

JOSEPH CONRAD KORZENIOWSKI  
AND HIS POLISH HERITAGE

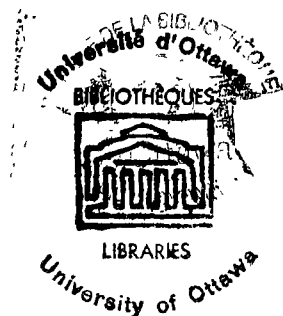
A Thesis presented to the  
Faculty of the Faculty of Arts,  
of Ottawa University, in part  
fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts

by

Richard John Pyszkowski

Brooklyn, New York

1952



UMI Number: EC55544

### INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

**UMI<sup>®</sup>**

---

UMI Microform EC55544  
Copyright 2011 by ProQuest LLC  
All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against  
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

---

ProQuest LLC  
789 East Eisenhower Parkway  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This thesis was prepared under the direction of Dr. Teodor Domaradzki, director of the East and South European Institute at the University of Ottawa.

The writer wishes to express his gratitude to the Paderewski Foundation which had made it possible for American students to further their education in Slavic Studies at the University of Ottawa through the East and South European Institute.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE.....	5
III. CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER.....	19
IV. CONRAD'S POLISH TRAITS.....	55
V. CONRAD'S FORM OF EXPRESSION.....	74
VI. POLONISMS IN CONRAD'S <u>CHANCE</u> .....	89
VII. CONCLUSION.....	101
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	104

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

It is a far cry from the knight-errantry of Polish exiles fighting for the liberty of other nations in the world's revolutions during a hundred years, to the strange phenomenon of avocation for a seafaring life asserting itself with elemental force from adolescence in the son of an inland race which had never produced great sailors. And even more amazing than the seafaring career of a Polish country gentleman in the British merchant service is the subsequent fact that this Pole, who until the age of twenty-one did not know a word of English, should, after enforced premature retirement from the life of a sea-captain, use the accumulated experience of that life to make of it the texture of twenty-eight volumes of great literature in the English language. However much-or little-incidental circumstances may contribute to elucidate this marvel of a Polish country gentleman who became a British sailor and then a great English writer, it is in the last

## INTRODUCTION

resort, the ever-inscrutable secret of the workings of inborn creative genius which must account for the unique personality and career of Joseph Conrad Korzeniowski.

All of Conrad's literary works were created in the English language and a major portion of his life was spent in England. Due to these facts there is a tendency on the part of some people, to unconsciously minimize the Polish heritage of Joseph Conrad Korzeniowski.

Conrad spent seventeen years of his life in Poland. During this period certain Polish traits were embedded into his mind and character. The writer wishes to show certain influences of Conrad's Polish back ground in his practices while away from his native land. These influences must be divided into two groups; the primary investigation pertains to the Polish traits and influences in Conrad's every day life and actions. The secondary investigation(which is equal in importance with the primary investigation)pertains to the Polish traits, characteristics and influences in his

## INTRODUCTION

chosen profession, namely, the Polish influences in Conrad's literary writings. The writer is also interested in determining the causes of Conrad's departure from Poland and the reasons for his writing in English rather than in Polish.

The writer wishes to present specific examples<sup>h</sup> were errors in Conrad's written English can be attributed to his knowledge of the Polish language. The writer wishes to bring to light specific examples that show Conrad was a true Pole.

There is an inadequate amount of work available on the Polish aspect of Conrad's life and literature. Taking all facts into consideration the writer felt a strong need for research in this field. The writer's knowledge of both Polish and English enabled him to accurately detect and record errors in Conrad's written English, which can be attributed to his Polish background. Through library research the writer was able to show; Conrad's reasons for leaving Poland, reasons for his writing in English rather than Polish, and specific examples

## INTRODUCTION

proving Conrad's Polish traits.

The three main sources of information used in this research were:

1. Every important English book, article, and sketch pertaining to Joseph Conrad.
2. Such first-hand information as letters written by Conrad to his relatives and intimate friends, the memoirs of these friends, and the official biography.
3. Every important Polish article, sketch, and books, including translations of Conrads works into Polish.

## CHAPTER II

### BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

To few men is it given to possess the abilities which resulted in the two long and yet separate careers of Joseph Conrad, as seaman and as novelist. The first saw him rise in nine years from seaman to captain; the second saw him begin as a promising novelist and end as perhaps the greatest writer of his times. His origin as Pole and his development as French and later as English seaman are well-known. What is less well-known is how completely his second career had its roots in his first. The creative works of Joseph Conrad almost never reflected contemporary life, that is that present which had begun with the publication of his first novel and his permanent establishment in England. They reflected the past, not only the more than twenty adventurous years preceding the completion of his first novel, but the unhappy Russo-Polish childhood, of exile and privation.

Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski, born on December 3, 1857, in a country manor of the Ukrainian

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

border province of the old Poland (then under Russian rule), was the son of a father who combined literary culture and ability with a fiery and adventurous disposition. Appollo Nałęcz Korzeniowski was a gifted writer of Polish prose and verse, and a prolific translator of Shakespeare, Victor Hugo, Alfred de Vigny, and other foreign masters. He showed neither capacity nor inclination for those agricultural occupations which constituted the life of his class, and abandoned the country, first for the provincial town, and then for Warsaw, to make a living by his pen, as a journalist and a man of letters. His wife came from the Bobrowski family, who differed from the Korzeniowskis by greater steadiness and resolution in their pursuits, though somewhat lacking in imagination and enterprise; her brother Thaddeus was to become Conrad's paternal protector, adviser, and benefactor throughout the stormy years of youth and early manhood. In Conrad's own temperament the romantic eccentricity of his father seems to have been blended with something of the determination and self-

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

command of the Bobrowski stock, which helped him to work his way through all obstacles toward the seemingly fantastic aims, first of a sea-captaincy, and then of a literary success.

Apollo Korzeniowski's activities in the early sixties were political as well as literary. Hopes for the emancipation of Russian Poland from Tsarist rule were running high under the reign of Alexander II, and public opinion was seething with the excitement of controversies as to ways and means of achieving that end. Conrad's father naturally found himself on the side of the "Reds," who were conspiring for an armed rising against Russia. A few months before the ill-fated insurrection of 1863 broke out as a result of these activities, Apollo Korzeniowski was arrested and was soon sentenced to exile. From the dreary distance of far-off provincial Russian towns the exile anxiously followed the disastrous course of the national struggle. Two of his brothers were killed in the insurrectionary war, and a third was sent to

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Siberia. His own wife, who had nobly and dutifully followed him into exile, died by his side in the bloom of her youth, a victim of hardships and privations.<sup>1</sup>

The broken man, left alone with the little boy, was at last allowed to leave Russia, and settled in Austrian Poland, where he soon died in Poland's ancient capital Kraków. "It was in that old royal and academical city"-so Conrad himself tells us in *POLAND REVISITED*-"that I ceased to be a child, became a boy, had known the friendships, the admirations, the thoughts and the indignations of that age."

At the bedside of his dying father, Conrad omnivorously and haphazardly read many books, books in most cases far too serious for his age. He read for many hours on end, day after day, in their small silent home on the outskirts of Tchernikow. He revelled in books

---

<sup>1</sup> Aubry, G. Jean, Joseph Conrad Life and Letters, New York; Doubleday, Page and Co. 1927, Vol. I, pg.14.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

which described countries where it was possible to breathe and act freely, to fight openly, if necessary. And to speak thoughts above a whisper. A longing was born in him to fly to those strange distant countries where one could be free. Sometimes these were Polish books, but more often they were French, for French literature often escaped the supervision of the Russian authorities. Conrad was born with a strong imagination, and sensitiveness, had been intensified by the sight of the sufferings of those he loved. Through his readings and private tutoring, Conrad learned fluent French.<sup>2</sup> As a child he read Victor Hugo's Toilers of the Sea. "It was the first book that directed his imagination toward the sea."<sup>3</sup>

Conrad lost his mother when he was seven. His father died four years later. From that time

---

<sup>2</sup> Conrad's knowledge of French was perfect. He not only spoke correctly, with a good accent and with great fluency, but he showed later, as a literary man, a nice feeling for French and a knowledge of the precise meanings of words which many Frenchmen might have envied. J.C. Life and Letters, Vol. I pg. 28.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

he was under the care of a maternal uncle, Thaddeus Bobrowski. His education however was continued, in good part by private tutor. It was natural, that imaginative and moody as he was, even from earliest youth, the boy should seek to escape from the cramped and suffocating atmosphere of Poland. He surprised and disappointed his uncles and cousins by expressing a wish to go to sea. It was a strong desire coming from an individual whose roots lay in the completely land-locked plains of Poland. Persistence won out. He left his beloved native land in 1874, armed only with a few introductions, for the French City of Marseille.<sup>4</sup>

Conrad began a new life in France. Early in 1875 he was already making his first voyage as a merchant marine cadet. He spent over three years learning seamanship mostly in the Mediterranean,

---

<sup>3</sup> J. C. Aubry, Joseph Conrad Life and Letters. Vol. I, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.29.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

undergoing adventures which later played a part in essays and novels, particularly The Mirror of the Sea, and The Arrow of Gold. In 1878 he signed on an English ship at Marseille and sailed for Lowestoft. On the 18th of June, 1878, at that time almost twenty-one, Conrad, knowing hardly any English, arrived for the first time in the British Isles. He picked up much of the language during coastal voyages between Lowestoft and Newcastle. Then began the first of many long voyages to the South Seas. In October of the same year he sailed for Sydney, Australia.<sup>5</sup>

During the next years Conrad's rise was rapid. He passed in succession the examinations for third, second and first mate, and on November 11, 1886, not much more than eight years after his arrival in England, he received his Master's papers. In August he had been naturalized a British subject.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.47.

<sup>6</sup> Thaddeus Bobrowski tried to persuade his nephew to be naturalized, either as an Austrian,

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

At twenty-nine, Conrad, a foreigner, had successfully convinced the august masters of the British Merchant Marine that he, a Pole, born of an inland people, was the peer of Englishman born to the sea. It was the first of his amazing successes in a transference of roots from one land and life to another.<sup>7</sup>

The years following, as those before, were spent in various commands all over the globe. He added an adventure as mate on a river steamer in the Congo to his sea experiences. His official biographer, G. Jean Aubry, tells us that his experiences in Africa really made a writer of him, as it caused illness which not only permanently incapacitated him for the ardors of sea life, but also caused him to rest quietly for months during

---

English, or Swiss citizen. Conrad, for his part, often thought at Marseilles of becoming a Frenchman. Being a Pole, it was important for him to get rid as soon as possible of the Russian citizenship which the unhappy state of Poland had imposed upon him. There is no doubt that he often bitterly

resented the fact that he could not return to his fatherland without risk. J.C. Life and Letters, G.J.Aubry, Vol I. p.54.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

which he was able to reflect on his past life.<sup>8</sup> But his first experience with writing, dates from a time when he was still actively a seaman. He had submitted a story called "The Black Mate" to a magazine called Tid-Bits in 1885.<sup>9</sup> This story bore no resemblance to the later Conrad and did not, in fact, received any notice at the time. But it is the first hint of his coming metamorphosis. During one of his later voyages, around 1889, Conrad while away the long hours by beginning a novel which was eventually to become Almayer's Folly. He worked at this haphazardly and at odd moments for years-- but seems to have had no serious intention of completing it until an enforced period of six months on land, with much time on his hands, left him free to finish the manuscript.

Partly because of the illness generated

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.88.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.141.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.89.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

in Africa, Conrad could not attend to the exigencies of sea life, with his former ardor. He continued to seek positions on sailing ships (he refused to sail in steam), but, without his knowing it, his career in the maritime service ended on January 14, 1894.<sup>10</sup> There were to be efforts to return to the sea in the next few years, at first because in his mind he was still Korzeniowski, the sea-captain. Later because of the immense difficulties Conrad found in producing honest creative work, and the small rewards it brought. Nevertheless, on that fated day in January 1894, the sea-captain had died. The novelist, so long in gestation, had already been born.<sup>11</sup>

About this time Conrad's impulse toward literature became stronger, than it had ever been up till then. As we learn from the fact that from January to May 1894, he wrote the last three chapters of Almayer's Folly, that is to say, the

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.155.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.154.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

last quarter of the book whose first three quarters had cost him nearly four and a half years to achieve.<sup>12</sup>

Conrad's period as seaman ended in 1894. He often planned to return to the sea during the next five years but never did. From that year until his death in 1924 his major source of income was as novelist. In thirty years he completed more than twenty-seven full-size volumes of careful and skilfully written work. He became completely the artist, and set his mind as forcefully to becoming a success in writing as he had done in seamanship. His obstacles were numerous: he was already in his thirties when he started, he was working in his third language, (Polish was his first, and French his second), and he was a man in exile both in mind and heart. He triumphed over all these obstacles. Before his death Joseph Conrad was honored throughout the world. Fame had been his for years; wealth to, although it

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 158.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

came late, was his in the last years of life.

Conrad married an English girl,<sup>13</sup>

Miss Jessie George, shortly after the publication of his second novel, An Outcast of the Island in 1896. They had two children, Alfred Borys and John. Borys became an officer of artillery in the British forces during the first World War.

In 1914, Conrad returned to the Country which he had left some forty years Before (he always overlooked the few, sad days he spent there at the funeral of his uncle), the country in which he had been born, which he had loved in his own way, which he was most anxious to revisit now that he achieved abroad everything he attempted to do, which he wanted to present to his wife and sons. During his visit, which was interrupted by the war, Conrad had the opportunity to relive his childhood in a new free Kraków. He happily

---

<sup>13</sup> In March 1896, he married Miss Jessie George, a young girl whose acquaintance he had made eighteen months earlier at his friends, the Hopes. J.C. Life and Letters. Vol I. p.163.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

toured the city and proudly showed his family and friends the reliques of the past. Conrad was very happy to return to his homeland and mentioned to a friend, " it is a great happiness to me that at last I have come here with my wife and sons and have shown them that il y a quelque chose derriere moi."<sup>14</sup> And in this saying was the real soul of Conrad, his true sentimental entanglement. Conrad visited Poland only twice since his departure in 1894. He made several visits to France and the Continent and one trip to the United States. Aside from these short trips, Conrad spent all his literary life on the British Isles.

Chronically ill during his later years, the effects of exposure suffered during his maritime career, he persisted in writing to the very last. Conrad was working on the novel Suspense up to a few hours before his death.

---

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Retinger, Conrad and His Contemporaries, Roy Pub. New York, 1943, p.155.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The end came suddenly on August 3, 1924. He had been resting in his study after apparently recovering from a severe bout of illness. There was a cry of "Here!" and the sound of a fall.<sup>15</sup> Friends rushed into his room. The Pole in exile, who had transferred root, heart and branch to a fresh flowering and great honor in strange soil, had quietly passed on.

---

<sup>15</sup> Richard Curle, The last Twelve Years of Joseph Conrad, London, Sampson, Low, Marston and Company, 1928, p. 232.

## CHAPTER III

### CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

I shall here attempt to give a brief outline of just what things were learned in reference to Joseph Conrad's reputation. Conrad had the makings of a "reputation" almost from the first. His critical reputation had reached its apex as early as 1900, upon the appearance of Lord Jim. His great popular reputation was not made until 1914, with the success of Chance.

There was an amazingly rapid rise in critical acceptance between Almayer's Folly (1895), and Lord Jim (1900). After Lord Jim there was a levelling off, perhaps even a slight decline during the next dozen or so years. It is possible that a negative critical reaction which did not become important until the 1930's might have had its effect as early as 1914, were it not for the great sales of Chance and succeeding volumes, which dammed up protesting murmurs for almost a generation.

It was the great paradox of most of Conrad's writing life, that even though he received

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

tremendous praise during the early years of his career he was never popular. His reputation was restricted to a small coterie of "those in the know." For more years than was bearable he lived in poverty, always expecting that "success" which would take him out of the hands of the few, and bring him a respectable livelihood. But even as early as the start of his career his reputation was divided among two main groups; the reviewers, and the critical intelligentsia.<sup>1</sup>

Inevitably it was the reviewers who had the first opportunity to make Conrad's reputation. They did so with Almayer's Folly. Conrad's first novel had a tremendous critical success. But the reviewers were like blind men. As a group they sensed that they had something, but they weren't quite certain of what they had. A number predicted a place for him amongst the ranking novelists of the day. And the whisper "genius"

---

<sup>1</sup> Hugh Walpole, Joseph Conrad, Henry Holt Co., 1921, New York. p.33.

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

was already abroad. With only occasional exceptions the grounds for appreciation were based on exotic regionalism, on lush descriptions of jungle lands and peoples. Hardly a quality for which Conrad was later to be famous was remarked by these earlier critics. And yet their reviews gave him his "push!" Conrad himself had little more than contempt for the every-day reviewers, and throughout his life expressed surprise when occasionally one or another of them showed a sign of critical intelligence.<sup>2</sup>

The critical intelligentsia of England were aware of the existence of Conrad by the time his second novel came out. H. G. Wells was delighted

---

<sup>2</sup> Tags which the reviewers hung on Conrad tended to last. That of exoticism did not disappear until long after Conrad novels had ceased to have jungle settings. Succeeding books gave rise to new catch-words. An Outcast of the Islands brought out the catch-phrase "romantic-realist" and that other from which Conrad's name was never to be separated, "psychologist." The third book, The Nigger of the Narcissus, brought credit for impressionism and the tag, "writer of sea tales."

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

with An Outcast of the Islands. His laudatory review resulted in his friendship with Conrad. Such contacts were readily made in the England of those days. Through Edward Garnett, the publisher's reader who had "discovered" him, through the mere existence of his two novels, Conrad's acquaintanceship among the literary intellectuals rapidly widened. These people passed the word to one another. They wrote letters of appreciation to each other and to Conrad. Many of these have been preserved and published for the benefit of a less informed posterity.<sup>3</sup> The intelligentsia formed that small sure group to whom Conrad addressed himself in his novels, in the belief that he would be appreciated as he wished to be appreciated by these few men. Without the approval of his coterie Conrad would not have found it worthwhile to continue writing. Occasionally, even in early years, a Garnett, a Hugo Clifford

---

<sup>3</sup> Best collection of such letters are to be found in G. Jean Aubry's *Joseph Conrad Life and Letters*.

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

or an Arthur Quiller-Couch would get the opportunity to review a Conrad novel in one of the better magazines. Then Conrad would receive the sort of appreciation he felt he deserved. The notion, which Conrad's coterie possessed, that he could be understood only by the intelligent few, eventually seeped down to the reviewers, who used it as an excuse for their frequent inability to enjoy reading a Conrad novel. They often remarked that Conrad's appeal was restricted to a perspective few, thereby further frightening away whatever chance Conrad may have had for a popular public. From the start, many of the false notions about Conrad were perpetuated by the reviewers.<sup>4</sup>

Conrad was even less known in America than in England. Here, for long, not even the reviewers gave him credit, and his sales were even smaller than in England. With the exception of so rare and

---

<sup>4</sup> Richard Curle, Joseph Conrad, London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co. Ltd. 1914, pg. 19.

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

sensitive a soul as Stephen Crane,<sup>5</sup> Americans as a group ignored Conrad at first. His reputation reached the Continent early, however. By the early 1900's his works were being translated into French. A popular German reprint house had several Conrads titles on its lists, and there was talk of translating his work into Polish as early as the 90's.<sup>6</sup>

With the publication of Lord Jim Conrad's early literary reputation reached its zenith. He was everywhere applauded, everywhere celebrated, and the reviewers had gotten into the habit of repeating the catchphrases of the intelligentsia in describing Conrad's "subtlety," "art," "psychological" knowledge of his characters, and remarkable "mosaic" technique. The applause and the celebration

---

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Crane (1870-1900) An American novelist and poet. A New York newspaper correspondent. published many books, the most popular-The Red Badge of Courage, 1896.

<sup>6</sup> G. Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad Life and Letters Vol. II London, W. Heinemann 1927, p2.

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

of course, were confined "to those who could appreciate."

A single definitive volume as a crowning achievement was sought. Then for twenty months Conrad "struggled with the Lord" to produce Nostramo. He had been accused of being unable to properly construct a novel. Nostramo was aimed at correcting this defect. It was full of characters in complex interrelationship in a many-sided plot. Nevertheless Nostramo failed to achieve its object. The critics, instead of noting advancement were led to expressions of mild disappointment. There was much praise, but it was evident that the novel was not quite what it had aimed to be. Psychologically Nostramo was a turning point for Conrad. The effort had been enormously strenuous, and it had failed. Thereafter, for many years, he contented himself with easier tasks, the kinds of writing in which he had already proven himself, and which he knew he could produce with ease.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Letter to J. B. Pinker, p. 61 (October 10, 1907).

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

The result of Nostromo's falling short, and the consequent veering away from the task of attempting to achieve a fusion of his abilities in a masterpiece during succeeding years, was a levelling off in Conrad's reputation. Lord Jim had been his greatest novel so far. He had not surpassed it, therefore it was his peak achievement; he was going a little on the downgrade. The years between the publication of Nostromo (1903) and that of Chance (1914), saw Conrad turn first to the production of a book of essays, The Mirror of Sea (1906), then to novels which were essentially tours de force, and essays and short stories. The two novels, The Secret Agent, (1907) and Under Western Eyes (1911) were actually evasions on the issue. The former was an attempt to deal with espionage agents currently operating in the England of his times. Conrad thought he had produced a simple, straightfoward tale, almost a detective story. It was found to be confused, unclear and diäätory. He was accused of imitating the complex

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

style of Henry James,<sup>8</sup> without aid to his own peculiar methods. Under Western Eyes concerned revolutionaries and terrorists operating on the Continent. It was compared to Russian novels, Conrad being likened to Dostoyevsky, Turgenev, and Tolsoy,<sup>9</sup> but it was not really the forcefully unique work for which the critics had been looking.

The Mirror of the Sea (1906) and A Personal Record (1912), helped perpetuate Conrad's reputation as a splendid and unique stylist, a brilliant technician, but the former was for him essentially an exercise in technique, the latter a biographical memoir written at the insistence of a magazine editor.

Offshoots of Conrad's profuse talent were the short stories contained in A SET OF SIX (1908)

---

<sup>8</sup> Henry James. 1843-1916, Anglo American novelist born in New York. James's originality, his distinction of style and his finess of feeling are acknowledged by all and place him very close to the first rank of modern writers.

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

and 'Twixt Land and Sea (1912). He had repeatedly demonstrated his ability with fiction which did not require the tight construction of the novel, and in these collections he did so again.

Through the years Conrad had come to the realization that there was not going to be that single masterpiece which would simultaneously fuse and exemplify his achievements. Writing became increasingly difficult. His lasting poverty forced him to write under pressure. It was all he could do to maintain the creative effort year after year.

As years passed Lord Jim was constantly referred to in the absence of another, as the example par excellence of its author's abilities, and for comparison purposes. Conrad occupied much too hallow a niche in contemporary literature to be directly attacked. There was, in those days, too much respect for the skill and technique of writing alone for him to suffer any great loss in esteem. But there were little expressions of

---

<sup>9</sup> R. Curle, Joseph Conrad; 1914, London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd. p 111.

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

disappointment in the beginning of a reaction, or at least a real split in critical acceptance in the years immediately preceding the publication of Chance. Arnold Bennett was one of those who expressed discontent when he said that there was in every generation one artist who occupied a sacred niche which would not be touched. His generation had reserved that niche for Conrad. But surely, artist that he was, he wasn't the only artist on the island. It was noted by some critics that in a certain closed circle one could say no wrong of Conrad, and F. P. Adams, the humorist, observed that he could not understand why he "ought" to like Conrad when he couldn't. There were those who openly declared that he was overrated. All these murmurs were washed away after 1913 in the great wave of popularity which swept Conrad up. But they recurred in the late twenties, when the wave was dying down, and became part of the reaction against Conrad.

Despite the tremors of disappointment and dissatisfaction, Conrad's reputation was actually enormous during the whole period before the appearance

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

of Chance. Every outstanding writer and critic of his times knew him, and most knew him personally. From about 1907 on, numerous critical studies of his works appeared. The first of these was actually written by an American, John Albert Macy, for the Atlantic Monthly, and such eminent figures as Ford Madox Ford, John Galsworthy, and Henry James contributed their studies. There was general critical acceptance of Conrad in America by 1907. The vast increase in number and variety of articles about Conrad after 1907 indicated how widespread his reputation had become.

Chance brought Conrad the popular success and the financial rewards which had been so long delayed. It was a return in part to the sea, and to a novel of broad canvas. Nevertheless it did not attempt to achieve that perfection in art which ~~NOSTROMO~~ had failed to do, as Conrad no longer felt capable of such an effort. Chance had no special qualities to recommend it over other Conrad novels. The reviewers expressed no particular

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

approbation of it. Circumstances, events and a planned publicity campaign had long prepared the public for this novel. It was serialized in the Sunday edition of the New York Herald during 1912, bringing Conrad's name to the attention of scores of thousands who had never heard of him before. After that, the powerful American publishers of Doubleday, Page took an interest in Conrad. They undertook a publicity campaign which helped push the sale of the book when it came out.

The success of Chance was in reality comparatively small in terms of volume sales--originally 15,000, but it made Conrad known to the general public. Victory (1915) became one of the fifty best-sellers of its year in the United States. Later books, The Rescue, The Shadow Line, The Arrow of Gold, and the Rover eclipsed in popularity anything Conrad had previously published. Doubleday in America and Dent in England became Conrad's official publishers. A collected edition was issued in 1920. During the early 20's

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

a calculated publicity and advertising campaign (which included Conrad's visit to America, although Conrad did not make the trip purely for business purposes), sold and over-sold the novelist to the tune of hundreds of thousands of sets.<sup>10</sup>

The seeds of the later reaction against Conrad were planted in the decade 1910-1920. The "higher" critics had already begun to speak out, but the popular reaction was being prepared by the tremendous over-selling of Conrad. His peak in popularity was reached in 1925, and then there was a rapid decline. By the 30's his reputation was in eclipse. During the decade 1930-1940 little was written or said about Joseph Conrad.

It is only in recent years that there has been a revival of interest, but this time it has been as a classic writer. The misconception as romantic sea writer, and as the author of adventurous tales are still broadcast, and will continue to do harm, but Conrad has achieved the critical reputation

---

<sup>10</sup>Edward Garnett, Letters from Joseph Conrad, 1895-1924, 1928, p. 274.

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

of a writer's writer. He is studied in the classroom and by the scholar. Conrad is coming to be accepted as the outstanding English writer of the Edwardian era, above the best of the contemporaries of a comparatively shallow literary era. His reputation is higher than that of Bennett, Wells or Galsworthy.

Nevertheless Conrad's permanent reputation must rest on a comparatively slim body of work. Two novels, The Nigger of the Narcissus (1897) and Lord Jim (1900) stand as his great artistic achievements. The short stories, "Youth" (1898), "Heart of Darkness" (1898) and "Typhoon" (1901) must also take their place in any final critical appraisal. Strangely enough these novels and tales are all the product of a single golden era, about five years of writing between 1896 and 1901. Indisputably these few works place Conrad above the best of his Contemporaries.

During his lifetime Conrad was considered apart from his contemporaries. He was "different." No one attempted to rate the strange Pole who wrote

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

exotic English among purely English writers. Today the reluctance to give Conrad a place among the living of his time is explained. Of them all he is the only one who has become a classic. Even then it was suspected that he really belonged among the dead--the dead who are immortal.

Neither the contemporary critics nor Conrad were ever able to give the real reasons why he was incapable of producing a single artistic masterpiece. More sensitive even than the best of his critics, Conrad was aware that Lord Jim, which most seemed to regard as his best work, was far from being a single unique achievement. He wanted Nostromo, his great effort, to be regarded as best, but that was more a wish than a belief. He was perfectly aware that he failed, but he gave the wrong reasons for failure. He felt that he had not the strength, nor any longer the courage, or perhaps even the imagination, to produce the climactic work. But all strength and courage and imagination in the world would not have been enough, for Conrad could not break down the psychology of

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

escape, resulting in narrow intellectual convictions, which characterized his personality. His maximum limitations as a writer were established when he was a child in Poland. He could never go beyond them.

There is a curious parallelism in the careers of James Joyce<sup>11</sup> and Joseph Conrad. Both men were in exile. Both were products of fettered and oppressed countries, where nationalism and patriotic pride had burned for centuries. Both were born Roman Catholics in nations where Catholicism was still a ruling force in the national life. Both had left family, nation, race, to seek freedom and a better way of life. But here the parallelism ends.

Joyce was essentially a rebel, Conrad an escapist. Joyce was of the middle-class, Conrad of the gentility. Where Joyce had consciously revolted against his religion Conrad had merely chosen to

---

<sup>11</sup> James Joyce, 1882-1941, Irish author born in Rathgar, Dublin on Feb. 2, 1882. A measure of his total achievement, may well be T.S. Eliot's remark that Joyce was the greatest master of the English language since Milton.

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

leave it in the background.<sup>12</sup> The conditions of Conrad's leaving Poland made it more an escape from what might have been actual physical oppression, than the spiritual rebellion of Joyce against the narrowing influence of Irish life and times. Conrad left Poland to escape the struggle for freedom which was as much his heritage as it was his father's. He escaped, but was left with a sense of guilt, with the sense of duty not performed. He did not despise his people, or belittle them. What he did was to seek a personal and individual escape both for himself, and from problems he was unable to bring himself to face. Although he sought freedom almost as Joyce did: because there was no freedom of the spirit or the mind in his native land, and although he was equally justified in seeking this freedom, Conrad's sense of guilt overwhelmed his sense of justice at his escape.

For twenty years he played the role of

---

<sup>12</sup> Jessie Conrad, Joseph Conrad as I Knew Him, New York, Doubleday, 1926, pp.29.

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

the escapist. He sought not to destroy old roots, but rather to forget them, and he roamed the seas, as an unreflective, active mariner. And then things happened: illness, the decline in number of sailing ships, making berths unavailable. He was forced to spend long quiet periods on land.<sup>13</sup> A process of reflection began. His native talent, long-buried, asserted itself. He began to write.

But what was his objective of writing?

His first novels concerned men who had made strong impressions on him a few years before while he was in the Southern Pacific. He sought to delineate their personalities, and develop their character disintegration with realistic ruthlessness. No man, whatever his type, was too degraded to be studied, no man, whatever his color or race was beneath the

---

<sup>13</sup> His escapism sought outlets in many ways. His refusal to sail in steam for instance, was not a rebellion so much against the increasing mechanisation of the age as it was an escape from it. He didn't consciously face the issue. He merely "preferred" sail.

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

the dignity of fullscale characterization.

By the time he had written his third book Conrad had developed a creed to which he was to hew unswervingly for the rest of his life. That creed was envisaged in an article he wrote for the New Review, which became the preface of later editions of The Nigger of the Narcissus, and was repeated in A Personal Record.

His objective was Art. That was established in the very first line: "A work that aspires, however humbly, to the condition of art should carry its justification in every line." His creed was stated in another line:

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.<sup>14</sup>

In a later paragraph he condemned the cry "of Art for Art itself." He wished to bring alive to the reader his most sublime experiences. He wished

---

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Conrad, Preface to The Nigger of The Narcissus. pp.xi-xvi, New York, Doubleday Doran, 1938, p.xiv.

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

to make them so lifelike that the reader himself would undergo the same experiences. That was all. Actually it was an extremely limited objective. Art was great, but it was not all, and this was not, despite his statements, more than "art." And art without society, without perspective, without relationship between oneself and ones times, between the individual and civilization, could never be enough. Unfortunately a man like Conrad who had chosen to forget his roots, could not aspire beyond his greed. This established the essential difference between Joyce and Conrad. Joyce had uprooted himself. But he had not forgotten who he was. He could combine his great knowledge, his thinking upon civilization, his own relationship with his society into the telling monument of a Ulysses. The experiences of Joseph Conrad could never be so fused.

For Joyce was conscious, he had awareness. When he sat in his Swiss villa all Ireland was before him, her times, her struggles, her people, his family, his friends, the religion he had known

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

and abandoned. He was self-exiled, but he knew that he could not get Ireland out of his blood. So the scene is always Ireland, however far he may be from the scene, however universal may be his observations. Ireland became the medium for his reflections upon the universe. There is no effort to transplant roots, or to leave roots behind, no will to escape the past. He faces it, he is pained by it, he parodies it, he accepts the inevitable inner conflict and turmoil which reflection upon his early life will bring him. He is the mighty rebel. But Conrad, wishes to forget Poland for a while, his early sense of insecurity, the bitter childhood, the fate of his people.<sup>15</sup> He had no desire to examine himself in relation to the Poland he had left behind.<sup>16</sup> He withdrew from any social context. He wished only to forget,

---

<sup>15</sup> Conrad did not want to forget Poland, in the true meaning that Poland stands for. But wished to forget the Russian Poland in which his mother, father, relatives and friends died and suffered.

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

The original objective of his assumption of British citizenship was to put him out of the reach of Russian oppression, but when he finally did assume it he became more British than the British.<sup>17</sup> He had adopted his new land with all his being, and wished to send new roots into its soil. He became incapable of critically examining society because in England he was an outsider with no roots in any social level, and he had never tried to place himself in perspective to the society he had abandoned.

In A Personal Record Conrad stated that a mysterious compulsion kept him writing year after year, even though at times he felt wearied beyond measure. In letters he often admitted that he feared the pen would go dry, and yet, as often as

---

<sup>16</sup> Although he did not include Poland into his greater works, it cannot be said that he was a unfaithful Pole. In all his works, a Pole was writing and a Polish mind creating.

<sup>17</sup> G. Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad Life and Letters Vol. I, London, William Heinemann, 1927, p. 54.

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

this mournful cry was made he went on writing, as profusely as ever. What was this compulsion? Was it perhaps the need in himself to express that which was permanently blocked--his guilt, his confused and suppressed feelings about his people and his native land?

It is an extraordinary fact that Conrad never permitted the personal to enter his books. Although Marlow stood for Conrad, he was a shadowy figure in the background, standing for little more than chorus and curtain-raiser. There is little revelation of Conrad's own feelings and attitudes in any of his novels. There is no such highly personal protagonist as Stephen Dedalus.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> It became a source of great interest to the people of England that Conrad seemed to cloak himself in mystery. For many years very little was known of his personal life by the great public. When he did open up a little in A Personal Record, it was in the most reserved and general way, covered up with artistic flourishes, and made as much like fiction and as little like the reality as possible. Even in Jessie Conrad's memoirs there is indication that there was little deep understanding between the novelist and the wife. The strange courtship between the forty-year old mariner-novelist and the twenty-five-year old genteel British

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

Conrad consciously avoided the issues of the day. He admitted that he cared little for daily newspapers, and barely glanced at them. Current events, he said, mattered little. And yet he was supposed to have a deep knowledge of Russian, Polish and European history, and the ability to discuss current events with accuracy and discernment. He would never have undertaken Under Western Eyes, if he did not believe that he had a thorough-going understanding of the activities of Russian revolutionaries. The real reason he avoided current issues was that they had nothing to do with his personal struggle. Although he became a patriotic

---

girl was a rush affair, consisting of a few dates over a period of months, characterized by the urgent insistence of Conrad for an immediate marriage, "as he was a dying man." A curious defensive reason for wanting a girl to accept his hand. Jessie's most revered memory of her husband was that he threw spitballs at the breakfast table. She was a good wife and a devoted mother, and Conrad's attitude toward her was by turns childlike and paternal, with much tenderness and affection. But it is doubtful that there was ever any great understanding between them. Not even his wife broke through his basic reserve.

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

British national he wasn't interested in England or the English. Society bored him. He felt apart from it and consciously kept himself apart. The short story "The Return" demonstrated how incapable he was of objectifying himself in relationship to any fixed level of London society. He was a man in exile, out of time, out of place. He had withdrawn his being from Poland, but he could not withdraw Poland from his being. It, and his past were a phantom, haunting him throughout life.

A man can write only of what he knows. Conrad knew little of contemporary England. He was incapable of thoroughly understanding it. He knew much about his own country and his own past, but he had spent twenty years avoiding it. He would not wilfully return to that problem. His field, therefore, was limited to those experiences which were essentially rootless, the knowledge gained of individual character during his twenty years at sea. It is not strange that his two outstanding novels concern themselves with the experiences of a crew on board a sailing ship for two stormy bitter

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

months, and with an individual who acted out his tragedy away from all the complexities of modern civilization. His best short stories are concerned with man's struggle against the elements, and with the adventures of individuals who had sought fortunes or easy living in the faraway places of the earth. People said he did not understand women. It is not true. He amply demonstrated his ability to characterize womanhood in Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of The Island, but when his backgrounds did not permit the entrance of women, as was generally true, he could not write of them. Women are not found in the uncivilized places of the world in proportion to their numbers, and Conrad's accounts deal mostly with the uncivilized places.

A strange affinity between Conrad and the scrap and rubble of the world's men he so often characterized is revealed in that he himself found it expedient to spend much of his career in those South Seas which he describes as the lazy sailor's paradise. The men there were all individuals who

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

could not face the competition of the societies they had known. Conrad was not basically different. He too had run away from the problem created by modern civilization.

His return to England, his settling down in the countryside did not mean that he was going to face realities any more than before. He had no intention of reflecting deeply into his past. He was not going to try to discover the meaning of his existence in relation to the existence of all mankind. He was escaping in another direction. This time he wrote of the life he had known in his years at sea. It is to Conrad's credit that his escapism was not so extensive as to make him "romance" in his writings. He believed in the point of honor. He remembered that he was a gentleman. And so in his novels he attempted to present reality as he had lived it, to visualize situations without gloss, as they had occurred. His evasion was an evasion of the basic issues of his own life. What he did write he attempted to infuse with all the reality and truth of which he was capable.

## CONRAD(S LITERARY CAREER

Conrad could hide from the pursuing phantom of his past, but it emerged in his creations in many guises. The Negro of The Nigger of The Narcissus is almost the incarnation of evil, the demon hanging over ship and men, forcing them to do his bidding by a power which they cannot fathom. In Lord Jim the thesis is a man's escape from his own delicate sense of honor. The point of honor pursues him like a phantom at every port of call, until he has arrived at the most outlandish of places. But even there it catches up with him, and finally rather than escape again, he faces the death which he has felt from the first he rightfully deserved. Conrad's figure of the Negro in The Nigger of The Narcissus is almost an allegory of the fate which awaits all men, in a way they cannot foresee; his obsession with the point of honor in Lord Jim may be likened to his own suppressed feelings in regard to the Poland he had deserted. A number of short stories, notably "Karain" and "The Lagoon" of Tales of Unrest actually have a ghostly phantom of his past, emerging from some misdeed, which he

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

is unable to explain or do away with. There was as real a phantom pursuing Conrad.

The exiled Pole spent his life, avoiding not only the problems of his own past, which were intricately involved with the problems faced by all mankind in the 19th century, but also avoiding the complexities of modern civilization. It was another phase of his escapism that he chose to ship on sailing vessels at a time when these were on the wane and could offer at best a poor livelihood. He could no more face the stern reality of the machine age than he could the social problems which were another product of the age.<sup>19</sup>

In later years Conrad tired of his residences every four or five years, found himself unable to create in the old house and was forced to move. He often complained to his friends of a feeling of being closed in in the house in which he was living, of being oppressed by the woods near his home. The uncanny sense of being followed, or something behind him was always with Conrad. It

---

<sup>19</sup> During his maritime service he refused to sail in steam.

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

was the unexpungable past which he would not openly face, and which haunted him always.<sup>20</sup>

Even in the matter of religion there was a basic difference between Joyce and Conrad. Joyce had conflict with his religion, saw it, and sought to solve it. Conrad was known to be a Roman Catholic, but never indicated either religiosity or the spiritual effects of religion in any of his works.<sup>21</sup> As a problem his religion simply did not exist-- just as politics, society, and contemporary civilization simply did not exist.

Conrad's fear that some day he would no longer be able to write came from the inner conflict

---

<sup>20</sup> Jessie Conrad, Joseph Conrad as I Knew Him, New York, Doubleday, 1926, pp121.

<sup>21</sup> Although Conrad did not include religion into his works the following quotation proves that he had a religion, maybe unproven in his writings but truly proven within the family circle. "His wife (a non-Catholic) and his two sons, Boris and John, both told Father Sheppard that Conrad had died a professed Catholic, asked that there should be a Requiem Mass and a burial with Catholic rites, and assured the priest that this was what Conrad himself would certainly have desired." A. Hilliard Atteridge, Conrad the Catholic, The American Press, Vol XXIII #4 1925, p.79.

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

between his announced objectives and the desire to seek below that barrier which he had closed to his inner life. The sudden appearance of a mature reflective artist, after many years of active, unreflective life, deserves more than the simple explanation of latent talent. Surely the talent was latent, but whence came the maturity, full-blown, in his very first book? In all the years of endless sailing and adventuring Conrad was seeking that which he could find nowhere in the world: his roots. When he could no longer restlessly seek he had to find another outlet, another means of hunting for his roots. The writing was there waiting for him, had been for years, for the restless active sea life did not provide any opportunity for the self-expression which was so necessary to Conrad. Writing offered an opportunity at confession. It offered him the chance to examine self, discover what he was, learn his origins. He began to dig, as do all writers who have the most serious aims, but he refused to dig deeply enough. His attempt to achieve the masterwork with

## CO NRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

Nostramo was foredoomed from the start. It could not produce the answer. Fully aware in later years that Nostramo had not succeeded, he was only unconsciously aware that he had not fully examined himself. The writing became increasingly an escapist outlet, and he became ever more aware of his guilt in avoiding self in the writing. The stretches when he could not write came in later years with the increasing realization that he was working in a blind alley. As creator he had actually ceased writing after Nostramo. After that failure he continued to write as a means of earning a livelihood and also as a reason for living. He was compelled to do so. What had happened was simply that, although egoistically he had ceased being a writer, he was forced to go through the motions in order to provide the incentive for getting out of bed, for going through the activities of daily living. Life, for this chronically ill man, held nothing better. He fled to his desk as others flee to their golf game or to alcohol. The fact that writing was no longer a creative pleasure but

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

a means to an end-- to sustaining the life force itself--severly limited its potentiaal. He need not ha ve feared that "the pen would go dry;" it was the least likely thing to happen. But his fears had basis in fact--in the knowledge that he had already done his best, and would never do as well again. He had ceased writing.

After Nostramo Conrad need not have written another line. No later work would ever match his best period. At its best the work of the last twenty years of his career is imitation Conrad. Technically brilliant, it is frequently incomparable, but it lacks the unique inspirational fire which created "Youth" and The Nigger of The Narcissus.

Despite his "failure" Conrad made an important contibution to literature. In his treatment of men he was realist, not moralist. Men lived or died, or were pursued by phantoms, but even the phantoms were of their own making. The physical world was the only world. All men had the power to mold their destinies--withinthelaws

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

of chance. But chance could strike you down as fatefully and determinedly as the most Grecian tragedy if you had a fatal weakness. It would wait for the moment and the moment would overtake you. It was innate in Conrad that he would not deny the fact that in the nature of the physical world man was but a poor stumbling mite, lucky in most instances even to survive. His escapism highlighted his recognition that nowhere on earth was there real rest for the human spirit, that the brutality of men and of the elements would pursue one wherever one fled. The fact that as between the two brutalities Conrad preferred to face the elements to men indicated that he thought they were the lesser evil.

In keeping his inner life a secret, even to himself, Conrad forever shut the door against achieving the greatness of which he was capable. But he was not troubled by a problem that had frustrated most of the literary men of the 19th century: the spiritual destruction which had been wrought by the general acceptance of the theories

## CONRAD'S LITERARY CAREER

of evolution and the nature of matter. He accepted the realities of existence cheerfully and presented them without softening. His failure was in the answer to the brute fact of existence. In the absence of old spiritual values what new ones could be found? Conrad had avoided the answers. He gave as his rationalization Art. "To make you hear, to make you feel..before all, to make you see.. and it is everything." That was Joseph Conrad's answer to a world he never made.

He went as far as any man could go within the limitations of that creed, but it was not far enough. No more than the others had he answered the great question of the times. Art alone could not produce the unique masterpiece. At the end no man knew this better than Conrad himself.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONRAD'S POLISH TRAITS

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

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

---

<sup>1</sup> G. Jean-Aubry. Life and Letters. New York, 1927, Vol I. p.214.

## CONRAD'S POLISH TRAITS

anticipated the worst, or else had, perhaps, good reasons for wishing that they should be left alone.

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

....when I saw him for the first time, fourteen years ago, I was overcome with affection for him, as the man most akin to me in thought and by blood-after my uncle, who took the place of my parents. Not a single day passed but I found myself thinking of you both-<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.221.

## CONRAD'S POLISH TRAITS

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

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

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

## CONRAD'S POLISH TRAITS

is the main passage from the letter:

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

Please accept, dear and esteemed Sir,<sup>3</sup> my most affectionate thanks for the time, the thought, and the work you have devoted to me and for your most sympathetic comprehension which has discovered the compatriot behind the author.<sup>4</sup>

This letter, and more especially its last words, form the subject of an article by Zeromski, "The compatriot behind the Author," (author Rodak), which was published in the same number of *Naoko* Swiata as the facsimile of Conrad's message. Zeromski concluded in this study that Conrad was "as much a Polish as an English writer."

The same letter to Zeromski is also interesting from the point of view of handwriting, for it shows that Conrad wrote the

---

<sup>3</sup> The usual form of Polish address.

<sup>4</sup> Aubry's translation from the Polish.

## CONRAD'S POLISH TRAITS

most complicated Polish signes, as the "barred"  $\lambda$  for instance, (which the Poles have a curious way of writing by flinging the bar over the l ) without the slightest hesitation.

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

## CONRAD'S POLISH TRAITS

(including Zeromski) are prove to mistake for a sign of elegance, if not of high art. But perhaps that work is not to be judged according to critical standards, but to be understood by intuition. Would it not have been artificial (the intuitive will say), to present these memories in a chronological or, indeed, in any order but that which co-ordinated his feelings? And Conrad's obvious reticence about certain facts in his past, does this not do him more honour than if he had adopted the shamelessly outspoken tone of Rousseau? To these objections I would reply that the subject and the nature of the present book compels one to be rather critical than intuitive, and to point out the fact that in his "Personal Record" Joseph Conrad fails to do justice to the Polish part within himself, making much too little of the memories of his childhood, of the influence of Polish Society, of his Austro-Polish training. We hear in "A Personal Record" of many things, of Conrad's first experiences at sea, of the circumstances in

## CONRAD'S POLISH TRAITS

which *Almayer's Folly* was written, of a journey to his Ukrainian uncle, of his tour to Switzerland as a boy of 15, of his parents and his relatives, (where Conrad mostly contents himself with transcribing literally certain passages from his uncle's *Memoirs*), but in spite of a few genuine notes, the critical reader is left with the uncomfortable impression that he is shown a number of carefully selected and retouched photographs. One feels too much the censorship that Conrad imposed upon his emotions and thoughts when composing the book. He is talking at length about *Almayer's Folly*, but he never touches the cardinal facts that *Almayer* appealed to him as the man who, like "enchanted Heyst," could never get back to his country, as the out-cast gesticulating; "Why! I have been trying to get out of this infernal place for twenty years, and I can't. You hear, man! I can't, and never shall! Never!"

In 1911 the Oxford and Cambridge Review published Conrad's story, now included in *Tales*

## CONRAD'S POLISH TRAITS

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

Prince Roman is written very much in the same mood as *A Personal Record*, but its impersonal character allowed Conrad to bring out better a typically Polish fate, and a typical state of Polish society during Poland's darkest years. As Mrs. Conrad writes, Prince Roman was to be part of a second volume of reminiscences.<sup>5</sup> For this

---

<sup>5</sup> Jessie Conrad, Joseph Conrad as I Knew Him. New York, 1926, p. 97.

## CONRAD'S POLISH TRAITS

reason and because it is Conrad's only patriotic and Polish tale, it deserves some attention.

When reading about the Prince in his uncle's Memoirs, Conrad remembered vividly the short meeting he had had with him long ago, and he felt again that youthful revolt at the thought of the brutality of political circumstances which made devotion, heroism, and patriotism appear as sheer lunacy, unworthy of any but visionaries. In no other work of his do we find such noble scorn and sincere patriotism. Nowhere in his work has he expressed his indignation so well for that cannibalistic feast which is known in history as the partition of Poland, nor his love for his native country. "That country which demands to be loved as no other country has ever been loved, with the mournful affection one bears to the unforgotten dead, and with the unextinguishable fire of a hopeless passion which only a living, breathing, warm ideal can kindle in our breasts for our pride, for our weariness, for our exaltation, for our undoing."<sup>6</sup>

## CONRAD'S POLISH TRAITS

Only for some changes in several passages the story is exactly as Bobrowski tells it, and all the details given by Joseph Conrad are warranted by his uncle. So when Conrad writes that "Emperor Nicholas, who always took personal cognizance of all sentences on Polish nobility, wrote with his own hand in the margin: 'The authorities are severely warned to take care that this convict walks in chains like any other criminal every step of the way'," He is taking but small liberties with his uncle's report which says: "Emperor Nicholas, who had a good confirmed himself the sentences touching the Polish nobility. So after condemnation of Prince Roman, he remembered that his parents might induce the authorities to let him do the journey by cart, and sent an intelligent messenger with an order in his own handwritting that not the slightest indulgence should be granted- and that man walked, very erect, to the place of his exile, together

---

6. Joseph Conrad, Tales of Hearsay, p. 51.

CONRAD'S POLISH TRAITS

with criminals, and chained to a small cart." It is true, also, that Prince Roman's daughter was "married splendidly to a Polish Austrian Grand Seigneur" (Bobrowski gives his name as Alfred Potocki), and that the returned exile looked after her estate while she was amusing herself abroad.

What seems to have tempted Conrad to draw this picture of the Polish Prince is his extraordinary likeness to his own father. As it stands, the tale is an indirect plea for his father and a reaction against the worldly wisdom of his uncle, so similar to the worldly wisdom of Prince John. T. Bobrowski was, before everything, a man of hard facts, not of sentiment. Prince Roman's weary words which close the tale, "they think that I let myself be guided too much by mere sentiment," might have been Appollo Korzeniowski's reflection referring to his Bobrowski relatives.

It has been shown in his works, how eloquent Conrad could be when he expressed his

## CONRAD'S POLISH TRAITS

feelings and thoughts in an impersonal, intuitive, symbolic way, but how, whenever he becomes explicit, and tries to define objectively what he feels, to think it out, so to speak, inspiration fails him utterly. This is due to the special cast of his mind which did not permit of creation unless moved by the pressure of dammed-up tendencies in his unconscious. The conscious Conrad is discursive and dull. These are the reasons why Prince Roman ultimately fails to move us. The patriotic tendency is too conscious, the allusions to, and reminiscences of, his father too obvious to make of this story one of Conrad's "inspired" tales, which have been modelled and remodelled in an unconscious process before emerging. Read, for instance, the short lecture on patriotism at the beginning of Prince Roman. Truly, one might have expected from the son of Apollo Korzeniowski something more explicit than this: "It requires a certain greatness of soul to interpret patriotism worthily."

The same remark on Conrad's conscious

## CONRAD'S POLISH TRAITS

writing holds true of his two articles on behalf of Poland, and written respectively in the years 1916 and 1919. They have been reprinted in Notes on Life and Letters under the titles: "A Note on the Polish Problem" and "The Crime of Partition." These articles are well written, and inspired by the sincere thought of dispelling the wrong idea with which ignorance and foreign propoganda had surrounded the Polish question, but Conrad does not and evidently cannot give his full measure in the form of political articles.

As to his longer work, Poland Revisited,<sup>7</sup> it is very disappointing to anyone who wishes to study the Polish aspect of Joseph Conrad. A Personal Record allowed of a glimpse here and there, but Poland Revisited is mainly a record of his personal troubles and worries, not of his impressions. He admits that the thought of visiting Cracow "ended by rousing the dormant energy" of his feelings and explains: "Cracow is the town where I spent with my father the last wighteen months of his life.

---

<sup>7</sup> Notes, pp. 141.

## CONRAD'S POLISH TRAITS

It was in that old royal city that I ceased to be a boy, had known the friendships, and admirations, the thoughts, and the indignations of that age. It was within those historical walls that I began to understand things, form affections, lay up a store of memories and a fund of sensations with which I was to break violently by throwing myself into an unrelated existence."<sup>8</sup> But for all this, Cracow does not play a great part in these pages, nor indeed Poland. Fully nine tenths of Poland Revisited are devoted to irrelevant matter. Mrs. Conrad's account of the same journey reveals indeed more. She tells how deeply moved Joseph Conrad was when he saw the old city again after so many years. Surely, it was otherwise he had dreamed in his youth to come back to his country! Of these impressions and of that deep emotion we feel nothing in Poland Revisited.

Towards the end of his life, when Conrad's thoughts were dwelling more and more on the memories of his childhood, it seemed sometimes to

---

<sup>8</sup> Poland Revisited, p. 145.

## CONRAD'S POLISH TRAITS

him as though Poland were calling him back, that he ought to go there. When he was ill he would talk to himself in Polish.<sup>9</sup> Of what would he talk, then, if not of his Polish Past?

It is certainly more than a coincidence that in the very year when Joseph Conrad began to make plans for *The Rover*, in 1920, Polish patriots were shedding their blood, fighting against the Russian invaders. Conrad took a great interest in that war and wrote several letters on behalf of Poland during that crucial year. In one of them, addressed to an American friend (John Quinn) and published in the *New York Tribune*<sup>10</sup> he says: " I confess to some little gratification at the thought that the unbroken Polish front keeps bolshevism off and that apparently the re-born state has one heart and one soul, one indomitable will, from the poorest peasant to the highest magnate." Perhaps

---

<sup>9</sup> Jessie Conrad, Joseph Conrad as I knew Him. 1926. p.119.

<sup>10</sup> Jean Aubry, Joseph Conrad Life & Letters. Vol. II, pg. 237.

## CONRAD'S POLISH TRAITS

Conrad knew that four members of the Borowski family were fighting as officers in the Polish ranks, and that one of them received the Cross *Virtuti Militari*.

The writing of *The Rover* marked a turning-point in his mental development. It is the first of his books in which the outcast gets back to his country, and, what is still more significant, in which he proves beyond doubt that he is, in spite of everything, a good patriot. At that moment the possibility of returning to Poland grew obviously less remote, and as the years went by the idea became still more familiar.

We have Mrs. Conrad's authentic testimony that Conrad, who liked until the end to shift his dwelling-place time and again, in the fashion of an old sailor, thought and spoke of returning to Poland to live there in the evening of his days; that, in fact, "For a long time before his death, he felt the call of his native land—though he was as good an Englishman as any born and bred, as loyal to her interests and as devoted to the

## CONRAD'S POLISH TRAITS

English people.<sup>11</sup>

England early in his life had become his chosen "home" in that particular sense in which he speaks of it in a letter from Singapore to a Polish friend in England,<sup>12</sup> as of a country that offered quiet and friendly shelter to one for whom personal happiness was impossible in his own land "in the presence of national misfortune." And his patriotic attachment to the "Free and hospitable land" which had made "relative peace and a certain amount of happiness" possible to him, became vocal in wartime, when the privilege of visiting some of the vessels of the British Navy on patrol duty in the North Sea was proudly recorded in the articles; *Well Done* (1918), *Tradition* (1918), and *Confidence* (1919).

The facts prove clearly that Conrad had not disowned his Polish past nor his Polish origin.

---

<sup>11</sup> Jessie Conrad, Joseph Conrad as I Knew Him, Heinemann, 1926, p.114.

<sup>12</sup> Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad, Life and Letters, Vol. II, Heinemann, 1927, p 231.

## CONRAD'S POLISH TRAITS

He was not untrue to himself in liking England. What he appreciated most in England and English life were those very qualities which the English share with the Poles: Their stubborn individualism, their gallant sporting spirit, their racial tenacity. What he liked also (this is not a Polish trait) was the Englishman's mistrust of theories, political and economical, and his belief in the absolute value of experience and slowly matured competency. In this, Conrad was very true to his uncle's ideals and to the lessons of his seafaring life. After he had adopted the British nationality from necessity, he gradually became, as the years advanced, an Englishman from conviction. Joseph Conrad was also very true to himself when settling down in Kent, for Kent, more than other parts of England, reminded him (as he sometimes told his friends) of the undulated plains of Ukrania, all covered with fields and meadows, where he had grown up.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Gustav Morf, The Polish Heritage of Joseph Conrad, London, 1930, p. 125.

## CONRAD'S POLISH TRAITS

No doubt, Conrad loved England, and he expressed this attachment more than once in his writings, for he had a noble heart and did not forget the good he had received, But Galsworthy himself states, "that his was a heart of a sailor and an artist."<sup>14</sup> The heart of the sailor could never forget what it owed England. But then, could the heart of the artist ever forget Poland?

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p230.

## CHAPTER V

### CONRAD'S FORM OF EXPRESSION

The first thing which strikes the reader of Joseph Conrad's stories is that they are "different." One is constantly aware that his point of view is not typical of the people whose language he writes, and that his tales have a flavor which is neither English nor American nor French nor German, and which one finally decides is Slavic. He lacks the perfection of form which is French, the restraint and acquiescence in things as they are which is English, the compactness and nerve which we think of as American. He has the melancholy, the regret for joyous yesterdays, the brooding sympathy with all the children of Eve who must battle against mischance and poverty and weakness and heartbreak, only to find death at the end, which is typical in a marked degree of the Celt and of the Slav.<sup>1</sup>

Joseph Conrad spoke Polish, French and English fluently, and in theory might have written

---

<sup>1</sup> The Short Story of Joseph Conrad, Catholic World, 1919, p. 163.

## CONRAD'S FORM OF EXPRESSION

in any of these languages. There were, however, many reasons (mostly of an unconscious nature) which led him to write in English, and in English alone.

French critics, especially those who knew Conrad personally, often discussed the question why Conrad should not have written in French. He had known the language from childhood,<sup>2</sup> and had lived in France and on board French ships for several years before he knew one word of English. Moreover, he had always been greatly attracted by the French genius, and shared with his countrymen that strong partiality for all things French which made Mickiewicz say: "Whatever a Frenchman invents is dear to a Pole." There is a strong temperamental affinity between the Frenchman (especially of the Southern variety) and the Pole (some people consider Conrad's return to Southern France in his last writings as a veiled

---

<sup>2</sup> Conrad's knowledge of French was perfect. He not only spoke correctly, with a good accent and with great fluency, but he showed later, as a literary man, a nice feeling for French and a knowledge of the precise meaning of words which many Frenchman might have envied. Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad Life and Letters, Vol. I pg. 28.

## CONRAD'S FORM OF EXPRESSION

return to Poland) and Conrad had had special opportunities for getting acquainted with French people and French culture.

Seen from this angle, Conrad's resolve to write in English may seem puzzling, but if we examine the whole set of circumstances which led him to become an English writer, we find that he had instinctively chosen the English language as his most convenient means of expression at a moment when his literary ambition were still vague. His "Congo Diary" (published in *Last Essays*), although written in a French-speaking country and not intended for publication, is written in English. Almayer's Folly was planned from the very start as an English book, although parts of it have been written in France. Conrad's "intuitive" character led him always to be attracted by the new, the unusual, the adventurous, and writing in English satisfied all these conditions. The undertaking gained infinitely by the boldness of the task. The words had a fresher, a more dynamic meaning than in a language familiar from

## CONRAD'S FORM OF EXPRESSION

boyhood, and his first writings stimulated him as the first glimpse of the East had done. He was penetrating into a new country where discoveries were made at every step, inspiring him afresh and afresh by their novelty. What a unique, what a glorious experience it must have been that inspired him, to go on writing besides his absorbing work, during five full years, until Almayer's Folly was finished. His next book was so intimately related to the first that there could hardly be a question of writing it in a different language. And besides, the die was cast. The spell was broken. The continuity of his work, and artistic as well as material considerations did not allow leaving the way traced by his first books

He was, indeed, acutely aware of the elusiveness and conciseness of French style, and of the fact that it would have been almost impossible to write in French in English surroundings. In his "Note" to A Personal Record, he says distinctly that he "would have been afraid to attempt expression

## CONRAD'S FORM OF EXPRESSION

in a language so perfectly 'crystallized'". English is certainly a more tolerant language than either French or Polish. Its exuberance of synonyms, its rich and everchanging vocabulary, its uncommon elasticity of expression afford to anyone writing in English a latitude that a French author certainly does not possess.

Yet another reason favoured expression in English. Conrad's first books are full of autobiographical elements. A person seen long ago, a conversation or a simple remark overheard on board a ship or in some port, a scene of particular significance observed, or an experience gone through in strange circumstances are the materials out of which his imagination builds up a novel or a tale. But then, the real Almayer spoke English, and so did the real Willems, the real Lingard, the real Jim. As to the character of Marlow, whom Conrad presents as the inexhaustible story-teller he was himself, he is obviously speaking English, just as the French officer in Lord Jim, in speaking French or translated French.

## CONRAD'S FORM OF EXPRESSION

To write *ALMAYER'S FOLLY* or *YOUTH* in French would have meant to translate all but the descriptive parts from mental English into written French. And Conrad was too much of a realist to allow *Mr* Marlow telling yarns to British seamen in the French language. His affinities with French culture manifested themselves in an indirect way. In his last books he has tried, with an amazing success, to capture the very spirit of French life as well as of French expression. *THE ARROW OF GOLD*, *THE ROVER* are genuinely French, more truly French, no doubt, than *UNDER WESTERN EYES* in Russian.

Conrad's position towards the Polish language is more easily defined. He had left Poland at the age of not quite seventeen. During his seafaring life he had read but few Polish books, while he had been an assiduous reader of French and English Literature. At the age when the formation of artistic judgment and the sense of style takes place, Conrad had no Polish models. There are, of course, Polish influences

## CONRAD'S FORM OF EXPRESSION

in his style, but these are chiefly of spoken, not of written Polish. Joseph Conrad spoke Polish fluently throughout his life, but he never wrote one line for print in that language. And yet the first literary proposition he ever received came from his uncle who wanted him to write for a Warsaw periodical.<sup>3</sup> He may have felt that, although he knew the spoken language, he was far from possessing the literary Polish. Literary Polish, very much like literary French, is a language altogether apart from the everyday language, and it may be safely asserted that only a comparatively small number of Poles master it. The greatest difficulty when writing good Polish is to keep clear of the innumerable corruptions due to the strong influence of French, Russian, and German, Bobrowski's prose, for instance, is saturated with foreign expressions. Apart from this difficulty, the Polish language is too rich and too peculiar of expression, too

---

<sup>3</sup> J. H. Retinger, Conrad and His Contemporaries, Roy Pub. New York, 1943, p. 137.

## CONRAD'S FORM OF EXPRESSION

complicated in construction and too eclectic to be mastered easily. Good literary Polish, like Reymont's in the descriptive parts of his PEASANTS, reads like Latin Prose. It is an extremely aristocratic means of expression, very rigid and yet infinitely plastic, and altogether different from the idiom full of French and German expressions which fills the columns of certain newspapers, and serves too often as a conversational language. To write in Polish would not only have meant for Conrad to translate into another language (and a language then very poor in nautical terms) events lived in English, but to live in Poland, and to wrestle with the language for years. Conrad could not have risked the adventure of beginning, so to speak, a third career. Once he had started to write in English, the best was to remain faithful to his resolve.

Joseph Conrad's English has often been spoken of with high praise, but also been severely criticized. He certainly could express himself with great ease, especially when inspiration was

## CONRAD'S FORM OF EXPRESSION

on him. His choice of words is not only always right, but reveals the most refined feeling for every particular shade of meaning. One peculiarity will be easily noted by his readers: of two words, he will always prefer the more vivid, the fresher, the less usual, and the more "dynamic" expression. His painstaking care to convey just the right shade of meaning and nothing else, reveals itself in a passage like this; "His hands were spread over his knees and he looked perfectly insensible. I don't mean strange, or ghastly, or wooden, but just insensibel--like and exhibit.--"<sup>4</sup>

A word may have many meanings (sometimes so many that it can be said to have no meaning at all) and Conrad is only too aware of it. Nothing could be more characteristic of his method than the last words of the above quotation. What always gives his words the right shade of meaning, and at the same time an unusual relief and expressiveness,

---

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Conrad, ARROW OF GOLD, p. 281.

## CONRAD'S FORM OF EXPRESSION

is the metaphore or the sēmile that accompanies all his important statements. The use of the metaphor successfully counteracts the depreciation to which a long currency has subjected the once powerful meaning of words and phrases, filling with the vigour of an image what otherwise would be mere figures of speech, figures similar to "no" and "yes", which are no words in the primitive sense, but mechanical appliance. For the same reason, Conrad likes to choose words and expressions that have something magic, mystic, or enthroalling about them, words and expressions in short, which have retained that primitive energy with which men's first words must have been changed. Conrad's prose at its best is, indeed, rather a series of images to be visualized, than a string of words to be taken notice of. There is something new and at the same time very old about its glamour, a sort of archaic novelty which startles, as would the blare of a post-horn in a railway-station.

The same remark holds true of Polish

## CONRAD'S FORM OF EXPRESSION

speech. Polish words have a greater energy than English or French words, and two or three usually suffice to express an idea which we could not condense in less than five. Proverbs, proverbial sayings, and picturesque expressions, mostly of an incredible shortness, take in Polish a much greater place than in any language of the West. Frequently one hears, Polish people use quite intelligently sayings which are current, no doubt, but which it needed not a little imagination to employ on the right occasion. When after a sever winter, one makes the remark that it is getting warmer, one recieves the reply; Marzec, Starzec. (In March winter is an old man).

One must have lived on the spot to know the incredibel richness of proverbial saying which are current in Poland, especially in the country, of course, but also in the towns. Joseph Conrad himself quoted many Polish proverbs in his Polish letters.<sup>5</sup> The source of these sayings lies in

---

<sup>5</sup> Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad Life and Letters, Vol. I. p. 134.

## CONRAD'S FORM OF EXPRESSION

the picturesque speech of the Polish country folk, that speech which is so delightfully rendered in Reymont's PEASANTS. Unfortunately, many expressions which are quite natural in the original, seems far-fetched or cryptic in the English translation.

A Pole will not say that bad weather in harvest-time is a nuisance, but will remark dryly that "it is necessary as a gap in a bridge! To express the idea that somebody looks paler than usual, he will say that "he looks like a mouse that's come out of the flower." Something that is lost without leaving a trace, "fell through like a stone in the water." Something is very funny, "it would make a horse laugh."

These examples will suffice to show the grotesquely picturesque character of Polish speech. Proverbs and picturesque sayings exist in any Western language, but they have lost, like the words, their original savour, and those which demand a certain imaginative effort have fallen out of use and have been forgotten.

## CONRAD'S FORM OF EXPRESSION.

Joseph Conrad's keen sense of picturesque expression is certainly a Polish hereditary trait, which may have been fostered by his contact with seamen. The sailor is, indeed, after the peasant, most apt to use pictorial (or strong) language, although the overgrowing supremacy of the urban civilization is rapidly obliterating the taste for originality in speech.

In his work, Joseph Conrad used a great number of English proverbs (often accompanied by an apologetic "as the saying is"), but he also smuggled into his writings many Polish proverbs. When Conrad does not find a proverb expressing his idea, he occasionally fashions one, as in this passage:

The conveyance that was awaiting them would have illustrated the proverb that "truth can be more cruel than caricature," if such a proverb existed.<sup>6</sup>

By far the greatest part of Conrad's picturesque expressions have but very vague associations, if any, with current proverbial

---

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Conrad, The Secret Agent, p. 155.

## CONRAD'S FORM OF EXPRESSION

sayings, and even when he makes use of some expression already existing, he makes use of some expressions already existing, he likes to use it in a new sense, and to give it a personal touch of his own.

Among Conrad's picturesque sayings are biblical expressions. Their comparative frequency is certainly a proof that, at one time, he must have been a great reader of the bible. A book which would attract him doubly by its wonderful archaic English and by the Oriental picturesqueness of its expression.<sup>7</sup> Conrad's style has certainly been greatly influenced by the English Bible. So we have the curious fact that while he rejected the doctrine of the Bible as being too much of a ready made solution, he adopted a style which often reminds the reader of Biblical language. For Joseph Conrad's style betrays truly a prophetic inspiration and if he has not become a prophet, it is because he

---

<sup>7</sup> G. Morf, Polish Heritage, p. 217.

## CONRAD'S FORM OF EXPRESSION

avoids all solution, all definite judgement, and contents himself to lead the reader by the scuff of his neck, right into the centre of a burning problem and to abandon him there. His baffling method is but the expression of the will to show the problem under all its aspects.

## CHAPTER VI.

### POLONISMS IN CONRAD'S CHANCE

This chapter seeks to prove that Conrad's English was influenced by the Polish idiom not only when he spoke through the mouths of 'Polish' characters, but also when his characters were completely and essentially English. For detailed study one book, Chance, was chosen. Chance possesses, however, the general characteristics of Conrad's major works, especially his richly colorful style, his lavish use of similes, and in the person of the heroine, Flora, that Slavonic defeatism with which all his writing is permeated.

It is hardly credible that Conrad's English should not have smacked of the Polish idiom, even though as critics point out, Conrad had never accustomed himself to Polish as a literary medium before he learned English. Polish was, in fact, his native tongue, he had spoken it from childhood, he continued to speak it fluently all his life, and never, indeed, ceased to write occasional letters in Polish. That the existence of polonisms in Conrad's English is a

POLONISMS IN CONRAD'S CHANCE

matter of controversy rather than an accepted is a tribute to the great Pole's mastery as a literary medium of an unfamiliar tongue, and that not during the plastic years of childhood but entirely during the more difficult period of early maturity.

Conrad's preference for English rather than French as his literary medium was scarcely a whim of that Chance he so extols in the book under discussion. His predilection for the less familiar English was both instinctive and deliberate and his mastery of it almost miraculous. Despite, however, his unusual linguistic achievements, Conrad never succeeded in barring from his works completely certain awkward, un-English expressions, and these, moreover, can be explained in many cases by comparison with the Polish idiom.

The influence of the Polish is most frequently and most startlingly seen in Conrad's feeling for English prepositions. On page 229 of Chance occur the following sentences:

POLONISMS IN CONRAD'S CHANCE

Almost at once Fyne caught me up.  
But he would have caught me up.

Each of these is a literal translation of the Polish manner of expressing the idea of catching up with one. In Polish the verb dogonić means "to catch up with" and is followed by the accusative case. To a Pole the use of "with me" would have been unnatural since it is a translation of a prepositional phrase which in Polish would never be used to express this idea. The direct object "me" is a translation of the Polish manner of expressing it.

She no longer looked a child. (p.140)

Conrad may have had in mind the Polish Wyglądała na dziecko which in the Polish equivalent for this idea, jak, "like" being omitted.

I have never seen so many fine things  
assembled together out of a collection  
(p. 79)

From the context we know Conrad means "except in a collection" an interpretation which the ambiguity of his English permits. The use of a genitive construction was probably a subconscious

POLONISMS IN CONRA D'S CHANGE

reversion to the Polish oprócz, "except" with the genitive.

The tiger prepared to drag her away  
from a prey to his cubs of both sexes  
(p. 177).

Expressed in this manner instead of in the more English idiom "as a prey for" the underlined words are readily translated literally into the good Polish na łup swoim szczeniętom. It is reasonable, therefore, to allege strong Polish influence, since our English expression would strike discordantly upon the Polish ear.

They were always ready to make awful scenes to the luckless girl... (p. 174).

Where English word demand "before" or "in the presence of" it is possible in Polish to express this idea by the straight dative, a case which English translated in the majority of cases by "to" or "for".

She felt the desire of tears (p. 371).

This idea is expressed in Polish by uczuła (odczuła) pragnienie łez, and łez, "tears," is in the genitive plural. The English "she felt

POLONISMS IN CONRAD'S CHANCE

a desire to weep" or "a desire for tears" both of which constructions have the idea of direction inherent in the dative, would have been impossible to one whose subconscious feeling for the correct expression was tinged with Polish.

Conrad never completely mastered the English articles. Since in Polish there are no articles, this fact is not surprising. Sometimes he omits an article entirely where English demands one:

Yet somehow I got irresistible conviction that he was exasperated by something in particular (p.50).

Extraordinary, stiff-back thin figure all in black, the observed of all while walking hand-in-hand with the girl (p.94).

Again he uses an article when English would scarcely find one necessary:

This universal inefficiency...he ascribed to the want of responsibility and to a sense of security. (p.4).

And on page 371 in "She felt the desire of tears," he uses the definite article when the indefinite would have been the more English expression.

POLONISMS IN CONRAD'S CHANCE

Certain examples of Conrad's so-called "elliptical" style are traceable to the Polish.

Followed complete silence (p.443).

In Polish there exists no such word as the English expletive "there" used in an anticipatory sense. The sentence in question is a literal translation of the Polish manner of expressing this idea: Nastąpiła zupe/na/cisza.

May be that a glimpse and no more is the proper way of seeing an individuality (p.88).

The może być of common Polish parlance has no expressed equivalent for the English "it" which a native Englishman would use here.

Explain it as you may, in this world the friendless, like the poor, are always a little suspect (p.215).

The exact shade of meaning Conrad wished to convey would normally be expressed in English by "to be suspected." Passing over the obvious fact that he clipped off the "ed" of the past participle of the verb "suspect," we observed that it is the past participle Conrad uses instead of the infinitive as English would probably

POLONISMS IN CONRAD'S CHANGE

have done. This points to the Polish influence, for the same idea may correctly be expressed in Polish by the participle podejrzani.

Conrad was beset by the same difficulty every Slav experiences when he learns English, the correct use of the English tenses. Not only is the English scheme of tense sequence, derived of course from the Latin, strange to him, but the fact that English is concerned mainly with the time of an action and not with its quality is surprising to the Slavonic mentality.

In the following:

And it shall be funny world, the world of their arranging, where the Irrelevant would fantastically step in to take the place of the sober humdrum Imaginative (p.98).

Where English sequence demands the future tense in the second clause, Polish may use the conditional.

Again Conrad disregards sequence in the following:

But to soothe your uneasiness I will point out again that an Irrelevant world be very amusing if the women take care to make it as charming...(p. 99).

POLONISMS IN CONRAD'S CHANCE

The "would be " of the protasis of this condition should be followed by "would take care" in the apodosis. Polish, however, finds nothing wrong with Conrad's sequence since the meaning is clear. They;

Like a bird which secretly should have lost its faith in the high virtue of flying (p.35).

To determine whether this sentence as it stood was as un-Polish as it is un-English, it was given without comment to an educated Pole for translation. Without protest against the conditional which is patently foreign to English usage, this person translated the sentence literally:

"Jak ptak, który w głębi serca (potojmnie, w cichosci) utraci~~by~~by wiarę w wyskłą cnotę latania (lotu)," utaci~~by~~by being in the conditional mood of the verb, precisely the form used by Conrad in English. The obvious conclusion is, therefore, that the use of the conditional in this sentence, and in similar sentences which occur in Conrad is a polonism.

Conrad's choice of words and his turns

POLONISMS IN CONRAD'S CHANCE

of expression are at times tainted by Polish:

The savings had been coming in to the very last moment. And he regretted them (p.87).

She raged at him with contradictory reproaches the girl (p.111).

The Polish verb meaning "to regret," żałować, which must have lurked in the background of Conrad's mind, contains meanings which in present-day English must be expressed by such expansions of the verb as "to regret the loss of," "to regret the fact that," etc. Whereas in Polish żałować may have as its object any sort of substantive, in English a substantive used as the object of "to regret" contains or implies a verbal idea. Conrad read into the English verb the larger meaning of the Polish verb.

He had arrived to regard them as his own by a sort of mystical persuasion (p.87).

Where in English we should use "come" instead of "arrived," a Pole would scarcely find "come" sufficient to translate the idea of the sentence which is evidently, "He had come to the point of regarding..." Such an idea would

POLONISMS IN CONRAD'S CHANCE

BE expressed in Polish by the verb dójsć. Since the ordinary translation of dójsć is the English "arrive," Polish may again conceivably be responsible for this awkward manner of expressing a simple idea.

Although the whole matter of Conrad's sentence structure and his sense of work order is scarcely within the province of this chapter, it is however, not out of place to suggest two observations concerning this phase of Conrad's style that have occurred to the writer during his study of Chance. First, Conrad's well-known looseness of sentence structure may easily have been a hold-over from the Polish, a highly inflected language in which the relationship of groups of words to each other is made clear by inflectional endings. For example:

The officers kept out of the cabin against the custom of the service, and then this sort of accent in the men's talk (p.291).

Just then the racket was distracting, a pair of horse trolley lightly loaded with loose rods of iron passing slowly very near us (p.222).

POLONISMS IN CONRAD'S CHANCE

In the second place, Conrad's sentence structure and word order, especially in abstract passages (e.g. pages 68,87,99,120,173,206,428) have all the sonorousness of Literary Polish. It is a well-known fact that literary Polish such as Reymont writes possesses the ring and majesty of the best classical Latin. The same may be said of Conrad's English. To trace his indebtedness to Polish style would be an interesting quest.

But however closely or remotely connected with the Polish Conrad's style may be, the fact remains that there were found in Chance traces of the Polish idiom, and that only by recognizing these as polonisms can their presence in so well written a piece of English be explained. This study of Chance leads, therefore, to the conclusion that in spite of the miracle of his mastery of the English, Conrad never completely overcame the difficulties of the English articles, tenses, and prepositions, and that his choice of words is,

POLONISMS IN CONRAD'S CHANCE

moreover, not always quite English. The influence of Polish on Conrad's English is, in a word, greater than critics have suspected.

## CONCLUSION

When the author set out to give an account of Joseph Conrad, it was desired to present facts which would be helpful to the study and the records. The author was thoroughly aware of the value of such knowledge, therefore the study was aimed to interpret Joseph Conrad and his literary works, so that a greater understanding of Joseph Conrad "The Pole" could be ascertained.

Through library research the writer was able to show certain influences of Conrad's Polish back ground in his practices while away from his native land. Specific examples were given where, even though Conrad was several thousand miles away from Poland, he still had those Polish traits well inbedded in his Polish Heart.

The writer being completely familiar with the Polish language was able to detect and record the Polish traits, characteristics and influences in Conrads literary career. A evaluation was given on the reasons for Conrads departure from Poland and the reasons for his writing in English

## CONCLUSION

rather than in Polish.

The writer presented specific examples were errors in Conrad's written English can be attributed to his knowledge of the Polish language. For a detailed study one book, Chance, was chosen. Chance, possesses the general characteristics of Conrad's major works, especially his lavish use of similes, and in the person of the heroine, Flora, that Slavonic defeatism with which all his writings is permeated.

The study of Chance leads, therefore, to the conclusion that in spite of the miracle of his mastery of the English, Conrad never completely overcame the difficulties of the English articles, tenses, and prepositions, and that his choice of words is, moreover, not always quite English. The influence of Polish on Conrad's English is, in a word, greater than critics have suspected.

The writer feels that he has attained the goal which he set out to achieve in the preparation of the present study. He endeavored to give as

## CONCLUSION

complete a picture as possible developing the study from as many angles as possible, in order that an accurate understanding could be had of Joseph Conrad Korzeniowski.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### A. BOOKS

- Aubry, G. jean, Joseph Conrad Life and Letters, Garden City, New York, Doubleday, Page and Co., 1927, 2 Vols. 339, 376p.
- Adams, Elbridge L., Joseph Conrad, New York, William Edwin Rudge, 1925, 71p.
- Bendz, Ernst I. Joseph Conrad, Gothenburg, N.J., Gumpert, 1923, 117p.
- Bradbrook, Muriel Clara, Józef Teodor Konrad Nałecz Korzeniowski, Cambridge, Eng., The University Press, 1941, 79p.
- Bystron, Jan S. Przysłowia Polskie, Krakowée, Nakładem Polskiej Akademji Umiejętności, 1933, 260p.
- Conrad, Jessie, Joseph Conrad as I Knew Him, Garden City, N. Y., Doubleday, Page and Co., 1926, 162p.
- \_\_\_\_\_, Joseph Conrad and his Circles, London, Jarrolds, Ltd., 1935, 283p.
- Conrad, Joseph, Almayer's Folly, Garden City, N.Y. Doubleday, Page and Co. 1923. 208p.
- \_\_\_\_\_, An Outcast of the Island, Garden City, N.Y. Doubleday, Page and Co. 1914, 335p.
- \_\_\_\_\_, Chance, Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday Page and Co., 1915, 468p.
- \_\_\_\_\_, Lord Jim, Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, Page and Co., 1927, 417p.
- \_\_\_\_\_, The Mirror of the Sea, Garden City N.Y., Doubleday, Page and Co. 1925, 194p.

- \_\_\_\_\_, The Nigger of the Narcissus,  
New York, Dodd, Mead and Co. 1899, 217p.
- \_\_\_\_\_, Nostromo, Garden City, N.Y.  
Doubleday, Page And Co., 1925, 566p.
- \_\_\_\_\_, Lord Jim, Przełożyła Aniela Zagorska,  
Warszawa, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy,  
1949, 2v.
- \_\_\_\_\_, Notes on Life and Letters, London,  
J.M. Dent & Son, Ltd., 1921, 354p.
- \_\_\_\_\_, A Personal Record, Garden City,  
N.Y., Doubleday, Page & Co. 1925, 138p.
- \_\_\_\_\_, The Secret Agent, Garden City, N.Y.,  
Doubleday, Page & Co., 1925, 311p.
- \_\_\_\_\_, The Shadow Line, Garden City, N.Y.,  
Doubleday, Page & Co., 1923, 133p.
- \_\_\_\_\_, Smuga Cienia, Przełożyła J.  
Sienkiewiczówna, Rzym, 1945, 104p.
- \_\_\_\_\_, Suspence, Garden City, N.Y.  
Doubleday, Page & Co. 1925, 274p.
- \_\_\_\_\_, Tales of Unrest, New York,  
C. Scribner's Sons, 1914, 348p.
- \_\_\_\_\_, Typhoon, Garden City, N.Y.  
Doubleday, Page, & Co. 1914, 205p.
- \_\_\_\_\_, Under the Western Eyes, Garden  
City, N.Y., Doubleday, Page & Co.  
1923, 377p.
- \_\_\_\_\_, Youth, Garden City, N.Y.  
Doubleday, Page & Co. 1923, 330p.
- \_\_\_\_\_, Zwierciadło Morza, Przełożyła  
Aniela Zagorska, Warszawa, Państwowy  
Instytut Wydawniczy, 1949, 221p.

- Curle, Richard, Joseph Conrad, London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. LTD., 1914, 245p.
- 
- , The Last Twelve Years Of Joseph Conrad, London, L. Low, Marston & Co. Ltd., 1928, p.236.
- Cushwa, Frank W., An Introduction To Conrad, N. Y., The Odyssey Press, 1933, 436 p.
- Drzozowski, Franciszek K., Pryślowia Polskie, Krakow, Czcionkami Drukarnia Aleksandra Stamskiego, 1896, 181p.
- Ford, Madox, Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance, Boston, Mass., Little, Brown & Co., 1925, 164p.
- Garnett, Edward, Letters from Joseph Conrad, 1895-1924, Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1928, 194p.
- Gee, John A., and Paul J. Storm, Letters of Joseph Conrad to Marguerite Poradowski, New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press, 1940, 214p.
- Morf, Gustav, The Polish Heritage of Joseph Conrad, London, S. Low, Marston & Co., Ltd., 1930, 248p.
- Retinger, Joseph, Conrad and His Contemporaries, Roy Publishers, New York, 1943, 182p.
- Ujeski, Joseph, O Konradzie Korzeniowskim, Warszawa, Dom Książki Polskiej, 1936, 298p.
- Walpole, Hugh, Joseph Conrad, New York, Henry Holt & Co., 1921, 125p.

B. ARTICLES

- Burt, H. T., "Joseph Conrad," Hibbert Journal,  
London, Vol. 23, p. 141-157, 1924.
- Clifford, Hugh, "The Genus of Mr. Joseph Conrad,"  
North American Review, New York, 1904,  
Vol. 178, pp. 842-852.
- Connally, James B. and A. H. Atteridge, "Conrad  
the Writer, Conrad the Catholic," Catholic  
Mind, New York, 1925, Vol. 23, pp. 61-80.
- Curle, Richard, "Conrad's Diary," Yale Review,  
Concord, 1926, Vol. 15, pp. 254-266.
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Józef Konrad Kozeniowski," Bookman,  
New York, 1914, Vol. 39, pp. 662-668,  
Vol. 40, pp. 99-104, 187-201.
- Dybowski, R., "Pierwiastki Angielskie a Pierwiastki  
Polskie w umysłowości Conrada," Z zagadnień  
Kulturalno Literackich Wschodu i Zachodu,  
Krakow, 1934, pp. 199-209.
- Garnett, Edward, "Joseph Conrad," Century Mag.  
New York, 1928, Vol 115, pp. 385-393,  
593-600.
- Zeromski, Stefan, "Joseph Conrad," Nineteenth  
Century, New York, 1927, Vol. 101,  
pp. 406-416.