JOSEPH CONRAD

Typhoon and Other Stories

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TYPHOON

AND OTHER STORIES

EDITED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION, NOTES AND APPENDIX (*ONE DAY MORE*) BY

PAUL KIRSCHNER

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TYPHOON AND OTHER STORIES

Joseph Conrad (originally Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski) was born in the Ukraine in 1857 and grew up under Tsarist autocracy. His parents, ardent Polish patriots, died when he was a child, following their exile for anti-Russian activities, and he came under the protection of his tradition-conscious uncle, Tadeusz Bobrowski, who watched over him for the next twenty-five years. In 1874 Bobrowski conceded to his nephew's passionate desire to go to sea, and Conrad travelled to Marseilles, where he served in French merchant vessels before joining a British ship in 1878 as an apprentice. In 1886 he obtained British nationality and his Master's certificate in the British Merchant Service. Eight years later he left the sea to devote himself to writing, publishing his first novel, *Almayer's Folly*, in 1895. The following year he married Jessie George and eventually settled in Kent, where he produced within fifteen years such modern classics as *Youth*, *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim*, *Typhoon*, *Nostromo*, *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes*. He continued to write until his death in 1924. Today Conrad is generally regarded as one of the greatest writers of fiction in English – his third language. He once described himself as being concerned 'with the ideal value of things, events and people'; in the Preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* he defined his task as 'by the power of the written word . . . before all, to make you *see*'.

Paul Kirschner taught literature at the University of London, the University of Geneva and City University of New York, working between whiles as an editor at the

World Health Organization. A former Vice-Chairman of the UK Joseph Conrad Society, he is the author of *Conrad the Psychologist as Artist* (1968) and many essays on Conrad, including one in *Conrad's Cities* (1992). He has edited *Under Western Eyes* for Penguin and contributed to and co-edited *Between Time and Eternity: Nine Essays on W. B. Yeats and His Contemporaries Hofmannsthal and Blok* (1992). Dr Kirschner is now a freelance writer and editor.

EDITOR'S DEDICATION

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

A Personal Record *and* **The Mirror of the Sea**
Edited with an introduction and notes by *Mara Kalnins*

Conrad is a largely enigmatic presence in his novels, but in *A Personal Record* (1908–9) he decided to introduce his readers to 'the figure behind the veil'. Almost equally revealing is *The Mirror of the Sea* (1904–6), written in 'tribute to the sea, its ships, and its men, to whom I remain indebted for so much which has gone to make me what I am'. Both are full of anecdotes and adventures about smuggling arms to Don Carlos, a claimant to the Spanish throne, or characters like the great-uncle who once had to eat a Lithuanian dog during Napoleon's retreat from Moscow. Yet they also let us see from within the young man who broke with his Polish background and was deeply inspired by the resilience and devotion to duty of his fellow British sailors. Every page is shot through with a powerful moral intelligence and sense of history.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

'Conrad is among the very greatest novelists in the language – or any language' – F. R. Leavis in *The Great Tradition*

The Secret Agent

Based on anarchist and terrorist activities in London, this novel has been described by Dr Leavis as 'indubitably a classic and a masterpiece'.

Lord Jim

The novel by which Conrad is most often remembered by perhaps a majority of readers, and the first considerable novel he wrote.

Nostromo

His story of revolution in South America, which Arnold Bennett regarded 'as one of the greatest novels of any age'.

Heart of Darkness

T. S. Eliot's use of a quotation from *Heart of Darkness* as an epitaph to the original manuscript of *The Waste Land* was no doubt inspired by his belief that Mr Kurtz, the ambiguous hero of the story, stands at the dark heart of the twentieth century.

also published:

Almayer's Folly
An Outcast of the Islands
Chance
The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'
The Rescue
The Shadow-Line
Tales of Unrest
'Twixt Land and Sea
Victory
Under Western Eyes
Within the Tides
Youth *and* The End of the Tether

The Secret Agent, read by Alex Jennings; *Heart of Darkness*, read by David Threlfall; and *Nostromo* and *Victory: An Island Tale*, both read by Michael Pennington, are all available as Penguin Audiobooks.

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Acknowledgements and Editorial Notes

I am indebted to Hofstra University's Axinn Library for providing me with a microfilm of the first edition of *Typhoon and Other Stories* containing Conrad's corrections, and the page proofs of the corresponding volume of the Heinemann Collected Edition. I also thank the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Yale University for allowing me to quote from the manuscripts of 'Falk' and 'Amy Foster', Cornell University Library for providing a copy of the manuscript in Ford Madox Ford's hand of part of a dramatization of 'To-morrow', and the Berg Collection, New York Public Library, for a microfilm of the holograph manuscript of 'The Son' ('To-morrow'). I am grateful to the Joseph Conrad Estate for permission to obtain a copy of the last-named manuscript. The Joseph Conrad Society (UK) and the Polish Library in London (POSK) have been consistently helpful.

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In my text a row of three or four single-spaced dots (...) indicates an editorial deletion. Double-spaced dots (. . .) indicate suspension points in the original text. (Four dots include a full stop.) In keeping with Penguin house style, outer quotation marks are single, not double.

ABBREVIATIONS

I have used the following abbreviations in my text (see Select Bibliography for full details):

Baines: Jocelyn Baines: *Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography*
BL: Ashley Collection, British Library (London)
CEW: Norman Sherry: *Conrad's Eastern World*
CH: ——: *Conrad: The Critical Heritage*
CLJC: Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies, eds.: *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, Vols. 2 and 3
JCKH: Jessie Conrad: *Joseph Conrad as I Knew Him*
JCLCG: C. T. Watts, ed.: *Joseph Conrad's Letters to Cunninghame Graham*
LBM: William Blackburn, ed.: *Joseph Conrad: Letters to William Blackwood and David S. Meldrum*
LL: G. Jean-Aubry: *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters*, 2 vols.
Najder: Zdzisław Najder: *Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle*

INTRODUCTION

. . . instinct dictates duty, and intelligence provides the pretexts for dodging it.

. . . if intelligence comes but second in the hierarchy of virtues, it alone is able to proclaim that instinct must come first.

Proust

A few months before his death, Conrad affirmed that each of his short-story volumes had a 'unity of outlook': an 'inner consistency' springing 'from sources profounder than the logic of a deliberate theory'.[1] As far as I know, no critic has tried to define the 'inner consistency' of *Typhoon and Other Stories* and thereby explore the literary interval between the completion of *Lord Jim* in 1900 and the commencement of *Nostromo* in 1902.

For Conrad that interval marked the end of a lingering farewell to his simpler life as a seaman. In October 1898 he had written to Mrs Bontine that his new residence, Pent Farm, was 'near the sea, though not absolutely in sight of it', adding that as soon as he had finished *Lord Jim* he would 'use and abuse everybody's good will, influence, friendship to get back on the blue water. I am by no means happy on shore' (*CLJC*, 2, p. 105). But three weeks later he told her son, Cunninghame Graham, that it was already too late: 'This confounded literature has ruined me entirely' (*CLJC*, 2, p. 116); and in February 1899 he jokingly dismissed approaches to Glasgow shipowners on his behalf: 'They will never never give a ship to a "chiel" that can write prose – or who is even suspected of such criminal practices' (*CLJC*, 2, p. 155).

The self-deprecation sounds a bit complacent: Conrad speaks of being ruined by literature in the way W. C. Fields might have deplored the harmful effects of alcohol. But the nostalgia was real. In November 1901 he wrote wistfully to William Blackwood: 'I can't forget the days when "climate" did not exist for me as long as there

was enough air to breathe and not too much wind to keep my feet' (*CLJC*, 2, p. 301). And a year later Olive Garnett wrote after visiting Pent Farm: 'Conrad spoke very despondingly about his work, said he often had a mind to return to the sea . . . but he had gout in the foot, & it wd. not be honourable to engage.'[2]

Such feelings must have been sharpened by growing material anxieties: in his letters Conrad speaks constantly not only of agonizing slowness in writing, but of ailments, thoughts of early death and, above all, intricate schemes involving his newly-acquired agent, J. B. Pinker, to pay his ever-mounting debts.[3] While finishing 'To-morrow' he wrote to Pinker that he was 'nearly going mad with worry' (*CLJC*, 2, p. 365), and to David Meldrum, 'I am inutterably [*sic*] weary of all this' (*CLJC*, 2, p. 369). Bound to produce a certain number of words each day or suffer anguish as his family's breadwinner, he must have looked back on his sea life as the very essence of freedom. But despair alternated with optimism. According to Meldrum, Conrad was 'in great spirits'[4] when he arrived in Blackwood's office on 14 July 1900 with the ending of *Lord Jim*, and his mood was still sanguine in September, when he announced, 'I must make a fresh start without further delay' (*CLJC*, 2, p. 289). The 'fresh start' was 'Typhoon', the first story of a volume promised to William Heinemann.

Unity was a strong concern. 'Falk', Conrad told George Blackwood in 1902, was 'specifically intended for Mr. H[einemann]'s book; designed to go with the other [*sic*] of that group' (*CLJC*, 2, p. 375). In 1913 he chided Alfred Knopf for having let 'Typhoon' be published separately in 1902: 'I don't shovel together my stories in a haphazard fashion. "Typhoon" belonged to that volume on artistic and literary grounds. . . . The reading of that first story attuned the mind for the reception of the others' (*CLJC*, 5, p. 274). An in a note for T. J. Wise in the 1902 edition he complained that the separate publication of 'Typhoon' had 'spoiled the set of the 4 stories', (BL)[5]

The 'set', published in 1903, presents a chiaroscuro of sea and land life in an alternating rhythm of hope and despair. 'Typhoon' and 'Falk' deal with sea life, affirming deep convictions by moral vindication of the protagonist and ending on an optimistic note, though each with a dose of wryness. The shorter stories, 'Amy Foster' and 'To-morrow', are set firmly on land, not far from Conrad's home;

and their central figure either perishes in despair or is condemned to domestic slavery, mocked by the 'hopeful madness' of a fixed idea. The stories are not printed in order of composition (in which I shall discuss them) but rather reflect the see-saw mental struggle of a man pining for lost freedom while doggedly mooring himself to an existence that often must have seemed to mingle hopeless slavery and hopeful madness.

So much for biographical correlatives of the volume's 'inner consistency'. For the literary figures in the carpet we must look at the individual stories in detail.

Although immediately hailed as a descriptive *tour de force*, 'Typhoon' has generally been read as a simple story, posing only one problem: how could a man so stolidly heroic as MacWhirr in resisting elemental fury be so stupid as to sail his ship into it in the first place? Or, more precisely, how should we finally regard such a man? Recently, two critics have richly harvested the comic elements in the story, but it is not sure whether they have thereby answered or begged the question.[6] It is true that Conrad referred to 'Typhoon' as 'my first attempt to treat a subject jocularly, so to speak' (*CLJC*, 2, p. 304); but the comedy remains the means to an end; to an implied statement of belief which the comic conventions serve to make effective.

'Whom you laugh at,' wrote Turgenev, 'you forgive, and come near loving';[7] and the comic portrayal of MacWhirr helps to win affection for him. On his very first appearance he has to be helped to furl his unrolled umbrella, which he immediately calls by the Dickensian character-name for troublesome umbrellas – 'the blessed gamp' – thus endearing himself by fallibility while evoking unawares the master of comic endearment. (A deconstructionist before his time, Conrad often alludes to his own methods.) With equal transparency the very first sentence of the story repudiates Jukes's superficial verdict at the end. MacWhirr's face – 'the exact counterpart of his mind' – presents 'no marked characteristics of firmness or stupidity'. Unlike Captain Allistoun in *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*, MacWhirr has no ambition to arrive at his destination faster than expected (even delay, if justified, does not disturb him): above all, he has no wish, like Allistoun, to end his days out of sight of the sea; for he is in his element, doing the work he loves. It is his mysterious love of the sea that links

this 'perfectly satisfactory son of a petty grocer in Belfast' with the Rodinesque image of 'an immense, potent, and invisible hand thrust into the ant-heap of the earth, laying hold of shoulders, knocking heads together, and setting the unconscious faces of the multitude towards inconceivable goals and in undreamt-of directions'. The narrator adds ironically, 'His father never really forgave him for this undutiful stupidity.' The term 'stupidity' is thereby devalued, dwindling to a petty grocer's label for a force of nature – one later to be pitted against other natural forces.

MacWhirr is not only a source of comedy: he is defined and vindicated by it. The celebrated Siamese-flag incident is no isolated comic anecdote but a recurrent motif. To Jukes the flag is a mobile sign, symbolizing all un-English things he distrusts. Mobility in interpreting signs characterizes intelligence: a single unvarying response, like that governing MacWhirr's literal interpretation of Jukes's epithet 'queer', denotes instinct. Later, Jukes again evokes the flag in his fear that the coolies, once recovered, will 'fly at our throats' because the *Nan-Shan* 'isn't a British ship now. . . . The damn'd Siamese flag.' MacWhirr's remark, 'We are on board, all the same', lacks jingoistic stridency: it simply states that what matters is not a flag but the men who sail under it.[8] Finally, Jukes's words are echoed by the malicious second mate, whining about maltreatment by MacWhirr to his new-found sycophantic friend: 'I would talk and raise trouble if it wasn't for that damned Siamese flag.' The nationalistic meaning of the flag, apparently invoked to illustrate MacWhirr's obtuseness, is later seen as an alibi for xenophobic jitters, then for downright baseness. MacWhirr's instinctual 'stupidity' is steadily revalued in moral terms.

Jukes's defence of the second engineer, whom MacWhirr threatens to fire for profanity, leads to another seeming display of dense-mindedness, as MacWhirr expostulates 'against the use of images in speech'. But his real provocation is the 'filthy bad temper' he detects behind the words of the second engineer, whom he calls 'a very violent man'. The fact that he himself proceeds to swear comically absolves him of prudery; it does not invalidate the aversion to violence that makes every ship he sails in a 'floating abode of harmony and peace' (with that very camaraderie of which Jukes boasts when writing to his chum). In the event, Jukes is proved right about the second engineer, who, still swearing, is

undaunted by the typhoon: the aim is not to demonstrate the infallibility of the captain but rather to dramatize, without pomposity, what MacWhirr personally stands for. He swears against swearing much as he later has to give the second mate who attacks him 'a push'. His resistance to violence includes violence done to language: the improper use of words, or in a current jargon that would no doubt mystify him, the irresponsibility of signifier to signified.[9]

Jukes and MacWhirr change sides over the boatswain, whom MacWhirr regards as a 'first-rate petty officer' but whom Jukes dislikes because 'the men did what they liked with him, and he had not an ounce of initiative in his character, which was easy-going and talkative'. It seems paradoxical that MacWhirr should value a garrulous man; but once again the issue lies deeper than words. The boatswain – the immediate overseer of the crew – has 'none of the classical attributes of his rating' and imposes no sergeant-major's discipline. The men like him; and MacWhirr prefers that kind of authority, even when lax. It is no accident that it is the boatswain who reports the fighting to MacWhirr and leads in breaking it up, nor that he is described in simian terms.[10] Like the captain, he has an unsympathetic wife (who keeps a grocer's shop); and he guesses she would call him a fool (as MacWhirr's grocer father called his son an ass) for going to sea. The two men, far apart in rank, are linked by their instinctual nature.

The decisive clash between Jukes and MacWhirr (the story is structured on their contrast) comes when Jukes suggests altering the ship's course on the pretext that he is 'thinking of our passengers'. MacWhirr's amazement at hearing 'a lot of coolies spoken of as passengers' has caused some democratic unease, but what MacWhirr objects to once again is an abuse of language, and – even more – a perversion of function. The coolies may be 'passengers' in the sense of being conveyed, but they have not paid to travel on a passenger ship: they are being shipped home in a cargo vessel and therefore, professionally speaking, they are cargo.[11] MacWhirr regards the word 'passengers' applied to the coolies much as he does the word 'queer' applied to the flag. Moreover, his rebuke to Jukes – 'Why don't you speak plainly? Couldn't tell what you meant' – is morally justified because Jukes is clothing his fears for the ship (and, inevitably, himself) in spurious sympathy for