb to the dreariness of exile. Of these literary influences on the young imagination of the future writer, English and French critics know nothing, and Conrad himself said but little about it in his *Personal Record*. Nor can these critics understand any better his

¹ This sentence is a quotation from a Polish poet.—G.M.

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strong aversion against the Muscovites. How well must he not have remembered that first great journey! With what hatred must it not have inspired him, and with what longings, longings to be free, to get rid of the chains which were fastened to his small hands and feet! And so, at the end of the cycle of his life, at the summit of his fame, the old Polish soil, with its legends, incomprehensible, but indestructible as steel, asserted its right on that soul. The mysterious . . . unforgiving "mal du pays" laid hold of the emigrant in the foreign island. "To drop everything and go back to Poland" is the goal of his soul's desire after its journey round the world, the aim of the man who had conquered, all by himself, universal fame.

On the first page of the periodical we find an unknown photograph of Conrad in the year 1874, when, after his escape from his country, the "puppy" opened his eyes on the world in Marseilles. It is to be regretted that the picture does not allow one to represent to oneself his face (a conquistador's face), his flying hair—the hair of an adventurer, his eyes—the eyes of a dreamer.

Our extraordinary indifference in matters of culture can alone explain why we Poles have never tried to study and to bring to light the Polish elements in Conrad's personality. There is no biography, no history of the surroundings out of which he ran away to the sea, no reliable study of his extraordinary work. And yet, in order to account fully for this astonishing phenomenon of world literature, it must be studied from the Polish point of view. A great number of the English works of Conrad have an incomprehensible, strange, enigmatical side. Somebody has already said that *Lord Jim* is the story of a mental process, a fictitious tale of some mysterious breach of faith, some betrayal, and of the subsequent redemption. The more recent *Arrow of Gold* is also a symbolical work. *Nostromo* is more than an epic from one of the South American republics, which world Conrad did not know at all, it is

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a work built up by reflection, thinking, divination, and intuition, in the form of an invented story.

But more than these, the drama *To-Morrow* contains much symbolism. Nobody in Poland has as yet studied this interesting literary question. Our propaganda office at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had the intention of publishing two works in English, both written by Polish critics, and devoted to the memory of the deceased writer. It is urgent that these two studies be written, the first giving his genealogy, the history of his parents, the portrait of his father, and the story of his youth up to the journey to Marseilles. The object of the second study would be to examine, to classify, and to explain the whole of his literary indebtedness [to Poland]. Having been asked to give my opinion in this affair, I recommended the two most qualified authors: Witam Horzyca and Stanislaw Wyrzykowski. But in the Ministry, the proposition had meanwhile evaporated as quickly as it had been formed. It is true that it can hardly be the duty of state officials to throw themselves into such administrative adventures, and they do better to leave such matters to literary people. Maybe that after the foundation and consolidation in Warsaw of the P.E.N. Club, which is presided over in England by Conrad's great and faithful friend, John Galsworthy, we shall succeed in giving England, as the first proof of our spirit of international understanding, our Polish conception of Conrad, just, impartial, interpreting and penetrating the mysteries which his soul has for the West. For *we* alone are in a position to understand him entirely and to feel what he expresses and what he suppresses, what he conceals and what he obscures with symbols. We alone, for he is also a Polish writer, although he expressed himself in English. That this is so, is proved by a letter which I received from him after having written a preface to the complete edition of his works in a Polish translation. He thanks me in it for having felt "the com-

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patriot behind the author." I did not want to publish this letter before, as it contains awkward compliments as they are usual in such cases. But to-day, when Jean-Aubry has the intention of editing the whole correspondence of Joseph Conrad, to-day when we know that this our compatriot, was so lonely at the end of his life that he wanted to drop everything and go back to Poland, it may be stated here that earlier, and always, he had had the same feelings for his native country.

We have no intention—God forbid!—to snatch from the English the "author," and to annex him as our literary property, but it is our duty, so that his works may become our very own in excellent translations, to claim his spirit, and to bring it back to the country to which it longed to return. He is as much a Polish as an English writer. Our theatres, always complaining of the lack of interesting plays, should not hesitate to represent the work *To-Morrow*, that we might understand his ideas. Who knows, perhaps we shall understand it easily. The publishers who undertook the publication of Conrad's works, should push it more, it does not only pay, but there is the possibility of several editions. Our critics should study Conrad, this original, distinctive, new and wonderful spirit amongst our prophets and writers. For his work, so infinitely near and so infinitely remote, will vivify our literature with new currents from the world atmosphere, at the very moment of the rebirth and growth of the country. This daring, and hard, and independent, and original man fought his way. But his inspiration drew much from our country, for so rich is Poland in feeling that no Pole of noble heart can detach himself from her embrace.

III

CONRAD'S NATIVE COUNTRY

By STANISLAW MLECZKO

[Article published in the Warsaw newspaper, *Nowy Kurjer Polski*, of 29th and 31st August, 1926.]

HAVE we the right to say that he was not one of us, when he himself not only did not deny us, but when, on the contrary, as we now know, Poland was the object of his love and his highest hope, while his travels were the fun and great sport (and also the tragedy) of his life, as were not long ago the travels of Waclaw Rzewuski, Jan Ilinski, and so many, many others?

Have we the right to say that the creative work of Konrad Nałęcz Korzeniowski does in no way belong to us, when we see that his artistic ideas, his method, his grasp of life's conflicts, far from being of specifically English inspiration, are simply universal, when we know that the symbols of his tales, so animated by an undefinable spirit, can only be fully understood, as the author of *Roses* and *First Spring* [Żeromski] states, by a Pole and true son of our country?

He adopted the rich nautical language of the great island nation partly because it appeared to him as the best means of expression for his purpose, partly because the circumstances engaged him to do so, but to-day, when we Poles have built up an adequate nautical vocabulary, his works ought to be even more beautiful in an excellent Polish translation than in the original, and even more stirring.

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For Conrad was "as much a Polish as an English writer." So decided Żeromski, the most competent of judges.

[St. Mleczko then gives some information on Conrad's ancestors, information which has been used in Chapter II, and he concludes]:

Oceans and great journeys had been the dream of his childhood. Alone and, what is more, without money,¹ he went out into the world, to Marseilles, where his career as a sailor had to begin. Active and honest, he was successful. In 1878, he arrived in England. But happiness eluded him. The nostalgia of his native country remained, the country whose symbol is that Polish girl who said good-bye to him when he went to sea and who, as he recognizes himself, served as a model to that admirable type of a woman patriot in *Nostramo*, Antonia Avellanos.

"Who can tell," says one of the characters in Berent's wonderful novel *Prochmo*, "where the limits of nostalgia lie, where its influence can stop?" Of all feelings, nostalgia is the purest of all gifts of nature. Our most beloved, Kosciuszko, Pulawski, Mickiewicz, and others, drew their inspiration from this source, and so did Conrad. His nostalgia of our ideal country puts the mark of greatness over all his creative work. He is one of us, since he appreciated and admired Żeromski as only a true son of Poland can appreciate and admire him, since he rejoiced in his heart when hearing that the greatest Polish author (and his contemporary, too) had felt the Pole in his works. He is one of us since, as his wife (who is English) states, an implacable *mal du pays* was in him during the last months of his life *qu'il semblait parfois vouloir tout quitter et retourner en Pologne*. How lonely must he not have felt there in the foreign land, in the midst of the highest culture!

To drop everything and go back to Poland—this is

¹ This statement, we have seen, is quite incorrect.

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Conrad's last word, his ultimate wish, his testament. If we could, with the permission of England, bring back to our country the body of the author of *Nostromo*, his wish would be fulfilled and justice would be done. To leave it there in the foreign ground is to do violence to his spirit.

[In a last paragraph, too long to be quoted here, St. Mieczko draws attention to the fact that Conrad was a son of the Polish borders, like nearly all the great men that Poland had produced: Mickiewicz, Slowacki, Kosciuszko, Pilsudski and many others.]

IV

ON JOSEPH CONRAD

By STEFAN NAPIERSKI

[The following is an extract from an article published in the Warsaw periodical, *Wiadomosci Literackie*, of 8th of August, 1926.]

WHOEVER endeavours to penetrate the work of Conrad and thereby the enigmatical personality of the author himself, will more than once come to ask himself the question, how his success in the whole civilised world is to be explained, for success means acquiescence. There is certainly no steamer *de luxe* dividing the ocean which does not carry his complete works, those impressive works which resemble blocks of stone piled one upon another with tremendous effort, forming a pyramid reaching finally into endless space. It is not easy to represent to oneself that on breezy decks, leaning back in their easy-chairs, whiteclad gentlemen handle these volumes without the slightest signs of uneasiness. How provocative they are at bottom! It would seem that if ever anybody's work contained the maximum of unpopular elements, it would be Conrad's. How cultivated and sensitive—or how superficial—must his Anglo-Saxon readers be, to have accepted this fascinating and destructing artist! Do they not feel the despair lurking behind these truly nihilistic books? Few of the great writers of this age are so free from, and so opposed to, anything revolutionary in the accepted "bourgeois" sense of the word, and yet Conrad

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registers the smallest gestures and the imperceptible pauses separating them from each other with a cruel precision (as in some morbid film), creates the illusion of the flow of time, gives the very chemistry of life, the very process of becoming, and analyses and decomposes until the conventional reality, the reality of people accustomed to mental and physical comfort and to certitude seems altogether an absurdity. What bond could there be between his enthusiastic public and the revolutionary visionary he is himself? In his implacable world, each trait and each shadow is extraordinarily distinct, everything is inundated by the cold and dazzling light of his vision, as if by some unearthly phosphorescence. This crude picture of reality, devoid of all false idealism, is certainly not easily acceptable to the ordinary "eater of bread," the bourgeois hypocrite.

There is something enigmatical about Conrad. One feels the power of his introspection without being able to ascertain where it is genuine and where it is not. The whole work of Flaubert (whom Conrad read over and over again) gives the impression of a similar deceptive objectivity, but in his *Education Sentimentale*, at least, he laid bare the very fibres of the heart, while Conrad ever gives you the slip—a method that, far from being just the novelist's adopted habit of disappearing behind his work, appears as a cunning game. I think that one may approach Conrad in every possible way—as he did himself in his "Author's Notes"—study him from different angles, without ever being able to grasp the secret of his individuality, to penetrate neither the manifold meanings of his hard though sometimes misty personality, nor the essence of his greatness. Unplumbed depths from which arises a melody, wonderful and strong, as from the depths of some sea. One might of course deduce from Conrad's works a certain outlook on life, a certain philosophy (which might be called *pantagrism*)—but this would lead rather

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away from the living man whom we want to study. This is what English critics must have felt when they insisted on the mysticism of Joseph Conrad, whereby they really meant his keen sense for the omnipresence of the transcendental. Unable to explain this mysticism, they saw in it a foreign, essentially Slavonic trait. But does this help us to understand why every line he drew should be so marvellously distinct, as if seen in moonlight, why when thinking of him, the word "menace" persists in coming to the mind, why each of his genial works takes the ground off one's feet, why he shows such a curious contempt for himself, as if afraid of betraying his sentiments, and so much bitter and universal irony? There are moments when one begins to doubt whether the man who wrote these terribly logical and implacable books was really a strong, unbroken man, whether his pathos was not a mask, whether his heroic, tragical face did not hide some unknown, invisible misery, a misery which his whole life and his whole work were not sufficient to efface. Indeed, only the extraordinary mastery of the writer could make forget the nihilism of the man.

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- Joseph Conrad's certificate of naturalisation
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