

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO



JOSEPH
CONRAD

Edited by J. H. Stape

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Japan Women's University, Tokyo



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PREFACE

Like the work of other major writers, that of Joseph Conrad has occasioned a large critical industry devoted to its interpretation and appreciation. And since Conrad is read both in translation and in the original throughout the world, this body of criticism spans linguistic and cultural boundaries to include commentaries not only, as might be expected, in French, Italian, and Polish but even, for instance, in Japanese and Swahili.

Conrad's almost universal presence on school reading-lists and in university courses as well as at the corner bookshop testifies to the fundamental centrality of his writing to modern literature and the modern experience. In English alone the books, articles, and notes published about his life and work amount to several thousand items, and even the guides directing the student or the interested general reader to this mass of material now total some thousand pages.

While it does not and cannot make Conrad's writings easier, the present volume of a dozen essays aims at increasing their accessibility. It opens with an overview of Conrad's life and then proceeds to engaged readings of the major fiction. These chapters, devoted to individual works or to groups of texts, develop formal and thematic concerns with an eye on a range of ideological issues. This essential contextualization should help readers appreciate an author whose work is sometimes regarded as dauntingly complex and whose imaginative world and cultural framework may at moments seem remote from their own. The chapters that follow explore some of the larger questions raised by Conrad's writings as a whole. They focus on the special nature of his narrative techniques, on the current debates about his relationship to imperialism and to literary Modernism, and on the varied influence his work has exerted on other writers. Lastly, a guide to further reading provides information about Conrad scholarship and the body of standard Conrad criticism.

The emphasis of this volume falls on informed appreciation based on an understanding of Conrad's cultural contexts and fictional techniques. Con-

rad's own life, the object of considerable interest and comment, is discussed since it illuminates a number of the preoccupations of his fiction. These concerns are particularly contemporary in their nature and scope, and include, for instance, the complex interrelationships between an individual and his or her social and economic milieu, ethnicity and multi-cultural identity, linguistic confrontation and alienation, and the interactions between empire and colony.

The contributors to this volume live and teach in a number of countries and are actively engaged in the on-going process of discovering and re-discovering Conrad through a variety of perspectives. They bring to bear diverse scholarly and critical traditions – American, British, and Continental. The volume takes advantage of the rich heritage of Conrad studies that has evolved from the 1940s, and, more particularly, takes note of the critical movements and debates of the past two decades.

The task of preparing this volume has been greatly eased by the generous advice of Dr Owen Knowles, Hans van Marle, Dr Gene M. Moore, and, at Cambridge University Press, Josie Dixon and Kevin Taylor.

J. H. STAPE

CHRONOLOGY OF CONRAD'S LIFE

- 1857 Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski, only child of poet, dramatist, translator, and political activist, Apollo Korzeniowski and Ewelina (or Ewa), née Bobrowska, born on 3 December in or near Berdichev in the Ukraine.
- 1861 Apollo Korzeniowski arrested and imprisoned in Warsaw for anti-Russian conspiracy.
- 1862 The Korzeniowskis are exiled to Vologda, northern Russia.
- 1865 Death of Ewa Korzeniowska.
- 1868 Apollo Korzeniowski and his son move to Lwów.
- 1869 Death of Apollo Korzeniowski in Cracow. Maternal uncle, Tadeusz Bobrowski, becomes young Korzeniowski's guardian. Privately tutored because of ill health, also occasionally attends schools during the next few years.
- 1873 Visits Austria, Germany, Switzerland, and northern Italy with his tutor Adam Pulman.
- 1874 Leaves Poland for Marseilles to become a trainee seaman in the French Merchant Service. Works for shippers and bankers Delestang et Fils.
- 1874–7 Passenger and apprentice in the *Mont-Blanc* and 'steward' in the *Saint-Antoine* (to the Caribbean).
- 1878 Shoots himself in the chest in Marseilles after accumulating gambling debts but escapes serious injury. Joins the steamship *Mavis*, his first British ship. Serves as ordinary seaman in the *Skimmer of the Sea* (English coastal waters).
- 1878–80 Ordinary seaman in the *Duke of Sutherland* (to Australia) and in the steamship *Europa* (Mediterranean).
- 1880 Passes examination for second mate. Third mate in the *Loch Etive* (to Australia).
- 1881–4 Second mate in the *Palestine*, *Riversdale*, and *Narcissus* (to South-East Asia and India).

- 1884 Passes examination for first mate.
- 1885-6 Second mate in the *Tilkhurst* (to Singapore and Calcutta).
- 1886 Becomes a British subject. Passes examination for master's certificate.
- 1886-7 Second mate in the *Falconhurst*. First mate in the *Highland Forest* (to Java). Injured on board, is hospitalized in Singapore.
- 1887-8 First mate in the steamship *Vidar* (from Singapore to various Netherlands East Indies ports).
- 1888 Master of the *Otago*, joined in Bangkok, sails to Australia and Mauritius.
- 1889 Resigns from the *Otago*. Settles briefly in London and begins *Almayer's Folly*.
- 1890 Friendship with marriage relation and writer Marguerite Poradowska. In the Congo Free State for the Société pour le Commerce du Haut-Congo as second in command and, temporarily, captain of the river steamer *Roi des Belges*.
- 1891 Manages the warehouse of Barr, Moering in London.
- 1891-3 First mate in the passenger clipper *Torrens* (to Australia). Meets John Galsworthy, among her passengers. Visits Bobrowski in the Ukraine.
- 1894 *Almayer's Folly* accepted for publication. Meets Edward Garnett, publisher's reader, and Jessie George, a typist, whom he later marries. Signs on as second mate in the *Adowa* but sails only to France and back. End of his sea career.
- 1895 *Almayer's Folly* published under the pen name 'Joseph Conrad'.
- 1896 *An Outcast of the Islands* published. Marries Jessie George (24 March) and honeymoon in Brittany. Begins *The Rescuer*. Settles in Stanford-le-Hope, Essex. Becomes acquainted with H. G. Wells and initiates a correspondence with Henry James.
- 1897 Begins friendships with writer and political figure R. B. Cunningham-Graham and with Stephen Crane. *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* published.
- 1898 Son Borys born. *Tales of Unrest* published ('Karain', 'The Idiots', 'An Outpost of Progress', 'The Return', 'The Lagoon'). Collaborates with Ford Madox Hueffer (later Ford) and takes over from him lease of The Pent, Postling, Kent.
- 1899 'Heart of Darkness' serialized.
- 1899-1900 *Lord Jim* serialized
- 1900 In Belgium with Ford. J. B. Pinker becomes Conrad's agent. *Lord Jim* published in book form.

Chronology of Conrad's life

- 1901 *The Inheritors* (collaboration with Ford) published.
- 1902 *Youth: A Narrative; and Two Other Stories* published ('Youth', 'Heart of Darkness', 'The End of the Tether').
- 1903 *Typhoon, and Other Stories* ('Typhoon', 'Amy Foster', 'Falk', 'To-morrow') and *Romance* (collaboration with Ford) published.
- 1904 *Nostromo* serialized and published in book form. Jessie Conrad injures her knees, remaining partially disabled for life.
- 1905 Sojourn on Capri. *One Day More*, dramatization of 'To-morrow', staged in London.
- 1906 Sojourn in Montpellier. Son John born. *The Mirror of the Sea* published. *The Secret Agent* serialized in US.
- 1907 Sojourn in Montpellier and in Geneva. *The Secret Agent* published in book form. Moves to Someries, Luton Hoo, Bedfordshire.
- 1908 *A Set of Six* published ('Gaspar Ruiz', 'The Informer', 'The Brute', 'An Anarchist', 'The Duel', 'Il Conde').
- 1909 Moves to Aldington, Kent. Breaks with Ford.
- 1910 Completes *Under Western Eyes* and suffers a nervous breakdown. Moves to Capel House, Orlestone, Kent.
- 1910–11 *Under Western Eyes* serialized and published in book form.
- 1912 *Some Reminiscences* (later *A Personal Record*) and '*Twixt Land and Sea* published ('A Smile of Fortune', 'The Secret Sharer', 'Freya of the Seven Isles'). *Chance* serialized in New York.
- 1914 *Chance* published in book form. First financial success. Visits Poland in summer with family. Trapped for some weeks by the outbreak of war, returns to England via Austria and Italy.
- 1915 *Within the Tides* ('The Planter of Malata', 'The Partner', 'The Inn of the Two Witches', 'Because of the Dollars') and *Victory* published.
- 1917 *The Shadow-Line* published.
- 1919 Moves to Spring Grove, near Wye, Kent. Basil Macdonald Hastings's dramatization of *Victory* staged in London. Moves to Oswalds, Bishopsbourne, near Canterbury. *The Arrow of Gold* published. Begins 'Author's Notes' for Doubleday and Heinemann Collected Editions.
- 1920 *The Rescue*, begun in 1898, published.
- 1921 Visits Corsica, doing research for *The Rover* and *Suspense*. *Notes on Life and Letters* published. Collected Editions begin publication.

- 1922 Dramatization of *The Secret Agent* staged in London.
- 1923 Visits the United States to a rapturous reception. *The Rover* serialized in US and published in book form.
- 1924 Declines a knighthood. Dies of a heart attack at Oswalds on 3 August, aged 66. Buried in Roman Catholic section of Canterbury cemetery. *The Nature of a Crime* (collaboration with Ford) published in book form.
- 1925 *Tales of Hearsay* ('The Warrior's Soul', 'Prince Roman', 'The Tale', 'The Black Mate') and *Suspense* published.
- 1926 *Last Essays*, edited by Richard Curle, published.
- 1928 *The Sisters* (fragment) published.

ABBREVIATIONS

Citations to Conrad's writings are to Dent's Collected Edition. Where a volume in this edition has been reprinted by Oxford University Press in its *World's Classics* series it is cited by the title assigned to it in that series. Full publication details of works referred to are given in the Works Cited section at the end of each chapter.

AF	<i>Almayer's Folly</i>
AG	<i>The Arrow of Gold</i>
Ch	<i>Chance</i>
HD	<i>'Heart of Darkness' and Other Tales</i>
In	<i>The Inheritors</i>
LE	<i>Last Essays</i>
LJ	<i>Lord Jim</i>
MS	<i>The Mirror of the Sea</i>
NLL	<i>Notes on Life and Letters</i>
NN	<i>The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'</i>
No	<i>Nostromo</i>
OI	<i>An Outcast of the Islands</i>
PR	<i>A Personal Record</i>
Re	<i>The Rescue</i>
Ro	<i>The Rover</i>
SA	<i>The Secret Agent</i>
SL	<i>The Shadow-Line</i>
SS	<i>A Set of Six</i>
Su	<i>Suspense</i>
TH	<i>Tales of Hearsay</i>
TLS	<i>'Twixt Land and Sea</i>
TOT	<i>'Typhoon' and Other Tales</i>
TU	<i>Tales of Unrest</i>
UWE	<i>Under Western Eyes</i>

ABBREVIATIONS

Vi *Victory*

WT *Within the Tides*

YOS *Youth: A Narrative; and Two Other Stories*

Letters *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*. Ed. Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983–.

In quotations, spaced points (...) indicate an ellipsis by the writer, while unspaced points (...) occur in the work being cited.

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1

OWEN KNOWLES

Conrad's life

Conrad's earliest sense of himself, as a six-year-old child in 1863, was typically multiple, as 'Pole, Catholic, Gentleman' (Baines, *Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography*, p. 14). In 1874, he was an adolescent thought by some to be 'betraying' his country in his desire to escape Poland for a freer life as a seaman in France. By 1878 he had joined the British Merchant Service, though still officially a Russian subject and unable to speak English. Nicknamed 'Polish Joe' by other crew members, he was about to discover sustaining social and corporate ideals under the Red Ensign. By 1904, nine years after publishing his first novel, he produced the most radically experimental English novel of the early Modernist period, the monumental *Nostromo*. At his death in Canterbury in August 1924 he was already a legend in his own lifetime.

Surprised though the Polish-born 'Joseph Conrad' may have been to become a published English author in 1895 at the age of thirty-seven, it should come as no surprise, given the extraordinarily varied and cosmopolitan influences at work on him, that he should turn out to be the novelist of paradox and riddle. The logic connecting the various diverse phases of his life often appeared so mysterious to Conrad himself that he would repeatedly speak and write about it in terms of a dream-like 'affair'.

Such a life-history, particularly in its early stages, presents a teasing challenge to many of the conventions of biographical method.¹ Like his fictional Lord Jim, Conrad as subject can disappear from view for long periods, with the result that many of the critical moments in his early life – his childhood illnesses, youthful suicide attempt, and affairs of the heart – retain a high degree of mystery. When the subject does make an appearance, he can often be glimpsed only through layers of hearsay, reticence, reminiscence, and accompanying myth. In mocking the biographer's desire for clarity of outline and developing chronology, Conrad's life has often seemed to demand creative rescue-work akin to the freely novelistic methods of evocation he used in his own autobiographical volumes, *The Mirror of the*

Sea and *A Personal Record*. In these works, the truly authentic portrayal of a life-history calls for the dissolution of all boundaries between novel and biography in order 'to make you see the subject in his scenery' and thereby produce an impressionist rendering of 'such affairs as are our human lives' (Ford, *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance*, p. 6). The conventional biographer may frown upon such renderings by Conrad or of 'Conrad' by others as unofficial and unreliable, but in Conrad's case they sometimes provide the only available access to him.² Two such characteristic glimpses from intimate sharers in the 'affair' of Conrad's life may serve to introduce his highly distinctive linguistic, cultural, and literary position.

The first glimpse, from Conrad's wife Jessie, bears upon their unusual marriage and honeymoon in 1895 and her sense of embarking on a strange 'joint adventure' with a solitary Pole sixteen years her senior who, she felt, 'had hardly known anything of a mother's care, and had no sort of experience of any sort of home life' (*Joseph Conrad as I Knew Him*, p. 25). Their honeymoon in Brittany involved for Conrad a return to a country and language that instantly seems to have brought out his most animated social side. The English language, on the other hand, was at this time a private and domestic one shared between Conrad and his wife, since she could speak no French and needed her husband to translate everything, causing the Bretons to regard them both as '*les Anglais*'. But it turns out that Jessie Conrad was doubly estranged by language when her new husband fell ill:

For a whole long week the fever ran high, and for most of the time Conrad was delirious. To see him lying in the white canopied bed, dark-faced, with gleaming teeth and shining eyes, was sufficiently alarming, but to hear him muttering to himself in a strange tongue (he must have been speaking Polish), to be unable to penetrate the clouded mind or catch one intelligible word, was for a young inexperienced girl truly awful.

(*Joseph Conrad as I Knew Him*, p. 35)

This thumbnail sketch brings the man and the writer close in several ways. It anticipates a subject that Conrad would treat in 'Amy Foster', a short story about the hostile reception afforded a Polish castaway in a Kentish village and turning upon a tragic linguistic misunderstanding between him and his English wife. It also prefigures what for Jessie Conrad would become a common experience: the persistent conjunction in her husband's writing career of illness and artistic creation. More importantly, English-speaking readers may find in Jessie Conrad's description of this 'joint adventure' a resonant prefiguration of what it means to encounter the writer of *Almayer's Folly* – of whom an early English reviewer wrote that 'he gives you the idea of muttering the story to himself' (Sherry, ed., *Conrad: The Critical Heritage*, p. 58), of 'Heart of Darkness', with its