

## Table of Contents

[FROM THE PAGES OF HEART OF DARKNESS AND SELECTED SHORT](#)

[FICTION](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright Page](#)

[JOSEPH CONRAD](#)

THE WORLD OF JOSEPH CONRAD

Introduction

A NOTE ON THE TEXTS

AUTHOR'S NOTE

YOUTH

HEART OF DARKNESS

- I -

- II -

- III -

AMY FOSTER

THE SECRET SHARER

— I —

— II —

ENDNOTES

INSPIRED BY HEART OF DARKNESS

COMMENTS & QUESTIONS

FOR FURTHER READING

**FROM THE PAGES OF HEART OF DARKNESS AND  
SELECTED SHORT FICTION**

This could have occurred nowhere but in England, where men and sea

interpenetrate, so to speak—the sea entering into the life of most men, and the men knowing something or everything about the sea, in the way of amusement, of travel, or of bread-winning. (from “Youth,” page 7)

Only a moment; a moment of strength, of romance, of glamour—of youth! (from “Youth,” page 36)

What greatness had not floated on the ebb of that river into the mystery of an unknown earth! ... The dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empires. (from *Heart of Darkness*, page 39)

The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much.

(from *Heart of Darkness*, page 51 )

In and out of rivers, streams of death in life, whose banks were rotting into mud, whose waters, thickened into slime, invaded the contorted mangroves, that seemed to writhe at us in the extremity of an impotent despair.

Nowhere did we stop long enough to get a particularized impression, but the general sense of vague and oppressive wonder grew upon me. It was like a weary pilgrimage amongst hints for nightmares.

(from *Heart of Darkness*, page 50)

They were dying slowly—it was very clear. They were not enemies, they

were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now,—nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom.

(from *Heart of Darkness*, page 53)

It is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence—that which makes its truth, its meaning—its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream—alone.

(from *Heart of Darkness*, page 65)

I don't like work—no man does—but I like what is in the work,—the chance to find yourself. Your own reality—for yourself, not for others—what no other man can ever know. They can only see the mere show, and never can tell what it really means.

(from *Heart of Darkness*, page 66)

The reaches opened before us and closed behind, as if the forest had stepped leisurely across the water to bar the way for our return. We penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness.

(from *Heart of Darkness*, page 75)

HEART OF  
DARKNESS  
AND  
SELECTED SHORT FICTION

*Joseph Conrad*

*With an Introduction and Notes  
by A. Michael Martin*

George Stade  
Consulting Editorial Director



BARNES & NOBLE CLASSICS  
NEW YORK



BARNES & NOBLE CLASSICS  
NEW YORK

Published by Barnes & Noble Books

122 Fifth Avenue

New York, NY 10011

[www.barnesandnoble.com/classics](http://www.barnesandnoble.com/classics)

*Heart of Darkness* and “Youth” were originally published in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh*

*Magazine* (in 1899 and 1898, respectively), and together collected in volume form

in 1902. “Amy Foster” was first published in 1901 in the *Illustrated London News*,

and “The Secret Sharer” first appeared in *Harper’s Magazine* in 1910.

The present texts derive from Doubleday’s collected editions of

Conrad’s works, published in 1920-1921.

Originally published in mass market format in 2003 by Barnes & Noble

Classics

with new Introduction, Note on the Texts, Map, Notes, Biography, Chronology,

Inspired By, Comments & Questions, and For Further Reading.

This trade paperback edition published in 2008.

Introduction, A Note on the Texts, Footnotes,

Endnotes, and For Further Reading

Copyright © 2003 by A. Michael Matin.

Note on Joseph Conrad, Map of Congo Free State, The World of Joseph Conrad,

Inspired by *Heart of Darkness*, and Comments & Questions

Copyright © 2003 by Barnes & Noble, Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

al

Barnes & Noble Classics and the Barnes & Noble Classics

colophon are trademarks of Barnes & Noble, Inc.

*Heart of Darkness and Selected Short Fiction*

ISBN-13: 978-1-59308-123-2 ISBN-10: 1-59308-123-5

eISBN : 978-1-411-43230-7

LC Control Number 2007941531

Produced and published in conjunction with:

Fine Creative Media, Inc.

322 Eighth Avenue

New York, NY 10001

Michael J. Fine, President and Publisher

Printed in the United States of America

QM

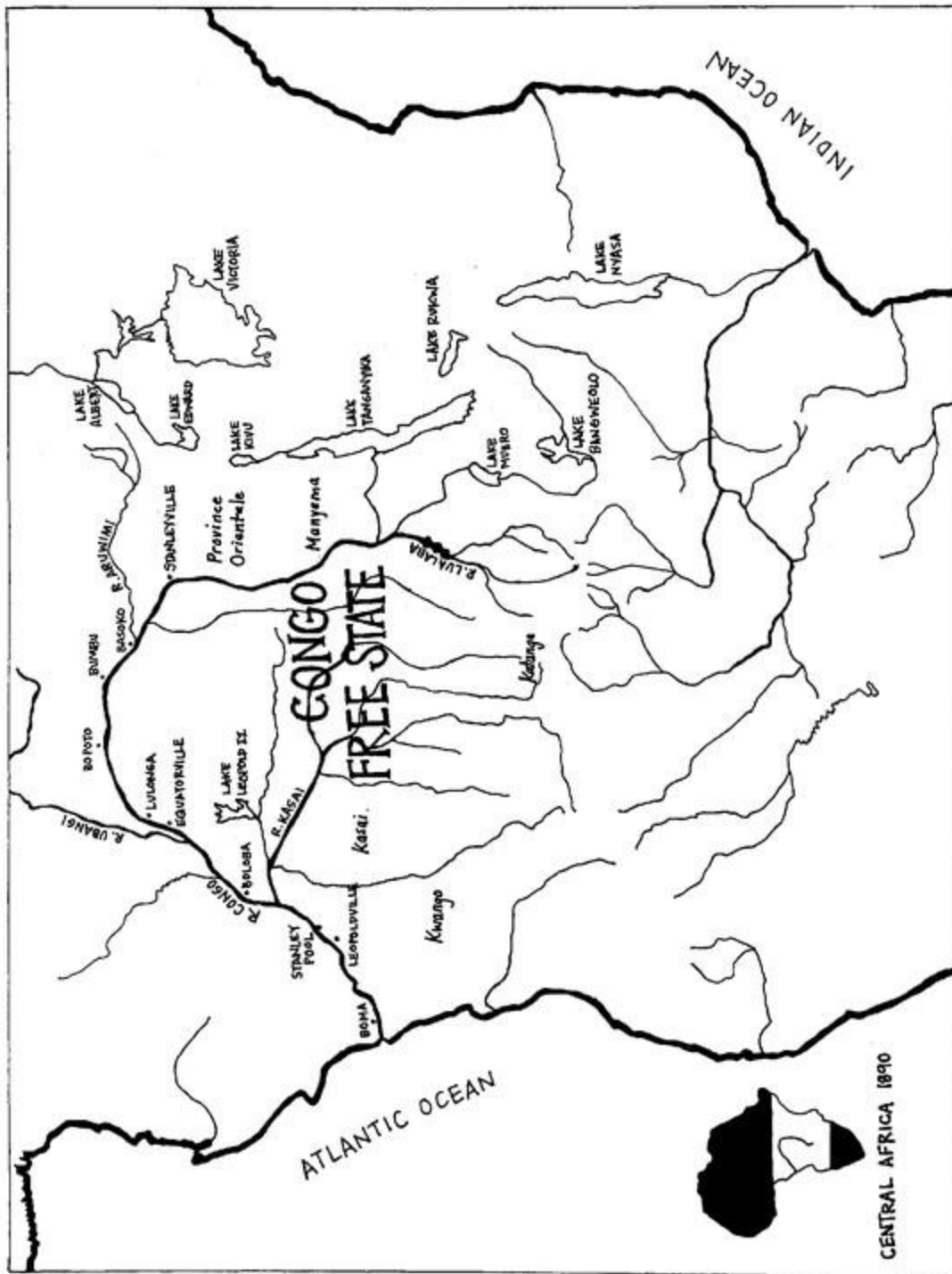
3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

## **JOSEPH CONRAD**

Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski was born on December 3, 1857, in a Polish province in the Ukraine to parents ardently opposed to the Russian occupation of eastern Poland. From his father, Apollo, Conrad developed a great love of literature, and he read the works of James Fenimore Cooper, Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, and Sir Walter Scott in Polish and French translations. After he lost his parents to tuberculosis in 1865 and 1869, Conrad was cared for by his uncle Tadeusz Bobrowski until 1874, when he left for Marseilles to launch a career at sea that would span some twenty years. He joined the British merchant marine in 1878, climbing the ranks and passing his captain's exam in 1886—the same year he became a British subject. Conrad's many ocean voyages took him all over the world and provided inspiration for his subsequent writing career, but it was his trip up the Congo River on a steamship that left him disenchanted with humanity and that led him to write his seminal work *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Conrad had begun a decade earlier, at age thirty-one, to compose fiction in English, a language he had not learned until he was a young adult. He published his first novel, *Almayer's Folly*, in 1895



under the pen name Joseph Conrad and, encouraged by the literary critic Edward Garnett, then devoted himself to writing. Although he suffered from physical ailments, such as malaria, as well as psychological problems, Conrad nonetheless produced a substantial body of work, including the great novels *Lord Jim* (1900), *Nostromo* (1904), *The Secret Agent* (1907), and *Under Western Eyes* (1911). He is regarded as one of the premier prose stylists and writers of psychological fiction in the English language. He died of a heart attack on August 3, 1924.



## THE WORLD OF JOSEPH CONRAD

1482 The Portuguese navigator Diogo Cão discovers the mouth of a river

nearly 3,000 miles long. Europeans initially call it the Zaire, but it later becomes known as the Congo.

1491

Christian missionaries first travel to the Congo.

1853

Scottish missionary-doctor David Livingstone embarks on his Zambezi expedition, one of the most significant explorations of the Congo.

1857

Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski is born in a province in the Russian-occupied Ukraine to Polish parents Ewa (née Bobrowska) and patriot, poet, and translator Apollo Korzeniowski.

1861

Apollo is arrested by the Russian authorities for his nationalist activities.

1862

Apollo is released, and the family is exiled to Vologda, Russia.

1865

Conrad's mother dies of tuberculosis. Conrad first experiences English literature through his father's translations of Shakespeare.

(His first two languages are Polish and French.)

1869 Conrad's father dies, also of tuberculosis; Conrad is adopted by his maternal uncle, Tadeusz Bobrowski, who lives in Poland. The completion of the Suez Canal effectively links the Mediterranean and Red Seas.

1874 Conrad sets off for Marseilles to become a seaman in the French merchant marine; his first voyage is to Martinique on the *Mont Blanc*.

1878 An indebted Conrad attempts suicide by shooting himself in the chest. He subsequently signs on with the British merchant navy.

Following Henry Morton Stanley's exploration of the region, King Leopold II of Belgium claims ownership of the Congo, founding the Comité d'Etudes du Haut-Congo (later the Association Internationale du Congo); Leopold takes this action privately, not on behalf of Belgium.

1881 Conrad sails to the Far East on the *Palestine*, a bark of 425 tons. On this two-year voyage, the *Palestine's* cargo of coal catches fire and must be abandoned. Conrad is forced to navigate an open boat for more than thirteen hours, until finally landing on an island near Sumatra. Conrad will draw on this experience when he writes

the story “Youth” (for more, see the Introduction).

1883

Conrad ships as second mate on the *Riversdale*, then boards the *Narcissus* at Bombay; he will later translate this experience into the novel *The Nigger of the “Narcissus.”*

1884

Conrad becomes a first mate.

1885 The Association Internationale du Congo obtains 450 treaties with African tribal chiefs, as well as the recognition of statehood by America, Belgium, France, Germany, Great Britain, Portugal, and Russia. The Congo Free State is formed, with Leopold II as its sovereign.

1886 Conrad becomes a British subject and earns his master’s certificate from the Board of Trade.

1889

Conrad begins writing *Almayer’s Folly*.

1890 Conrad embarks on a four-month voyage along the Congo River on a steamboat. During this period he keeps a diary, which he will later use when he writes *Heart of Darkness*. He returns to Brussels exhausted, ill with malaria, and profoundly disturbed by what he has

experienced in the Congo.

1894 Conrad concludes his sea career and begins writing full time. His uncle dies, leaving him £1,600. Conrad begins socializing with a literary circle that includes the critic Edward Garnett, John Galsworthy, Henry James, and Stephen Crane.

1895 Joseph Conrad formally adopts his pen name, and his first novel, *Almayer's Folly*, is published.

1896

Conrad settles permanently in England and marries twenty-two year-old Jessie George, with whom he will have two sons. His second novel, *An Outcast of the Islands*, is published.

1897

Conrad's novel *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* is published.

1898

"Youth" is published in the September issue of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. *Tales of Unrest*, his first volume of short stories, is published. The Conrad family moves to Pent Farm, near the coast of Kent, England. Conrad's son Borys is born.

1899 *Heart of Darkness* is published, as *The Heart of Darkness*, in the February, March, and April issues of *Blackwood's Edinburgh*

*Magazine.*

1900

Conrad's novel *Lord Jim* is published.

1901

"Amy Foster" is published in the *Illustrated London News*,

December 14-28. Conrad collaborates with Ford Madox Ford; the result is *The Inheritors*.

1902 Edward Garnett favorably reviews *Heart of Darkness* upon its initial publication in book form in *Youth: A Narrative; and Two Other Stories*.

1903 Conrad publishes *Typhoon and Other Stories*, which includes "Amy Foster." *Romance*, his second collaboration with Ford Madox Ford, is published. Roger Casement, a British consul to the Congo Free State, solicits Conrad's support to expose the atrocities of Leopold's rule over the Congo.

1904

Conrad's novel *Nostromo* is published.

1906

Conrad's son John is born.

1907

Conrad's novel *The Secret Agent* is published.

1908

Following international outcry about the treatment of the Congolese under Leopold's Congo Free State, Belgium annexes the country, establishing the Belgian Congo. The worst abuses are gradually diminished, but the region remains a resource for European exploitation, with little provision for the well-being of its people.

1910 "The Secret Sharer" is published, as "The Secret-Sharer," in the August and September issues of *Harper's Magazine*.

1911 Conrad publishes the novel *Under Western Eyes*, following a nervous breakdown.

1912 Conrad's memoir *A Personal Record* and *'Twixt Land and Sea*, a short-story collection that includes "The Secret Sharer," are published.

1914

Conrad enjoys popular success for the first time as his novel *Chance* becomes a bestseller. World War I erupts during the Conrads' visit to Poland.

1915



Conrad's novel *Victory* is published.

1917

Conrad's novella *The Shadow-Line* is published.

1921

1920- Collected editions of Conrad's works are published by  
Double day, Page (in America) and Heinemann (in Britain).

1923

Conrad undertakes a reading tour in the United States.

1924 A rheumatic Conrad refuses an offer of knighthood a few months  
before he succumbs to a fatal heart attack.

1926

Conrad's volume *Last Essays* is posthumously published.

1958

The Congo forms its first parliamentary government.

1960

The Congo wins its independence from Belgium.

1979 Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, a movie largely inspired  
by *Heart of Darkness*, premieres.

## **INTRODUCTION**

While engaged in the mundane chore of packing ivory tusks into casks, in

his second week in the Congo as an employee of a Belgian company, Joseph Conrad could hardly have dreamed that the events of the next six months would provide him with the basis for one of the most influential works of fiction of the modern era. In fact, at the time, in June 1890, he felt this task to be “idiotic employment” (Conrad, “The Congo Diary,” p. 161; see “For Further Reading”), an impression he recorded in a journal that is one of the earliest samples of his writing in the English language as well as a document that demonstrates how closely aspects of *Heart of Darkness* are based on his own experiences. Perhaps it was the unpleasant memory of his physical contact with the coveted substance for which the Congo region was being plundered that would lead him, twenty-seven years later, to make clear that he did not profit from the endeavor materially but only artistically: two stories, one of which was *Heart of Darkness*, he maintained, “are all the spoil I brought out from the centre of Africa, where, really, I had no sort of business” (Author’s Note, p. 4). Conrad was not yet a writer in 1890, although he had a year earlier tentatively begun work on what would eventually become his first novel, based partly on his observations in the Malay Archipelago. His relatively late start, however, was essential to his success, for by the time he began he had amassed a wealth of experiences of the sort that most other writers could only imagine. In fact, while *Heart of*

*Darkness* is the best-known instance of Conrad's penchant for transforming personal experiences into fiction, it is only one of numerous such works by this prolific author. By presenting this novella along with several of Conrad's finest short stories—"Youth," "Amy Foster," and "The Secret Sharer," each of which also draws on his travels and observations from around the world—the current volume aims to facilitate an appreciation of the diverse fruits of his genius.

### **Life and Career**

In an essay written shortly after Conrad's death in 1924, Virginia Woolf copiously praised her fellow novelist's artistry. Yet even though Conrad had been naturalized as a British subject nearly four decades earlier, the quintessentially English Woolf viewed this Polish émigré, who "spoke English with a strong foreign accent," as a "guest" in Britain. She further described him as "compound of two men," as one who was "at once inside and out," and who was therefore possessed of a penetrating "double vision" (Woolf, *Collected Essays*, pp. 302, 304). Ever the penetrating observer herself, Woolf thus crystallized what is perhaps the most basic aspect of Conrad's identity: the fact that it was structured according to a series of dichotomies. He was a Pole and a Briton as well as a seaman and a writer, a fact he alluded to in a 1903 letter in which he characterized himself as a

*“homo duplex”* (double man) in multiple senses (*The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, vol. 3, p. 89). As a result of his dual nationalities and careers, he had a plurality of experiences and insights on a wide range of issues. Indeed, he was a consummate example of what Salman Rushdie (himself a hybrid product of India, Pakistan, and Britain) has termed “translated men”—expatriate artists whose geographical, cultural, and linguistic border crossings have resulted in rich cross-fertilizations of identities and perspectives (*Imaginary Homelands*, p. 17). One salient example of Conrad’s variety of experiences is on the matter of imperialism. Having been born in Russian-occupied Poland to a family of ardently nationalistic Poles and subsequently naturalized as a subject of the world’s foremost imperial power, and, further, as a seaman who traveled around the world during the heyday of European imperialism, he had a diversity of viewpoints that enabled him to write illuminating fiction on this theme. Another such example is that of language. That he is one of the foremost English prose stylists is an especially remarkable achievement given that this was his third language (after Polish and French, the latter being the language of the writers he most admired) and that he did not begin to learn it until he was a young adult.

Conrad’s unique circumstances as an individual were complemented by

the fact that he occupied a singularly opportune moment in the history of British literature. His period of artistic fertility occurred precisely on the cusp between a Victorianism that was rapidly becoming antiquated and a modernism that would not be fully developed until after World War I. Dramatic changes in the reading public and the publishing industry, along with technological and geopolitical developments that challenged the traditional insularity of British culture, made the era ripe for both formal and thematic literary innovations. Yet while the particulars both of Conrad's individual life and his historical moment no doubt provided him with special opportunities and capabilities, it was a combination of raw talent and uncompromising dedication to his artistic vision that enabled him so fully to actualize their potential. It is through understanding the remarkable circumstances of his life that one may see how it paradoxically came to be the case that this Polish-born, Francophile mariner was uniquely equipped to exploit the aesthetic and ideological instabilities of his era and thereby become a vital force in the development of British literary modernism.

Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski, who published under the Anglicized pseudonym Joseph Conrad, was born on December 3, 1857, in southeastern Russian-occupied Poland—specifically, in or near Berdichev, a Polish province in the Ukraine. His family were Catholic members of the Polish

hereditary nobility, the *szlachta*, which Conrad unassumingly characterized as “the land-tilling gentry” in order to make clear that this group (which comprised about ten percent of the population and for whom there was no distinction between aristocracy and gentry) was not comparable to the small minority of superwealthy families that constituted the aristocracy of his adoptive country. A formidable power in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Poland had gone into decline and then been systematically dismantled by its more powerful neighbors, Austria, Russia, and Prussia, in a series of partitions in the late eighteenth century. In 1795, in the last of these partitions, the remnants of Polish territory were taken, and the nation would not be reconstituted until after World War I. Poland’s subjugation was a profound influence on Poles of Conrad’s generation in general and for Conrad in particular, given that many members of his family were deeply committed to the cause of autonomy for their homeland. The extent to which his father, Apollo Korzeniowski, a prominent playwright, poet, and translator, embraced the nationalist cause is indicated in the title of a poem he composed that marked Conrad’s birth in relation to the first Polish partition of 1772: “To My Son Born in the 85th Year of Muscovite Oppression, a Song for the Day of His Christening.” For his political activism, Apollo was imprisoned by the Russian authorities in the fall of

1861 and then, upon his release the following spring, was exiled with his wife, Ewa, and their only child to Vologda, a cold city northeast of Moscow. The harsh circumstances of their exile took a toll on the health of both parents. Ewa died of tuberculosis in 1865, when Conrad was seven years old. In 1867 the ailing Apollo and his son were permitted to return to Poland, where Apollo died, also of tuberculosis, in 1869. His funeral procession, in Cracow, inspired a major nationalist demonstration. As Conrad was thus orphaned at the age of eleven, his upbringing now fell to his maternal uncle, Tadeusz Bobrowski, who was to prove a formative influence. Whereas Conrad's father had been a passionate idealist, his uncle was eminently practical and conservative, and the opposition between these influences may be viewed as yet another of the dichotomies that shaped the author's life. As Zdzislaw Najder, Conrad's finest biographer, observes, "Almost all Conrad's inner tensions—the painful, uncomfortable, wearisome wealth of his mind—can be associated with this basic contrast between his [father's] and his uncle's personalities" (*Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle*, p. 166). In 1872, at the age of fourteen, Conrad declared his intention of becoming a sailor, a plan that was initially opposed by his uncle. The idealistic adolescent was fixed on the idea, though, and his aspiration actually served a practical necessity, since it was

clear that emigration would be necessary: as a Russian subject and the son of a convict, he would have been liable for up to twenty-five years of compulsory duty in the Russian Army had he remained in Poland. So in October 1874, two months before his seventeenth birthday, he left Poland for the port city of Marseilles, where he entered the French merchant marine as a trainee seaman and a steward.

His budding career, however, was temporarily brought to a halt when, in December 1877, he was informed that, as a Russian subject, he could no longer serve on French vessels. Without a livelihood, he remained in Marseilles, where he lived beyond his means and then tried to recoup his losses by gambling. The ensuing financial crisis led him to attempt suicide. (Conrad himself always insisted that the scar on his left breast was from a gunshot wound received in a duel, a claim perpetuated in his pseudo-autobiographical novel *The Arrow of Gold* [1919], which consists of heavily embellished memories of his Marseilles period, including romantic stories of gun running for the Spanish Carlist cause and a torrid love affair. His uncle, who rushed to Marseilles, helped him recuperate, and paid off his debts, publicly affirmed this myth—presumably because suicide is a mortal sin for Catholics whereas dueling was viewed as honorable—but in a confidential letter he acknowledged the truth.) After his recovery, no longer



eligible to serve on French ships, Conrad joined the British merchant marine and first arrived on British shores in June 1878. Over the next several years he rose through the ranks, passing his exams for second mate in 1880, first mate in 1884, and captain in 1886, the same year in which he was naturalized as a Briton.

Yet employment opportunities for captains were scarce during this era, for the demand for sea officers was steadily declining as steamships were supplanting smaller sailing vessels (a historical shift Conrad wistfully treated in his 1906 memoir *The Mirror of the Sea*, in which he makes clear his belief in the dignity of sail over steam). So over the next several years he accepted positions as first mate and second mate, and in January 1894 he completed his last voyage. His two-decade-long career as a seaman had taken him all over the world—to southeast Asia, Australia, Africa, the Caribbean, South America, India, and throughout Europe—and would provide him with much of the material for his second profession, as a writer. The year 1894, in fact, constitutes a watershed in Conrad's life, as the end of his period as a seaman was followed rapidly by the death, the next month, of his beloved uncle Tadeusz and the completion of his first novel, *Almayer's Folly*, which he had begun writing five years earlier. The novel was published in 1895 under the name Joseph Conrad (the inaugural

use of this pseudonym), and, although it did not sell well, it received generally good reviews. With this modest success, the thirty-seven-year-old Conrad embarked on a literary career that from this point on would be the consuming passion of his life.

Conrad settled permanently in England in 1896 and (to the surprise of some of his friends) after a brief courtship married Jessie George, an intellectually unimpressive lower-middle-class Englishwoman nearly sixteen years younger than he. They would remain married for the rest of his life, and she appears to have provided the domestic support and stability that the irascible, high-strung author found necessary in order to work. In the same year his second novel, *An Outcast of the Islands*, was published, followed in 1897 by *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* whose preface may be viewed as his aesthetic manifesto: he defined "art" 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" (Kimbrough edition, p. 145). He was well aware that his rather elevated artistic vision of fiction was not typical of English assumptions of the period. On the contrary, as Ian Watt points out, "Conrad's basic conception of the novel was not of English origin. Nor was it derived from Polish sources, if only because the novel developed rather late in Poland,

compared to poetry and drama. For Conrad the exemplary novelists were French, and, in particular, Flaubert and Maupassant” (*Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 48). As Conrad forged ahead with his literary career, his domestic life continued to develop. In 1898 the first of his two children, Borys, was born, and his first volume of short stories, *Tales of Unrest*, was published. In the fall of that year the family moved into Pent Farm, a home near the Kentish coast that Conrad had subleased from a new friend of his, the writer Ford Madox Hueffer (later, Ford Madox Ford). The relationship with Ford would prove to be important, as the two would go on to collaborate on several projects, most notably the novels *The Inheritors* (1901) and *Romance* (1903), before a quarrel would effectively end their friendship. It was also during this period that Conrad began to cultivate relationships with some of the most important writers of the era, several of whom—H.G. Wells, Stephen Crane, and Henry James—were now his neighbors. His second son, John, born in 1906, would in fact be named after his friend, the future Nobel Prize-winning novelist John Galsworthy. The family lived at Pent Farm until 1907, and it was here that Conrad wrote most of his finest and most enduring fiction, beginning with *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and *Lord Jim* (1900). Although his output was prodigious during his years at Pent Farm—and he remained steadily prolific

throughout his career as a writer, with not only novellas and novels but short stories and essays as well—he suffered chronically from debilitating bouts of depression and writer’s block. In a letter to the literary critic Edward Garnett, written shortly before he began full-time work on *Lord Jim*, he dramatically conveyed his anguish and sense of paralysis:

The more I write the less substance do I see in my work. The scales are falling off my eyes. It is tolerably awful. And I face it, I face it but the fright is growing on me. My fortitude is shaken by the view of the monster. It does not move; its eyes are baleful; it is as still as death itself—and it will devour me. Its stare has eaten into my soul already deep, deep. I am alone with it in a chasm with perpendicular sides of black basalt. Never were sides so perpendicular and smooth, and high (*Collected Letters*, vol. 2, p. 177).

To make matters worse, as he was racked with escalating debts (and proudly refused to lower his fairly high standard of living) he often spent large advances on work that he had hardly begun, which led him to request still greater advances; he was, therefore, more or less constantly under pressure to produce. Further, his difficulties with writing were exacerbated by a deep metaphysical pessimism that presupposed the ultimate futility of

all human endeavors. In a letter to the idealistic Scottish socialist politician Cunninghame Graham, he summed up his view of the human condition, which was extrapolated from popularized accounts of the second law of thermodynamics (the law of entropy):

The mysteries of a universe made of drops of fire and clods of mud do not concern us in the least. The fate of a humanity condemned ultimately to perish from cold is not worth troubling about. If you take it to heart it becomes an unendurable tragedy. If you believe in improvement you must weep, for the attained perfection must end in cold, darkness and silence. In a dispassionate view the ardour for reform, improvement for virtue, for knowledge, and even for beauty is only a vain sticking up for appearances as though one were anxious about the cut of one's clothes in a community of blind men (*Collected Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 16-17).

What has been termed the Conradian ethic is based, paradoxically, on acknowledging this darkly existential condition while nonetheless remaining faithful to one's human commitments.

Having spent much of his early career as a writer using his own experiences and observations as grist for his art (most of his early tales are

set at sea or in parts of the world to which he had traveled during his years as a seaman), Conrad now, after completing *Typhoon* (1903), began to treat subjects that were remote from his own experiences. This was in part a strategic shift of gears: he did not like the idea of being thought of as a writer whose sole subject matter was seafaring. The great political novels *Nostromo* (1904), *The Secret Agent* (1907), and *Under Western Eyes* (1911) were his primary achievements during this period. His political interests found expression at this time in nonfiction writings as well, most notably the 1905 essay “Autocracy and War,” which he wrote on the occasion of the defeat of Russia in the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese War. In this essay, Conrad astutely analyzes the increasingly bellicose climate of Europe generally, asserting that it has become “an armed and trading continent, the home of slowly maturing economical contests for life and death, and of loudly proclaimed world-wide ambitions” and presciently warning of the growing danger of German militarism (*The Works of Joseph Conrad: Notes on Life and Letters*, p. 112). He also used the piece on behalf of his homeland with the assertion that “[t]he common guilt of the two [that is, German and Russian] Empires is defined precisely by their frontier line running through the Polish provinces” (p. 95). He would in later years take up this issue at greater length in the polemical essays “A Note on the Polish

Problem” (1916) and “The Crime of Partition” (1919), in which he would represent the Poles as “Western” rather than “Slavonic” and would appeal to the “Western Powers” to protect Poland from the twin evils of “Russian Slavonism” and “Prussian Germanism” based on “the moral and intellectual kinship of that distant outpost of their own type of civilisation” (pp. 131, 135).

Public affirmations of loyalty to Poland appear to have been very important for Conrad, particularly following a debate that had transpired at the turn of the century in the Polish press over the emigration of talent.

During this debate he was publicly denounced by one of Poland’s most famous novelists for alleged disloyalty for having emigrated to Britain and chosen to write in the English language. So acutely sensitive was he to such charges that he contended in a 1901 letter to a fellow Pole (who happened to share the name Józef Korzeniowski), on the matter of his adoption of an Anglicized pseudonym,

I have in no way disavowed either my nationality or the name we share for the sake of success. It is widely known that I am a Pole and that Józef [and] Konrad are my two Christian names, the latter being used by me as a surname so that foreign mouths should not distort my real surname.... It does not seem to me that I

have been unfaithful to my country by having proved to the English that a gentleman from the Ukraine can be as good a sailor as they, and has something to tell them in their own language (*Collected Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 322-323).

Although the claims of some critics that Conrad's fiction may be viewed primarily as displaced expressions of his own sense of guilt over having abandoned Poland have been taken beyond plausibility, there is no doubt that this issue played a prominent role in his psychology and in the development of his fiction, which pursues with a relentlessness bordering on obsession the themes of conflicted loyalties and betrayal. In fact, his 1912 autobiography, *A Personal Record*, is particularly interesting as a rhetorical effort to represent himself as faithful to his native homeland yet nonetheless as a natural fit for his adoptive country. The latter tendency is epitomized in the author's note he wrote for a new edition of the volume in 1919 that includes a rather mysterious account of his relationship to the English language, which, it bears recalling in this context, he always spoke with a thick Polish accent:

The truth of the matter is that my faculty to write in English is as natural as any other aptitude with which I might have been born. I have a strange and overpowering feeling that it had always been



an inherent part of myself. English was for me neither a matter of choice nor adoption. The merest idea of choice had never entered my head. And as to adoption—well, yes, there was adoption; but it was I who was adopted by the genius of the language, which directly I came out of the stammering stage made me its own so completely that its very idioms I truly believe had a direct action on my temperament and fashioned my still plastic character (*The Works of Joseph, Conrad: A Personal Record*, p. vii).

He even went so far as to deny the formative influence on him of French writers in order, as Najder characterizes it, “to erase from his literary biography any elements which might detract from his reputation as a classic of the English literary tradition” (p. 433).

In addition to the conflict over his dual national allegiances, Conrad was faced with the dilemma of how to negotiate the conflicting exigencies of two distinct audiences for his fiction. Subsequent to the education reform movement of the 1870s (a series of acts passed by Parliament had made elementary education compulsory for all British children), the British reading public had increasingly divided into a new mass readership and a highbrow readership. Although Conrad’s loyalties were with the latter, he was financially dependent on the former, and, despite his begrudging efforts

to appeal to a popular readership, his books simply would not sell well. Unsuccessful in attracting a popular readership, he attempted to make his writing more lucrative by adapting his fiction for the stage, but the results of this endeavor were disappointing as well. Although he blithely claimed of his 1905 adaptation of his short story "To-morrow" (under the title *One Day More*) that he was content to have "an exceptionally intelligent audience stare... it coldly off the boards" ("The Censor of Plays" in *The Works of Joseph Conrad: Notes on Life and Letters*, p. 77), privately he had made clear that he had been hoping it would make him solvent in a way that his fiction had not yet done for him: "my little play.... may lead to the end of all my financial troubles," he had optimistically speculated (*Collected Letters*, vol. 3, p. 237). The first substantial sign of a change in this situation was the 1912 publication of *Twixt Land and Sea* (including the fine short story "The Secret Sharer"), which garnered unprecedentedly high sales for him. Yet it would not be until the publication of the novel *Chance*, in 1914, that he would have an actual best-seller and a measure of relief from his financial burdens. From this point on, Conrad was marketable.

In an irony of the sort that is characteristic of his own fiction, however, Conrad's newfound popularity coincided with a dramatic and permanent diminution in his powers as a writer. Indeed, the fact that Henry James,

whom Conrad viewed as the greatest authority on the art of the novel form, had been sharply critical of *Chance* made painfully clear to him that the work's fame and its artistic quality were not proportional to each other. The decline that had begun with *Chance* steepened with his next novel, *Victory* (1915), and his subsequent fiction, with the notable exception of the novella *The Shadow-Line* (1917), is inferior still. Some critics identify this process as having begun with his nervous collapse in 1910 after completing *Under Western Eyes*. So torturous was the writing of this book that even for Conrad, for whom completion of a novel was often the occasion for physical and emotional breakdown, it was extreme: he collapsed with fever, raved, and spent three months in bed recuperating. Yet regardless of whether one can identify the deterioration in the quality of his fiction with a particular event, it is apparent that his mode of creativity was not sustainable either physically or psychologically.

Other circumstances no doubt contributed as well to his decline. The fact that he began writing at a relatively advanced age meant that the duration of his career would be correspondingly short, and his creative difficulties later in life were surely exacerbated by various burdens, such as the chronically poor health of his wife and the long-term effects of shell shock experienced by his son Borys in the trenches of World War I. It is also important to

recognize that the tendency to dismiss Conrad's later work may not altogether do justice to it, and critics have begun to reassess that work and to challenge the assumption that it is wholly substandard. Yet despite how one judges the quality of Conrad's output during his last decade, what is clear is that the popularity of that work led to belated appreciation of his earlier books as well as numerous reprintings of them, most notably in the form of a pair of prematurely titled "collected editions" that were published in Britain and America in 1920 and 1921. Riding the crest of his popular success, in 1923 he embarked on a reading tour in the United States, where for the first time he found himself a center of public interest. In the following year, his mounting accolades in Britain culminated in the offer of a knighthood, although, in keeping with his propensity for turning down public honors, he declined to accept it. He died of a heart attack on August 3, 1924, at the age of sixty-six, and was buried near his home in a Roman Catholic cemetery in Canterbury. Although his reputation ebbed slightly in the years after his death, by the 1940s he was generally acknowledged to be among a handful of the greatest writers of his era, an estimation that has never faltered since.

### **"Youth," "Amy Foster," and "The Secret Sharer"**

For both practical and artistic reasons, the short story form was important to

Conrad. On the practical side, before he became a popular success, it provided the chronically debt-ridden author with a more dependable source of income than did the novel form; both in Britain and America, magazines during this era tended to pay well for short fiction, whereas selling a novel was always a dicey proposition. Yet he was also deeply invested in the short story as an aesthetic form, as was the case with several of the authors whom he most admired, such as Guy de Maupassant. Unlike Maupassant's compact, elliptical stories, however—and despite his own assertion that “[i]t takes a small-scale narrative (short story) to show the master's hand” (*Collected Letters*, vol. 1, p. 124)—Conrad's stories tend to be long and richly detailed, and, as his creative imagination was constantly at work reshaping and augmenting his material, they invariably threatened to evolve into novellas and even full-scale novels. In fact, nearly all of his novels were initially envisioned as short stories. In his entire career, to the consternation of his publishers and his literary agent, he brought only one work of fiction in at the length he had projected (the 1897 short story “The Lagoon”), and he completed very few works by the times to which he had agreed. Writing either to a set length or to a deadline was anathema to this temperamental artist.

The three short stories included in this volume are generally recognized

to be among Conrad's finest examples of the genre. As is the case with much of his fiction, all three stories deal with the theme of the dangers of sea travel, a preoccupation that stems from his first career as a seaman. Further, all three stories demonstrate Conrad's proclivity for transmitting information through the refracting lenses of specific subjectivities—in the case of "Youth" and "Amy Foster" (each of which is a frame-tale narrative, or a story within a story), multiple subjectivities. Yet despite these thematic and formal similarities, they also present Conrad in three different modes, and each displays different of his skills. While reading any one of these stories on its own is illuminating, for reasons that are detailed below, when read together they yield considerably more than the sum of their parts.

"Youth" (1898) consists of the reminiscences of the English seaman Charlie Marlow, Conrad's most famous narrator, to a group of his friends, one of whom subsequently passes the story on to the reader. The outlook Marlow here recalls—in sharp contrast to that of the next of Conrad's tales he will narrate, the broodingly pessimistic *Heart of Darkness* —is unencumbered by introspection and psychological conflict. Yet this is not to say that the story runs no deeper than the insights of its reckless, twenty-year-old protagonist (whose limited outlook the wistful, now forty-two-year-old Marlow scrupulously reproduces); on the contrary, "Youth" contains much

more than its boy's-adventure-tale surface immediately discloses. The story Marlow recounts is of his ill-fated first voyage as second mate on an aged, poorly maintained ship that is supposed to deliver a load of coal from England to Siam (modern Thailand). After several months of false starts, crew changes, and long periods of waiting for repairs to be done, the barely seaworthy craft finally sets off. The comedy of errors that is the voyage culminates when, *en route* in the Indian Ocean, the cargo of coal catches fire. The crewmen make futile attempts to put out the fire and then are nearly killed in an explosion that compels them finally to abandon the now-sinking ship. Marlow is put in charge of one of the lifeboats with two other men, and, proud to assume his first "command," he successfully leads his boat ashore, having had a memorable adventure and an initiation of sorts into manhood.

Although the story draws heavily on Conrad's own experiences from 1881 to 1883 as second mate on the *Palestine* (here renamed the *Judea*), which would conclude with his first voyage to southeast Asia, his claims in the 1917 author's note that the tale constitutes "a feat of memory" and "a record of experience" (p. 4) are decidedly inaccurate. For example, Marlow's account of the acts of recklessness committed by those in charge is heavily embellished from the facts: Captain Beard's decision to keep his

crew on the clearly doomed *Judea*, Captain Nash's decision to deliver mail rather than rescue Captain Beard and his crew, and Marlow's own decision to place the lives of the two men in his lifeboat in jeopardy by remaining silent about a ship that could potentially rescue them simply so he can continue his romantic adventure—any of these actions would have been sufficient to lead to charges that would have stripped the perpetrator of his officer's certificate. (A court of inquiry was convened in Singapore to investigate the loss of the *Palestine*, and no such findings were made.)

Actually, the *Palestine* sank not far from shore, so even to the extent that those three decisions may correspond to the facts, the perils associated with them in the fictional version do not reflect the real circumstances. Rather attached to the myths he had created of his maritime career, as well as to his honor, Conrad was not pleased when, in 1922, this fact was unearthed and publicized.

What is perhaps the story's most interesting departure from the facts, however, was hardly a secret: the recasting of the Polish Conrad as the Englishman Marlow. Further, it is not only the author who is reinvented as an Englishman. Whereas the group with whom Conrad actually served on the *Palestine* could hardly have been of more international composition—although the captain and several of the crew were English, there were also