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Joseph Conrad

A Literary Life

Cedric Watts

*Professor of English
University of Sussex*

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1

Preliminary Matter

1.1 PREFACE

This book was commissioned as part of a series with a distinctive specification. I'll quote the general editor's 'Outline of Policy' to give you the main notions:

The volumes of the series will not be works of literary criticism but attempts to sketch out sufficient detail about the lives, publishing contexts and intellectual backgrounds of the authors for any reader subsequently to be able to make an informed historical reading of the authors' lives. . . . The series will concentrate on the literary *career*, focusing on matters which have a demonstrable bearing either on what authors actually wrote or on the conditions under which they wrote. The series will thus have a practical and factual emphasis, and . . . issues such as patronage and subscription, or practical considerations such as writing for the theatre, or for periodical publication, would thus figure prominently, as would anything giving rise to an author's revision of his texts. . . .

The factual, biographical base may thus help to keep the 'intellectual milieu' element of the literary life (which is theoretically inexhaustible) within reasonable limits. Such considerations will be important in keeping to a 60,000 word target. . . .

The opening declaration that volumes in this series 'will not be works of literary criticism' may need some qualification. Documentary material about Conrad would have little point if it could not be shown to have some bearing on the content and variable quality of Conrad's writings. Even the selection of one fact rather than another is a matter of evaluation; so 'documentary material' here is impelled by the spirit of criticism, just as (conversely) Conrad's tales, at their most exuberantly imaginative, are impelled by the desire to tell truths about the real world; and if circum-

stances often contorted that impulsion, the contortions can still be construed as truth-tellers. To talk of 'truth' rather than 'ideology' or 'inter-subjectivity' may be forgiven as an echo of Conrad, the courage of whose quest for veracity was proportionate to the corrosiveness of his scepticism about the quest's goal. His fiction sometimes reminds us of Nietzsche's aphorism: 'Truths are illusions of which we have forgotten that they are illusions.'

In accordance with the series-format, the plan of this book is as follows. Part 2 offers a chronological table followed by a concise biographical survey which gives particular attention to the financing of Conrad's remarkable odyssey through the world. Part 3 gives illustrations of Conrad's cultural milieu and of his ability to create a distinctive literary identity by learning from a multiplicity of exemplars. Part 4 follows his career as a writer from the early days of struggle to the late days of popular success, emphasising the material circumstances of his literary production. These pages depict the tension which Conrad experienced between the claims of artistic integrity and the demands of the market-place; they also consider the various kinds of suasion and sustenance provided by his publishers and editors, friends and collaborators. Modes of censorship form a topic of the Conclusion.

One thesis of this book is that, although Conrad gave frequent and eloquent expression to the wretchedness of his plight as an author, he was remarkably fortunate in his circumstances, given not only the amount of sympathetic support and financial aid that he received but also the size and diversity of the market for his work. A second thesis is that consequently his output is much larger than it may at first appear, since a single work might be published in a variety of forms. *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*, to take just one example, changed markedly between its serial form and its initial book form, and there are further textual variations between the various editions of the book – and even small variations between different impressions of a single edition. Thirdly, we can observe that Conrad's situation as a writer for posterity who was also seeking to earn his bread and butter by his pen led him to make some painful (even unethical) compromises, and these relate thematically to his main works, which so vividly render the corruption of integrity by 'material interests'. A large general point made in the ensuing pages is that when we consider his career historically, emphasis falls less on Conrad as the author of 'canonical texts' for academic study than on Conrad as

communicator – a writer who, in the burgeoning era of mass-communications, was able to address his public (on both sides of the Atlantic) through popular magazines and newspapers as well as through the pages of elegant volumes. His mood was sometimes haughtily patrician; but the very exigencies of the market impo-rtuned the solidarity of this seer with 'all the hearts that beat in the darkness'.

The co-ordinating theme of the subsequent chapters is 'indebtedness': Conrad's cultural, social and financial indebtedness to others, and our literary indebtedness to Conrad. In view of the range and variety of his career, the 60 000-word limit on this discussion is quite severe; but the consequent economies may perhaps lend this book an introductory clarity. The teacher of languages in *Under Western Eyes* declares: 'Words, as is well known, are the great foes of reality.' If he is right, the series-format at least restricts the damage.

1.2 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND EDITORIAL NOTES

When preparing this book, I was particularly indebted to the following works. Andrzej Busza, 'Conrad's Polish Literary Background and Some Aspects of the Influence of Polish Literature on His Work', in *Antemurale*, vol. X (Roma: Institutum Historicum Polonicum, 1966). Zdzisław Najder, *Conrad's Polish Background: Letters to and from Polish Friends* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964) and *Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, edited by Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983 onwards). Professor Davies kindly supplied me with proofs of Volume III, which had not yet been published when this book was written. Andrzej Busza and Hans van Marle generously provided scholarly advice. The publishers of my *Preface to Conrad* (London: Longman, 1982) kindly permitted me to adapt here some of its paragraphs. Alan Sinfield was, as usual, shrewdly encouraging. Dr G. Hemstedt kindly helped to check the proofs.

In any quotation, a row of three dots (...) indicates an ellipsis already present in the printed text, whereas a row of five dots indicates an omission that I have made. All other emendations to quoted passages are given in square brackets. With these exceptions, I have endeavoured to present all quoted material without correction or alteration.

In accordance with 'house style', large numbers are given with spaces instead of commas. Thus '6,153,000' is represented as '6 153 000'.

This book was written in 1986 and 1987.

2

Biographical

2.1 CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

- 1857: Conrad (Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski) born at Berdyczów (Ukrainian: Berdichev) in partitioned Poland.
- 1861: Conrad's father, Apollo Korzeniowski, arrested for patriotic conspiracy.
- 1862: Apollo and his wife, Ewa, sent into exile in northern Russia; Conrad travels with them.
- 1865: Conrad's mother dies of tuberculosis.
- 1867: Apollo Korzeniowski, suffering from tuberculosis, is permitted to reside in Galicia.
- 1869: Apollo Korzeniowski dies in Kraków. Tadeusz Bobrowski becomes Conrad's guardian.
- 1874: Conrad travels to Marseille to become a seaman.
- 1878: Conrad attempts suicide, recovers, and later enters British Merchant Navy.
- 1880: Qualifies as second mate.
- 1883: Shipwrecked.
- 1884: Qualifies as first mate.
- 1886: Becomes a British subject; qualifies as master.
- 1887: First mate of barque *Highland Forest*.
- 1888: His first command: the barque *Otago*.
- 1889: Begins *Almayer's Folly*.
- 1890: The Congo journey.
- 1891: First mate of clipper *Torrens*; meets Galsworthy on board.
- 1893: Second mate of steamship *Adowa*.
- 1894: Bobrowski dies; Conrad inherits about £1600; *Almayer's Folly* accepted for publication by T. Fisher Unwin.
- 1895: *Almayer's Folly* published (London: Unwin; New York: Macmillan); reviews vary but include high praise.
- 1896: *An Outcast of the Islands* published (London: Unwin; New York: Appleton; Leipzig: Tauchnitz). Conrad marries Jessie George. 'The Idiots' published in *Savoy*.

- 1897: *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* serialised in Henley's *New Review* (extracts in *Country Life*, New York) and in *Illustrated Buffalo Express* (USA), and published as a book by Heinemann in London and by Dodd, Mead & Co. (under the title *The Children of the Sea*) in New York. Conrad meets Cunninghame Graham and Stephen Crane. 'The Lagoon' published in *Cornhill Magazine*, 'An Outpost of Progress' in *Cosmopolis*, and 'Karain' in *Blackwood's Magazine* and *Living Age*.
- 1898: Birth of son, Borys; Conrad meets Ford Madox Hueffer (later known as Ford Madox Ford) and Henry James. *Tales of Unrest* ('Karain', 'The Idiots', 'An Outpost of Progress', 'The Return', 'The Lagoon') published (London: Unwin; New York: Scribner's; Leipzig: Tauchnitz). 'Alphonse Daudet' and 'Tales of the Sea' in *Outlook* (London); 'An Observer in Malaya' in *Academy*; 'Youth' in *Blackwood's* and in *Outlook* (New York).
- 1899: 'Heart of Darkness' serialised in *Blackwood's*. J. B. Pinker offers to become Conrad's literary agent.
- 1899–1900: *Lord Jim* serialised in *Blackwood's*.
- 1900: *Lord Jim* published as book (Edinburgh and London: Blackwood; New York: Doubleday; Toronto: Gage). 'Heart of Darkness' serialised in *Living Age*.
- 1901: *The Inheritors*, with Hueffer as co-author (London: Heinemann; New York: McClure, Phillips). 'Amy Foster' in *Illustrated London News*.
- 1902: 'The End of the Tether' in *Blackwood's*. *Youth* volume ('Youth', 'Heart of Darkness', 'The End of the Tether') published (Edinburgh and London: Blackwood). 'Typhoon' serialised in *Pall Mall Magazine* and in *Critic* (New York); published as a book (New York and London: Putnam). 'Tomorrow' in *Pall Mall Magazine*. Preface to *The Nigger* issued as booklet.
- 1903: *Youth* volume published in New York (McClure, Phillips). *Typhoon and Other Stories* ('Typhoon', 'Amy Foster', 'Falk', 'Tomorrow') published (London: Heinemann). *Romance*, a collaboration with Hueffer, published (London: Smith, Elder & Co.). 'Falk', 'Amy Foster', 'To-morrow': *Three Stories* (New York: McClure, Phillips).
- 1904: Jessie Conrad injures her knees and is partially disabled for life. *Romance* (New York: McClure, Phillips). *Nostromo*

serialised in *T. P.'s Weekly* and published as book (London and New York: Harper). 'Missing', 'Overdue' and 'Stranded' (subsequently entitled 'Overdue and Missing' and 'The Grip of the Land') in *Daily Mail*; 'Anatole France [Crainquebille]' in *Speaker*; 'London River' (subsequently 'The Faithful River') in *World Today* and *World's Work*; 'On the North Sea Outrage' in *The Times*.

- 1905: *One Day More* (dramatisation of 'Tomorrow') unsuccessfully staged. 'Henry James' in *North American Review*; 'Landfalls and Departures', 'Up Anchor' (subsequently 'Emblems of Hope') and 'Gales of Wind' (subsequently 'The Character of the Foe') in *Pall Mall Magazine* and *Reader Magazine*; 'The Fine Art' in *Pall Mall Magazine*; 'The Tallness of the Spars' (subsequently 'Cobwebs and Gossamer') and 'The Weight of the Burden' in *Harper's Weekly*; 'Autocracy and War' in *Fortnightly Review* and *North American Review*; 'Books' in *Speaker* and *Living Age*; 'Her Captivity' (later 'In Captivity') in *Blackwood's*; 'The Heroic Age' in *Standard*; 'The Art of Fiction' (preface to *The Nigger*) in *Harper's Weekly*; 'London River' in *Metropolitan Magazine*.
- 1906: Second son (John) born. *The Mirror of the Sea* published (London: Methuen; New York: Harper; Leipzig: Tauchnitz). 'Initiation' in *Blackwood's*; 'A Middle-Class Family' (later 'John Galsworthy') in *Outlook*; 'Gaspar Ruiz' in *Pall Mall Magazine* and *Saturday Evening Post*; 'An Anarchist' and 'The Informer' in *Harper's Magazine*; 'The Brute' in *Daily Chronicle*; 'My Best Story' and 'An Outpost of Progress' in *Grand Magazine*; 'The "Tremolino"' in *Tribune*.
- 1906-7: *The Secret Agent* serialised in *Ridgway's*.
- 1907: *The Secret Agent*: book (London: Methuen; New York: Harper; Leipzig: Tauchnitz). 'The Brute' in *McClure's Magazine*; 'Rulers of East and West' in *Reader Magazine*; 'The Censor of Plays' in *Daily Mail*.
- 1908: 'The Duel' in *Pall Mall Magazine* and (under title 'The Point of Honor') in *Forum* and as book (New York: McClure); 'The Black Mate' in *London Magazine*; 'Il Conde' in *Cassell's Magazine*; 'Anatole France [L'Ile des pingouins]' in *English Review*. *A Set of Six* ('Gaspar Ruiz', 'The Informer', 'The Brute', 'An Anarchist', 'The Duel', 'Il Conde'): London: Methuen; Leipzig: Tauchnitz. 'Rulers of East and West' in *Putnam's Magazine*.

- 1908–9: *Some Reminiscences* (later entitled *A Personal Record*) serialised in Hueffer's *English Review*.
- 1909: 'The Nature of a Crime' (co-authored with Hueffer) in *English Review*. 'Il Conde' in *Harper's Magazine*; 'The Silence of the Sea' in *Daily Mail*.
- 1910: Conrad has breakdown after completing *Under Western Eyes*. 'The Secret Sharer' in *Harper's Magazine*; 'The Life Beyond', 'A Happy Wanderer' and 'The Ascending Effort' in *Daily Mail*.
- 1910–11: *Under Western Eyes* serialised in *English Review* and *North American Review*.
- 1911: *Under Western Eyes*, book (London: Methuen; New York: Harper; Leipzig: Tauchnitz). 'A Smile of Fortune' in *London Magazine*; 'Prince Roman' in *Oxford and Cambridge Review*; 'The Partner' in *Harper's Magazine*.
- 1912: *Some Reminiscences*: London: Nash; and (under the title *A Personal Record*) New York: Harper. 'Freya of the Seven Isles' in *Metropolitan Magazine* and *London Magazine*. *Twixt Land and Sea* ('A Smile of Fortune', 'The Secret Sharer', 'Freya of the Seven Isles'): London: Dent; New York: Doran; Leipzig: Tauchnitz. *Chance* serialised in *New York Herald*. 'Prince Roman' in *Metropolitan Magazine*; 'Some Reflections on the Loss of the Titanic' and 'Certain Aspects of the Admirable Inquiry' in *English Review*; 'The Future of Constantinople' in *The Times*; 'A Friendly Place' in *Daily Mail*.
- 1913: 'One Day More' in *English Review*; 'The Inn of the Two Witches' in *Pall Mall Magazine* and *Metropolitan Magazine* (New York).
- 1914: Book of *Chance* published in January (London: Methuen; New York: Doubleday, Page): exceptionally good sales; Conrad becomes a highly profitable author. Conrad re-visits Poland. 'The Lesson of the Collision' (subsequently 'Protection of Ocean Liners') in *Illustrated London News*; 'The Planter of Malata' and 'Because of the Dollars' in *Metropolitan Magazine*. Introduction to Maupassant's *Yvette and Other Stories*, translated by Ada Galsworthy.
- 1915: *A Set of Six* (New York: Doubleday, Page). *Within the Tides* ('The Planter of Malata', 'The Partner', 'The Inn of the Two Witches'): London: Dent. *Victory* appears in both *Munsey's Magazine* (New York) and *Star*, and as a book (New York:

- Doubleday, Page; London: Methuen). 'Poland Revisited' serialised in *Daily News* (under the titles 'The Shock of War', 'To Poland in War-Time', 'The North Sea on the Eve of War' and 'My Return to Cracow') and in *Boston Evening Transcript. Wisdom and Beauty from Conrad*, edited by H. Capes (London: Melrose).
- 1916: *Within the Tides* (New York: Doubleday, Page). 'Poland Revisited' in *The Book of the Homeless. The Shadow-Line* serialised in *Metropolitan Magazine*.
- 1916-17: *The Shadow-Line* serialised in *The English Review*.
- 1917: Book of *The Shadow-Line* (London and Toronto: Dent; New York: Doubleday, Page). Conrad begins to write 'Author's Notes' for a collected edition of his works. Introduction to Edward Garnett's *Turgenev: A Study*. 'Never Any More' (subsequently 'Flight') in *Fledgling*; 'The Tale' in *Strand Magazine*; 'The Warrior's Soul' in *Land and Water*.
- 1918: 'Tradition' in *Daily Mail*; 'Well Done!' in *Daily Chronicle*; 'First News' in *Réveille*.
- 1918-20: *The Arrow of Gold* serialised in *Lloyd's Magazine*.
- 1919: Book of *The Arrow of Gold* (New York: Doubleday, Page; London: Unwin). 'The Tale' as booklet (London: privately printed). *The Rescue* serialised in *Land and Water*. 'The Crime of Partition' in *Fortnightly Review* and *Collier's Weekly*; 'Confidence' in *Daily Mail*; 'Stephen Crane: A Note without Dates' in *London Mercury*. Introduction to Maupassant's *Mademoiselle Fifi* (reprint of introduction to *Yvette*). 'Anatole France [Crainquebille]' reprinted as booklet.
- 1919-20: *The Rescue* serialised in *Romance* (New York).
- 1920: *The Secret Agent* (play) written; 'Because of the Dollars' adapted as a play, *Laughing Anne*. *The Rescue* published as book, twenty-four years after commencement (New York: Doubleday, Page; London and Toronto: Dent). 'Stephen Crane: A Note without Dates' in *Bookman* (New York). Author's note to 'Gaspar Ruiz' in 'Youth' and 'Gaspar Ruiz' (London: Dent). Pro-Polish cablegram in *Outlook*. 'Alphonse Daudet' and 'Anatole France [L'Ile des Pingouins]' reprinted as booklets.
- 1920-28: Collected editions by Doubleday (New York), Heinemann (London), Gresham (London) and Grant (Edinburgh).
- 1921: *Notes on My Books* (New York: Doubleday, Page; London:

- Heinemann). *Notes on Life and Letters* (London and Toronto: Dent; New York: Doubleday, Page). Play of *The Secret Agent* privately printed. Conrad translates (as *The Book of Job*) Bruno Winawer's *Księga Hioba*. 'Heroes of the Straits' (subsequently 'The Dover Patrol') in *The Times*; 'The Loss of the *Dalgonar*' in *London Mercury*; 'The First Thing I Remember' in *John O'London's Weekly*. Introduction to *A Hugh Walpole Anthology*.
- 1922: Death of J. B. Pinker. Stage-production of *The Secret Agent* fails. 'Cookery' in *Delineator*; 'Notices to Mariners' (subsequently 'Outside Literature') in *Manchester Guardian Literary Supplement*. Foreword to J. Sutherland's *At Sea with Joseph Conrad*.
- 1923: Conrad gives readings in United States. *The Secret Agent* (play) published (London: Laurie). *The Rover* serialised in *Pictorial Review* and published as book (New York: Doubleday, Page; London: Unwin). *Laughing Anne* (play) published (London: Morland). Preface to R. Curle's *Into the East*. Preface to Jessie Conrad's *A Handbook of Cookery*. Introduction to T. Beer's *Stephen Crane* (New York: Knopf). Foreword to A. Dawson's *Britain's Life-Boats*. 'My Hotel in Mid-Atlantic' (subsequently 'Ocean Travel') in *Evening News*; 'A Clipper Ship I Knew' (subsequently 'The Torrens: A Personal Tribute') in *Blue Peter* and *Collier's Weekly*; 'Outside Literature' in *Bookman* (New York); 'Christmas Day at Sea' in *Daily Mail* and *Delineator*. 'Proust as Creator' in *Marcel Proust*, edited by C. Scott-Moncrieff.
- 1923-7: Collected ('Uniform') edition by Dent.
- 1924: May: Conrad declines offer of knighthood. 3 August: Conrad dies after a heart attack; subsequently buried at Canterbury. 'The Nature of a Crime' (co-author, Hueffer) published as book (London: Duckworth; New York: Doubleday, Page). '*Laughing Anne*' and '*One Day More*' (London: Castle). *Shorter Tales of Conrad* (New York: Doubleday, Page). 'Geography and Some Explorers' in *Countries of the World* and *National Geographic Magazine*; 'Legends' in *Daily Mail*.
- 1925: *Tales of Hearsay* ('The Warrior's Soul', 'Prince Roman', 'The Tale', 'The Black Mate') published (London: Unwin; New York: Doubleday, Page; Leipzig: Tauchnitz). '*Laughing Anne*' and '*One Day More*' (New York: Doubleday, Page). The unfinished *Suspense* serialised in *Saturday Review of Literature*

and published as a book (New York: Doubleday, Page; London and Toronto: Dent; Leipzig: Tauchnitz). Preface to reprint of Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*. Collected edition by Doubleday (the 'Memorial' edition). 'The Unlighted Coast' in *The Times*. 'A Glance at Two Books' in *Forum* and (as 'The Enterprise of Writing a Book') in both *T.P.'s* and *Cassell's Weekly* and *Living Age*.

1926: *Last Essays* (London: Dent; New York: Doubleday, Page). 'The Congo Diary' in *Blue Peter* and *Yale Review*. *Joseph Conrad's Diary* (London: privately printed).

1927: *Joseph Conrad: Life & Letters*, written and edited by G. Jean-Aubry (London: Heinemann). *The Sisters* (fragment) published as book (New York: Gaige).

2.2 THE FINANCING OF CONRAD'S CAREERS

2.2.1 'The Making of a Man'

Joseph Conrad pursued two careers: first, that of a seaman and officer in the merchant navy; second, that of a professional fiction-writer. His progress through the first career and his entry into the second were facilitated by money provided by his uncle, Tadeusz Bobrowski; and that money derived, in turn, from the efforts of many Polish tenant-farmers, mill-workers and labourers: workers who probably lived and died in ignorance of the illustrious achievements that their toil had helped to make possible. Conrad was to travel far from Poland, but he retained a lifelong emotional attachment to his native land; and furthermore there was a more tangible attachment – for many years the flow of credit-notes and remittances from his uncle was a nourishing umbilicus linking the voyager in distant oceans or the writer at an urban desk to the wheat and sugar-beet of Kazimierówka.

In December 1857, Conrad – then Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski – was born into a nation which had vanished from the map of Europe. By means of a series of partitions in 1772, 1792 and 1795, Poland had been annexed by Russia from the east and by Prussia and Austria from the west and south-west. The Poles were, and remain, a proudly patriotic nation, their sense of national identity being all the more intense for their lack of

national autonomy; and when a nation is annexed by hostile powers, its preoccupation with the interlinked problems of loyalty and treachery is intensified.

Conrad's father, Apollo Korzeniowski, was fervently patriotic; and, as a consequence of their conspiratorial activities, both Apollo and his wife Ewa were arrested, tried and sent into exile by the Russian authorities; their four-year-old son accompanied them on the melancholy journey to Vologda. So already, as a child, Conrad would have learned that to be loyal to one principle may entail treachery to another: service of nation may entail subversion of a state. Partly as a result of the privations of exile, Ewa died early of tuberculosis, in 1865; and four years later her grieving widower joined her in death. By the age of eleven, Conrad was an orphan, heading the vast procession of mourners which followed his father's coffin through the streets of Kraków in a funeral that was simultaneously a huge patriotic demonstration. Already, stamped on the boy's imagination, was an image of the lethal cost exacted from domestic, familial life by national political concerns; and already he knew personally the isolation which was to be rendered with such intensity in the novels of his mature years.

As is shown by the writings of Hobbes, Adam Smith and Godwin (and, of course, by those of Conrad himself), one does not have to be a Marxist in order to see that cultural matters have their economic causes. Conrad was a junior member of a ruling class – the *szlachta* – which had ceased to rule; the class which, in Poland, derived its power primarily from the ownership of agricultural land. (The term 'szlachta' can be translated equally as 'nobility' and 'gentry'.) Politically, Conrad's subsequent novels could seem paradoxical in their combination of some aristocratically conservative elements (the keen sense of honour, of tradition, of *noblesse oblige*) and some sceptically radical elements (the hostility to capitalism and to the commercial spirit): but the paradox dwindles when we see how strongly it relates to the values of a traditional land-owning gentry, and particularly to a gentry which, in the modern world, is denied its former political powers. After the death of Apollo Korzeniowski, the rôle of Conrad's guardian was eventually taken by Apollo's brother-in-law, Tadeusz Bobrowski. Biographers have followed Tadeusz's lead in stressing the temperamental conflict between Conrad's father and his uncle. Apollo, a poet, dramatist and translator, was romantically

idealistic, impetuous, melancholy, introspective; Tadeusz, a busy land-owner, was shrewdly practical, astutely prudent, lucidly circumspect. Yet the practical uncle was also deeply patriotic, and repeatedly reminded young Conrad of the heritage and responsibilities of a Polish nobleman: in his letters he frequently addresses his ward as '*Panie Bracie*' – 'Brother-Lord' or 'Fellow-Nobleman'. When Stein in *Lord Jim* utters the motto *usque ad finem* ('Persevere to the very end'),¹ he is echoing a poignantly patriotic confession in one of Bobrowski's letters to his young nephew:

I have gone through a lot, I have suffered over my own fate and the fate of my family and my Nation, and perhaps just because of these sufferings and disappointments I have developed in myself this calm outlook on the problem of life, whose motto, I venture to say, was, is, and will be '*usque ad finem*'. The devotion to duty interpreted more widely or narrowly, according to circumstances and time – this constitutes my practical creed which – supported as it is by the experience of my sixty years – may be of some use to you?²

The economic basis of Conrad's early career is very clearly indicated in another letter that Bobrowski sent him: this letter was written in September of 1886, the year in which the errant nephew, after many years at sea, had qualified as a master in the merchant navy. I quote it at some length, for it well displays the intermingling of the economic and the literary in Conrad's background.

The money [on this occasion £30 requested by Conrad] will probably arrive about a week late for it will take at least that time for it to reach Odessa and then be posted on to London. I am now just telling you that it will arrive, proving my constant solicitude for you. I do not know how much longer I shall be able to manifest my remembrance in such a tangible form. For if Hamlet said '*Something is rotten in the State of Denmark*', so it has been the case for some time in our agricultural affairs. The fall in the prices of grain (in spite of the bad harvest this year our local needs can always be met) and sugar affects the rent one can get for one's land. The leaseholders are losing badly. . . . [W]hatever the price of land may be I am not going to farm it myself, so I shall let it for whatever it will fetch. . . .