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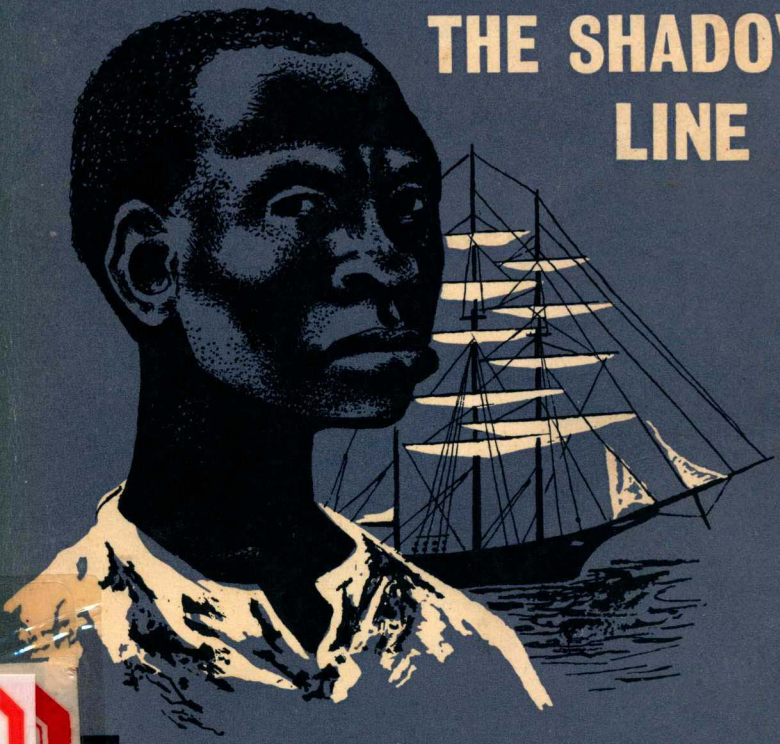

AN EVERYMAN PAPERBACK

JOSEPH CONRAD

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THE SHADOW-LINE

INTRODUCTION BY A. J. HOPPÉ

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INTRODUCTION

It was the intention at one time to give this Conrad volume a title like *Stories of the Sea*, but for two reasons this has not been done. In the first place the stories are not short stories; there are three only, each famous and each a book in itself. Under an anthological banner their familiar titles would be hidden, and a wrong idea of the contents of the volume probably conveyed. But the more important reason is that such a title would classify Conrad as a sea-story writer, a classification which Conrad himself disclaimed and which gives a narrow view of his work. It is true that *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus,' Typhoon* and *The Shadow-Line* are the chief stories written by Conrad wholly within the setting of the sea and ships; it is, however, not the setting as such but the author's intense power of perception and revelation of humanity which make these stories outstanding in the art of fiction.

Almost everything that Conrad wrote originated in his own experiences, and it was his life between the ages of seventeen and thirty-six, when he was at sea, which he most often drew upon in illuminating the whole world of nature, men and action. He was not concerned merely to paint a picture of the sea and ships; his urge was to shed light on the soul of men, and that he did incomparably when his men were seamen. To Conrad it was a holiness to marvel at that men endured the rough, dangerous and solitary life at sea and in the remote places of the earth, never shirking hazards, going out to meet fresh trials in the name of duty. His greatness as an artist was in rendering feeling and delineating character in this stress of daily life, not by analysing his people from within or soliloquizing on their fears and thoughts, but by presenting in authentic, graphic and dramatic detail that which anyone present could see or hear. This is particularly true of *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus,'* which was for Conrad to be a test of his power as a creative writer and which occasioned an Author's Preface that is by way of a credo of the artist.[1]

The Nigger was Conrad's third book and the first of his writings about a ship and her crew. With its unparalleled description of storm as it came upon the graceful sailing ship, the story

[1] This Preface is reprinted in this volume, as are the Author's Notes on the other two stories in the Conrad Collected Edition.

owes its material to a voyage which Conrad made as second mate from Bombay to Dunkirk in 1884 in a ship actually named 'Narcissus.' The crew are the real crew: these men are drawn from life—unflinching, simple, ageing Singleton; unemotional Archie; emotional 'Little Belfast'; the urchin Young Charley; lame Knowles; the 'sea-lawyer' and scallywag Donkin; the captain and his chief mate and second mate, contrasted yet perfectly complementary officers; and the ominous, sick 'Nigger,' whose name, James Wait, belonged to one on an earlier Conrad ship, 'The Duke of Sutherland.' The book is the memorial which Conrad was inspired to make to his shipmates, so that, as in *A Personal Record* he said he had aimed at, one feels 'the vibration of life in the great world of waters, in the hearts of the simple men who have for ages traversed its solitudes and also that something sentient which seems to dwell in ships—the creatures of their hands and the objects of their care.'

Typhoon was written a few years after *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus,'* and by and large does for a steamship in furious storm what the earlier story does for a sailing ship. It is more 'professional,' less strictly autobiographical, and magnificent as it is has not perhaps the overwhelming natural force of its predecessor. The story turns on the dilemma of handling the ship and dealing with the hold-full of overturned, rolling chinamen and their scattered silver dollars; the latter problem had not actually been experienced by Conrad and he regarded it, he says in his Note, 'as a mere anecdote.' What interested Conrad was the part of the uninhibited Captain MacWhirr, that seemingly commonplace man imperturbably and obstinately driving the 'Nan-Shan' through the typhoon, in defiance of all the text-books, and quietly insisting on the chinamen being put straight meanwhile. The raging progress of the storm, the disintegration of the superstructure of the ship, the nightmare scene in the hold, all serve to bring out the character of the captain, his officers, engineers and crew. They write home about the experience, and the story closes in Conradian irony on the reception and reading of their letters in the world of wives and landsmen.

The Shadow-Line is Conrad autobiographical again. It tells the story of a first command and the circumstances of it are largely those of Conrad's first command. The setting of the Malay Archipelago and the manner of taking over command

are used in two other stories by Conrad, *Falk* and *The Secret Sharer*, the latter a short story, both front-rank stories and both developed very differently from *The Shadow-Line*, for Conrad sometimes worked upon the same incident in creating different views of character and circumstance. *The Shadow-Line* was written in 1917, considerably later than the other two; it has the old, natural mastery, with the advantages and disadvantages of a more practised hand. It restates Conrad's love of youth. The young commander has reached the 'shadow-line warning one that the region of early youth, too, must be left behind.' And when, in that awful calm, with officers and crew fevered, dying and unable to help in reaching help, he turns to ask himself what he had expected from this first command, he says, 'perhaps nothing else than that special intensity of existence which is the quintessence of youthful aspirations.' This tale of a death-haunted ship 'drifting in calms and swinging in light airs' is the perfect counterpart of the storms of *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* and *Typhoon*, but again it is the men who matter—Mr. Burns, the sick, half-crazy mate, Ransome, the heroically moulded cook with a weak heart, and the others, including the young, strangely tried captain himself.

Whether amid the furore of the tempest or the grim silences of the calm there stand for Conrad a few men whose spirit at least is imperishable. As an example of how Conrad achieves his effects, it is worth while to study the extreme contrasts of sounds in these stories. I think it might be said that Conrad himself chose these three stories for such a volume as this: indeed he once wrote, 'If there is to be any classification by subjects, I have done two storm-pieces in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* and *Typhoon*, and two calm-pieces, this one (*The Secret Sharer*) and *Shadow-Line*.'

The miracle of Conrad is that born and bred in central Europe, not seeing the sea until he was nearly seventeen and not knowing a word of English until he was nineteen, he wrote like a master in our language about British ships and mariners. His appreciation of our way of life was as remarkable as his instinct for our language. 'The truth of the matter,' he wrote in his Note to *A Personal Record*, 'is that my faculty to write in English is as natural as any other aptitude with which I might have been born . . . its very idioms I truly believe had a direct action on my temperament and fashioned my still plastic character.' But he was born a Pole and he remained one in temperament,

bringing something transcendental to our conception of the seafaring race and to English prose.

A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

JOSEPH CONRAD was born on December 3rd, 1857, at Berdiczew in Podolia, one of the Ukrainian provinces of Poland long under Russian Tsarist rule. He was the only child of Apollo Nałęçz Korzeniowski and his wife Evelina Bobrowska, and his full name was Józef Teodor Konrad Nałęçz Korzeniowski. His parents were of the landowner class, and his father was deeply involved in the secret national Polish movement. Apollo had literary interests too, wrote poetry and criticism and translated from the French and German.

When Conrad was three his father was arrested by the Russian authorities and exiled to Northern Russia, his wife and child being allowed to go with him under the same conditions of banishment. Evelina's health broke down and she died in exile in 1865. Two years later Apollo was given conditional parole, but seven years of privation had also told on him physically, and he died in Cracow in 1867, leaving the orphaned Conrad in the care of his maternal uncle, Tadeusz Bobrowski.

Between the ages of fifteen and seventeen Conrad astonished his uncle and tutor by expressing from time to time a determination to go to sea, a strange calling to people belonging inland and traditionally devoted to agricultural pursuits. Conrad persisted and in September 1874 he travelled to Marseilles and became a seaman. He spoke French fluently and had one or two introductions to people in the port. After some experience on two sailing ships, he became one of a syndicate of four young men who bought the sixty-ton 'Tremolino' and sailed her on contraband activities until she was deliberately wrecked, as described in a chapter in *The Mirror of the Sea*. More of this phase of Conrad's life is told in the story *The Arrow of Gold*.

Conrad's first English ship was the 'Mavis,' which he joined at Marseilles in April 1878, and it was aboard that vessel that he arrived at Lowestoft two months later and saw England for the first time. After some coastal trips in another ship, he joined as ordinary seaman a 'wool-clipper' sailing to Australia. Returning to London, he passed examination as third mate in June 1880.

From then on he served as officer on several ships, voyaging to many parts of the world, particularly across the Indian ocean,

and in and around the Malay Archipelago and the Gulf of Siam. These are the scenes of some of his best-known stories, *Youth, Almayer's Folly, The Nigger of the 'Narcissus,' The Secret Sharer. Typhoon, Lord Jim, Victory, Falk, The Rescue, The Shadow-Line,* and others. He passed his mate's examination in July 1883, and on November 11th, 1886, he succeeded in the final seamanship test and obtained his Master Mariner's Certificate. Conrad's accounts of these examinations are in *A Personal Record.* He became a naturalized British subject on August 19th, 1886.

In 1890 he went to the Belgian Congo to command a river steamer—realization of a hope expressed as a child when he put his finger on a spot of the map of Central Africa and said he would go there one day. From his experiences in the Congo Conrad was physically weakened but psychologically awakened, and his writing career really dates from this period, for he was then writing his first book, *Almayer's Folly.* Years later he gave his Congo story to the world in one of his finest books, *Heart of Darkness.*

His last ship was the 'Torrens,' a renowned sailing vessel, which he left in October 1893. It happened that John Galsworthy (not then a writer) was a passenger on part of this last voyage, joining the ship at Adelaide; years later he gave a picture of Conrad at their first meeting: 'He was superintending the stowage of cargo. Very dark he looked in the burning sunlight—tanned, with a peaked brown beard, almost black hair, and dark brown eyes, over which the lids were deeply folded. he was thin, not tall, his arms very long, his shoulders broad, his head set rather forward. He spoke to me with a strong, foreign accent. He seemed to me strange on an English ship. For fifty-six days I sailed in his company. . . . Many evening watches in fine weather we spent on the poop. Ever the great teller of a tale, he had already nearly twenty years of tales to tell. . . . At Cape Town, on my last evening, he asked me to his cabin, and I remember feeling that he outweighed for me all the other experiences of that voyage.'

Conrad took about five years to write *Almayer's Folly,* which, having fallen into the appreciative hands of Edward Garnett, was published in April 1895. Encouraged by Garnett and other editors to continue writing, he settled down to a shore life, marrying Miss Jessie George of London on March 24th, 1896. His early books were appreciated by a discriminating public and praised by eminent critics, but none of his books attracted a

really wide circle of readers until *Chance*, 1913. It is now generally agreed that his greatest stories were written round about the turn of the century: *Lord Jim* came out in 1900, and *Nostromo*, published in 1904, is regarded by many as his masterpiece, indeed as the greatest novel in English of the twentieth century. Between *Nostromo* and *Chance* came those two remarkable novels, totally unconnected with the sea, *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes*.

During most of his married and writing life Conrad lived in various houses in Kent, occasionally making visits lasting some months to the Continent, usually France or Poland. He had two sons, Borys, born in January 1898, and John Alexander, born in August 1906. He and his family were on a visit to Austrian Poland when war broke out in 1914, and they went through some excitement and hardship in getting out of enemy territory via Italy and the Mediterranean.

His last two novels (*The Rover* and *Suspense*, the latter unfinished) were of the Napoleonic period and set in the Mediterranean, the first sea he had known, and some of the characters had their prototypes in friends of his youthful days there. *The Rover*, probably the best of his later books, has something of both of his adopted countries in it, France, the Rover's native land, and England, in her sailors at war with France. Poland is in it also in spirit, because the author was himself a Rover from that native land of his. Mrs. Conrad has said that a sort of homing instinct was on Conrad towards the end of his life. But he remained in Kent, in his English home, Oswalds, in the village of Bishopsbourne, with his English family, writing until the end. Although he had been ailing for some years his death came suddenly, after a heart attack, on the morning of August 3rd, 1924. He is buried in Canterbury, and the stone on his grave bears his Polish name.

A. J. H

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A TALE OF THE SEA

TO
EDWARD GARNETT

THIS TALE
ABOUT MY FRIENDS
OF THE SEA

PREFACE

A WORK that aspires, however humbly, to the condition of art should carry its justification in every line. And art itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect. It is an attempt to find in its forms, in its colours, in its light, in its shadows, in the aspects of matter and in the facts of life what of each is fundamental, what is enduring and essential—their one illuminating and convincing quality—the very truth of their existence. The artist, then, like the thinker or the scientist, seeks the truth and makes his appeal. Impressed by the aspect of the world the thinker plunges into ideas, the scientist into facts—whence, presently, emerging they make their appeal to those qualities of our being that fit us best for the hazardous enterprise of living. They speak authoritatively to our common sense, to our intelligence, to our desire of peace or to our desire of unrest; not seldom to our prejudices, sometimes to our fears, often to our egoism—but always to our credulity. And their words are heard with reverence, for their concern is with weighty matters: with the cultivation of our minds and the proper care of our bodies, with the attainment of our ambitions, with the perfection of the means and the glorification of our precious aims.

It is otherwise with the artist.

Confronted by the same enigmatical spectacle the artist descends within himself, and in that lonely region of stress and strife, if he be deserving and fortunate, he finds the terms of his appeal. His appeal is made to our less obvious capacities: to that part of our nature which, because of the warlike conditions of existence, is necessarily kept out of sight within the more resisting and hard qualities—like the vulnerable body within a steel armour. His appeal is less loud, more profound, less distinct, more stirring—and sooner forgotten. Yet its effect endures forever. The changing wisdom of successive generations discards ideas, questions facts, demolished theories. But the artist appeals to that part of our being which is not dependent on wisdom; to that in us which is a gift and not an acquisition—and, therefore, more permanently enduring. He

speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty, and pain; to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation—and to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts, to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity—the dead to the living and the living to the unborn.

It is only some such train of thought, or rather of feeling, that can in a measure explain the aim of the attempt, made in the tale which follows, to present an unrestful episode in the obscure lives of a few individuals out of all the disregarded multitude of the bewildered, the simple and the voiceless. For, if any part of truth dwells in the belief confessed above, it becomes evident that there is not a place of splendour or a dark corner of the earth that does not deserve, if only a passing glance of wonder and pity. The motive then, may be held to justify the matter of the work; but this preface, which is simply an avowal of endeavour, cannot end here—for the avowal is not yet complete.

Fiction—if it at all aspires to be art—appeals to temperament. And in truth it must be, like painting, like music, like all art, the appeal of one temperament to all the other innumerable temperaments, whose subtle and resistless power endows passing events with their true meaning, and creates the moral, the emotional atmosphere of the place and time. Such an appeal to be effective must be an impression conveyed through the senses; and, in fact, it cannot be made in any other way, because temperament, whether individual or collective, is not amenable to persuasion. All art, therefore, appeals primarily to the senses, and the artistic aim when expressing itself in written words must also make its appeal through the senses, if its high desire is to reach the secret spring of responsive emotions. It must strenuously aspire to the plasticity of sculpture, to the colour of painting, and to the magic suggestiveness of music—which is the art of arts. And it is only through complete, unswerving devotion to the perfect blending of form and substance; it is only through an unremitting never-discouraged care for the shape and ring of sentences that an approach can be made to plasticity, to colour, and that the light of magic suggestiveness may be brought to play for an evanescent instant over the common-

place surface of words: of the old, old words, worn thin, defaced by ages of careless usage.

The sincere endeavour to accomplish that creative task, to go as far on that road as his strength will carry him, to go undeterred by faltering, weariness or reproach, is the only valid justification for the worker in prose. And if his conscience is clear, his answer to those who in the fulness of a wisdom which looks for immediate profit, demand specifically to be edified, consoled, amused; who demand to be promptly improved, or encouraged, or frightened, or shocked, or charmed, must run thus: My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you *see*. That—and no more, and it is everything. If I succeed, you shall find there according to your deserts: encouragement, consolation, fear, charm—all you demand—and, perhaps, also that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask.

To snatch in a moment of courage, from the remorseless rush of time, a passing phase of life, is only the beginning of the task. The task approached in tenderness and faith is to hold up unquestioningly, without choice and without fear, the rescued fragment before all eyes in the light of a sincere mood. It is to show its vibration, its colour, its form; and through its movement, its form, and its colour, reveal the substance of its truth—disclose its inspiring secret: the stress and passion within the core of each convincing moment. In a single-minded attempt of that kind, if one be deserving and fortunate, one may perchance attain to such clearness of sincerity that at last the presented vision of regret or pity, of terror or mirth, shall awaken in the hearts of the beholders that feeling of unavoidable solidarity; of the solidarity in mysterious origin, in toil, in joy, in hope, in uncertain fate, which binds men to each other and all mankind to the visible world.

It is evident that he who, rightly or wrongly, holds by the convictions expressed above cannot be faithful to any one of the temporary formulas of his craft. The enduring part of them—the truth which each only imperfectly veils—should abide with him as the most precious of his possessions, but they all: Realism, Romanticism, Naturalism, even the unofficial sentimentalism (which like the poor, is exceedingly difficult to get rid of), all these gods must, after a short period of fellowship, abandon him—even on the very threshold of the temple—to the