

# The extraordinary life of Joseph Conrad

© Manfred Kramesberger

In the middle of the 19th Century Poland was a divided and occupied country. At the first division of Poland in 1772 Poland had been divided between Prussia, Austria and Russia. Prussia had taken the western and some northern Polish territory, Austria the southern area (including Cracow and Lemberg) and Russia the area east of the rivers Dnjepr and Düna. After that the proud Polish people tried to establish some political reforms. In 1792 the Russians again occupied the country, thereafter it came to the second Polish division. During the years 1830/31 the Polish people - led by the aristocrats - tried another revolt, which ended in disaster. 33 years later there was the next trial to expell the occupiers. Also this revolt was dejected and resulted in the banishment of many Polish, who were actively or passively involved in the revolt.

Under the large amount of exiled people was the father of Joseph Conrad, Apollo Korzeniowski (born February 21st, 1820 in Honoratka). Apollo Korzeniowski was a sensitive and scholarly man and an ardent patriot. He had studied orientalism, languages and literature in St. Petersburg. The family of the Korzeniowski's came from an old noble family. They belonged to the 'red' hawks.

The 'Reds' saw Poland's future in an open revolt. On the other end of the spectrum of Polish patriots were the 'white' pigeons. They stood for not risking any military confrontation, because they were sure of the military superiority of the Russian army. They believed in negotiating tactics and on the intensification of the relationship with Western Europe. The liberation of Poland was a holy thing to them as well as to the 'Reds' on the other side.

To the group of the 'Whites' belonged the family Bobrowski, an old Polish noble family as well. Apollo Korzeniowski was in love with Eva Bobrowska (born in 1831) since many years. Especially the father of Eva was not very happy with the relationship, because he believed the relationship between his daughter and a 'Red' would bring no luck to her. It should turn out that he was right with his opinion. (The Bobrowski-family also believed Apollo was actually 'doing nothing'). Apollo Korzeniowski had worked as an estate agent, but didn't have much success in doing this. He was fascinated by literature, languages and his affection belonged to his Polish homeland and fellow citizens. He was widely known as a translator of works of Flaubert, Hugo, Alfred de Vigny, but also of Shakespeare plays. Joseph Conrad remembered later that he had become familiar with literature because of the literary ambitions of his father. At the age of ten he had read some of the translations his father had written. A first step in the direction to his later activity as a writer ? In his autobiography 'A Personal Record' he wrote:

*'At ten years of age I had read much of Victor Hugo and other romantics. I had read in Polish and in French, history, voyages, novels; I knew "Gil Blas" and "Don Quixote" in abridged editions; I had read in early boyhood Polish poets and some French poets, but I cannot say what I read on the evening before I began to write myself. I believe it was a novel, and it is quite possible that it was one of Anthony Trollope's novels. '*

Besides translations Apollo Korzeniowski also wrote works of his own, political articles, tales and poems. 1854 he wrote the drama 'Comedy' (which was premiered almost 100

years later in 1952) and 1858 the play 'For a Pretty Penny'. One of his poems speaks a clear language regarding his political conviction:

*'May cowards tremble at lofty waves,  
To you they bring good fortune.  
You know the hidden reefs,  
And are familiar with the tempests.'*

Apollo Korzeniowski and Eva Bobrowska finally got married on May 10, 1856. The only child of the couple was Józef Theodor Konrad Nalecz Korzeniowski, who was born on December 3rd, 1857 in Berdyczew and who was to use the pen-name Joseph Conrad later. 1857: This was the year in which the first public libraries opened in England and Germany and the year Flaubert published his 'Madame Bovary'. If one searches for the town of Berdyczew in Poland today, one will not find it. The town belongs to the Ukraine and is located approximately 150 kilometers west of Kiev. Now it is spelled 'Berdychiv'. A poem from Apollo - written for the birth of his son - clearly tells us about the patriotic spirit of Apollo, who could not offer a real homeland to his son:

*'Baby son, tell yourself  
You are without land, without love,  
Without country, without people,  
While Poland - your Mother is in her grave.'*

Conrad later described his father very affectionate, but also somehow critical. In his autobiographical book 'A Personal Record' he writes:

*'The Russians themselves called them "rebellions," which, from their point of view, was the exact truth. Amongst the men concerned in the preliminaries of the 1863 movement my father was no more revolutionary than the others, in the sense of working for the subversion of any social or political scheme of existence. He was simply a patriot in the sense of a man who believing in the spirituality of a national existence could not bear to see that spirit enslaved',* and in a letter he wrote:

*'A man of great sensibilities; of exalted and dreamy temperament; with a terrible gift of irony and of gloomy disposition; withal of strong religious feeling degenerating after the loss of his wife into mysticism touched with despair.'*

It looks like Conrad had recognized - at least later - his father's dreaming spirit, who was not always able to prepare for reality. His guardian Tadeusz Bobrowski, the older brother of his mother, with his pragmatic and disciplined way of living, seemed to be more prepared for 'the real life'. Conrad was aware of this contradiction between the tempers of his father and his uncle. He knew it would make sense *'to have both feet on the ground'*, but escaping into dreams was the blood of his father, which he could not deny, as well as the caring attention from his mother.

It is much easier to report about the relationship to his mother: He loved her, without compromise. He loved her as every small child loves his mother: possessive, looking for shelter and warmth. It appears that the memory of Conrad in his later years was influenced by her early death. One has to mention she must have been a compassionate and loving person. After the marriage with Apollo she stood right behind her husband, even during the most critical times, she was a caring mother and a patriot. About his mother we find these lines in 'A Personal Record':

*'Amongst them I remember my mother, a more familiar figure than the others, dressed in the black of the national mourning worn in defiance of ferocious police regulations. I have*

*also preserved from that particular time the awe of her mysterious gravity which, indeed, was by no means smileless. For I remember her smiles, too. Perhaps for me she could always find a smile. She was young then, certainly not thirty yet. She died four years later in exile.'*

... and also (a report from his uncle):

*'Your mother - of far greater beauty, exceptionally distinguished in person, manner, and intellect - had a less easy disposition. Being more brilliantly gifted, she also expected more from life. At that trying time especially, we were greatly concerned about her state. Suffering in her health from the shock of her father's death (she was alone in the house with him when he died suddenly), she was torn by the inward struggle between her love for the man whom she was to marry in the end and her knowledge of her dead father's declared objection to that match. Unable to bring herself to disregard that cherished memory and that judgment she had always respected and trusted, and, on the other hand, feeling the impossibility to resist a sentiment so deep and so true, she could not have been expected to preserve her mental and moral balance. At war with herself, she could not give to others that feeling of peace which was not her own. It was only later, when united at last with the man of her choice, that she developed those uncommon gifts of mind and heart which compelled the respect and admiration even of our foes. Meeting with calm fortitude the cruel trials of a life reflecting all the national and social misfortunes of the community, she realized the highest conceptions of duty as a wife, a mother, and a patriot, sharing the exile of her husband and representing nobly the ideal of Polish womanhood.'*

In 1859 the family had lost all their money and moved to Zytomierz. Apollo worked there as a secretary for a publishing company. When Apollo was informed about some preparations in Warsaw, which were intended to lead to the final liberation of Poland, he travelled there in May 1861. His wife and little Konrad followed him in October 1861. They found a home in Nowy Swiat. Some secret conferences of the 'Reds' took place in the house of the Korzeniowski's. These meetings finally resulted in the revolution of 1863. But: This revolt was not to be witnessed by the family Korzeniowski in personal freedom.

As early as October 21st, 1861 Apollo Korzeniowski was arrested and taken to the notorious pavilion 10 of the Warsaw prison. On May 9th, 1862 the trial took place. Apollo was found guilty of formation and membership to a forbidden organisation and was sentenced to banishment to Northern Russia. His wife Eva was also sentenced to banishment because of complicity. Originally the banishment was pronounced for Perm in the Russian Ural-region, but was modified to Vologda later (several hundred kilometers north of Moscow).

On June 12th, 1862 the family reached Vologda, a town with a very unhealthy climate. Five year old Konrad and his mother were seriously ill on the journey, but Konrad recovered. His mother did not. Because of health-problems the family was allowed to move to Tschernigow later (in the northeastern part of Ukraine). In August 1863 Eva Korzeniowska and son Konrad were allowed by the authorities to travel to Nowochwastow for a three months visit of their family. But not even this vacation should recover the health of Eva. The mother of Konrad died of tuberculosis in Tschernigow on April 18th, 1865 after a long illness. Konrad was seven years old when his mother died.

But also his father did suffer from serious health problems. Little Konrad spent the May of 1866 again with his relatives in Nowochwastow. He became ill in the summer of this year and was sent to Kiew for treatment. From there he was brought again to uncle Tadeusz, while his father - with an absolutely unstable health - remained in exile.

It is much likely that in summer of 1867, when Konrad was nearly 10 years old, he saw the ocean for the first time. Together with his uncle Tadeusz he spent a few weeks in Odessa

at the Black Sea. In January 1868 Apollo Korzeniowski was released from prison due to his serious health-problems. Together with his son he left Russia. In September of the same year Apollo Korzeniowski was treated in a hospital in Topolnica. The treatment did not have any results. Later father and son moved to Lemberg and to Cracow. In February 1869 they arrived in Cracow. They found a home in Poselska number 6. Again Apollo was politically engaged, this time to organize a patriotic newspaper. The health of his father was not to recover. After a long and tormenting illness Apollo died on May 23rd, 1869, aged 49 years. He died of tuberculosis, same as his wife Eva. Konrad was to become an orphan at the age of eleven.

The first person to take care of Konrad after his father's death was Stefan Buszczynski, a friend of his father. Later the grandmother of Konrad, Teofila Bobrowska, took over. But uncle Tadeusz Bobrowski should become the real mentor and guardian of Konrad, who took care of the education and financial aspects of his nephew. The financial, but also personal and good-willing care of his uncle should accompany him for many years, should help him in times of crisis. His uncle remained - until his death in 1894 - a second father for Konrad. Joseph Conrad was to write later about him:

*'I cannot write about ... (him) ... without emotion. Even now, after 10 years, I feel his loss ... but even so I attribute to his devotion, care, and influence, whatever good qualities I may possess ...'*

Konrad was ill quite often during these years. One could have called him a 'difficult child'. He first attended a boarding-school in Cracow and was sent to Lemberg in 1872, where again he attended a boarding-school. He was not really popular with his classmates and his teachers. He was hardly interested in education, was involved in some disputes with both his teachers and classmates and he kept saying that he would become a great writer later. Only the geography classes interested him. In particular the white spots on the map of Africa were of great delight to him and he had spent many hours in front of the school-globe, touching the distant continents with his fingertips.

During this period for the first time he pronounced his wish to become a sea-man. He did not only dream about distant countries, but in particular he dreamed about ships and the ocean. These plans of Konrad were not right for uncle Tadeusz. He tried to talk him into a change of plans, sending him to Switzerland together with a medical student named Adam Pulman (who had taught him in Cracow). Konrad and Adam Pulman travelled through Switzerland in the summer of 1873. However, the expected success (Konrad to withdraw his plans of becoming a sea-man) did not come true. The family of young Konrad reacted very concerned and unfavorably to these fantasies. His plans caused

*'... a mass of remonstrance, indignation, pitying wonder, bitter irony, and downright chaff. I could hardly breathe under its weight ...'*

Konrad was not even 17 years old, when his family and - in particular - Tadeusz Bobrowski finally accepted his wish. His uncle declared a yearly payment of 600 rubel to be reasonable and on October 13th, 1874 Konrad left his home Poland with destination France. He entered the train in Cracow and arrived in France via Vienna. At this very moment he could not know that he was to see his homeland again for three short visits only. Adventure was calling.

Conrad (we shall call him Conrad with C from now on; his childhood as little Konrad had ended) did not leave anything in Poland which he really missed. Although his relationship to Uncle Tadeusz, to his grandmother Teofila Bobrowska and to other relatives was familiar and good, he did not have a real family anymore, hardly friends, a school which did not interest him and in addition: A call to serve in the Russian Army was more than likely.

So he reached Marseille as a youngster, totally free and without loads. Some people say

he has abandoned his home country, but there was no real homeland for him. It was a Russian colony which he had left. He had made his own way, nothing more, and this way had led him to Southern France. Some critics believe the fact that some of his later works deal with betrayal and trust and blame is the evidence that he brooded over his own escape from Poland when he wrote these stories. It is hard to believe in this and it is not very likely.

The subject of betrayal and trust is also an important factor when it comes to life at sea - Conrad's new life - and the life he was living for the next twenty years. At sea it is a major point being able to trust your fellow crew-member. Without this there would not be any working seamanship. Much more than ashore one is very close to each other - even in a physical way - and the behavior of your comrades is a critical point when it comes to the functionality of marine business. Not just a few young people - excited at first - give up their passion for ships and sea, not because of wind and waves, but because of the untrustful and betraying behavior of their comrades. Conrad did find a large variety of these cruelties aboard his ships - and did mention these later in his books. However, in 'A Personal Record', he wrote:

*'I have the conviction that there are men of unstained rectitude who are ready to murmur scornfully the word desertion. Thus the taste of innocent adventure may be made bitter to the palate. The part of the inexplicable should be allowed for in appraising the conduct of men in a world where no explanation is final. No charge of faithlessness ought to be lightly uttered ...'*

Tadeusz Bobrowski had not let his nephew go without any shelter. He had contacted the French Marine Authorities and had asked for some help - in particular for the first time. So Conrad had a first place to go, a first goal. The fact that he already spoke French fluently was of great help as well.

The first friend in France which Conrad met was the seaman Baptistin Solary. Aboard his ship Conrad took his very first small trips, however, because Solary was working as a pilot, these have been small trips between harbour and roadstead. Yet Conrad had enjoyed the first weeks in Marseille. Also he enjoyed his visits to the charming Cafés and Bistros. Some desperate money-transfers from Uncle Tadeusz to Conrad tell us about this. Conrad's favorite place was the 'Café de l'Universe', owned by Monsieur Boyer, who had many well-known painters and authors among his guests.

He made the acquaintance of the banker Delestang and his wife and occasionally had the opportunity to join them, riding on their coach (the money transfers from his uncle were sent to the Delestang-Bank). Later he wrote about him:

*'Her husband (as I sat facing them both), with his thin, bony nose and a perfectly bloodless, narrow physiognomy clamped together, as it were, by short, formal side whiskers, had nothing of Sir Leicester Dedlock's "grand air" and courtly solemnity. He belonged to the haute bourgeoisie only, and was a banker, with whom a modest credit had been opened for my needs. He was such an arden - no, such a frozen-up, mummified Royalist that he used in current conversation turns of speech contemporary, I should say, with the good Henri Quatre; and when talking of money matters, reckoned not in francs, like the common, godless herd of post-Revolutionary Frenchmen, but in obsolete and forgotten ecus - ecus of all money units in the world!'*

He made his first real sea-journey as a passenger aboard the ship 'Mont Blanc'. The ship left the harbor of Marseille on December 15th, 1874 for Martinique. For the first time Conrad travelled to one of the places which he had studied so carefully on the school globe in Lemberg. The 'Mont Blanc' returned to Marseille on May 23rd the next year, but already a month later Conrad found himself again aboard the 'Mont Blanc', this time

serving as a trainee sailor, going to Haiti. The night before Christmas Eve the ship returned to Le Havre.

More voyages followed, always interrupted by long times ashore in Marseille. There was a trip (as steward) aboard the 'Saint Antoine' to Haiti, Martinique, Colombia and (possibly) Venezuela. On this ship he met Dominic Cervoni, who was to become the model in some of his works, such as Jean Peyrol (The Rover), Attilio Pieschi (Suspense) and Nostromo. Conrad returned to Marseille mid-February 1877.

The next extraordinary time in the life of Conrad was his time as a gun-smuggler. There is really little known about the detailed circumstances and background-story. Much of the story is based upon Conrad's own writings and upon the letters of his uncle, who also supported him well during this time.

In Conrad's own words he was engaged - together with some others - in smuggling guns and ammunition for Don Carlos, one of the men who claimed the Spanish throne. In his novel 'The Arrow of Gold' he tells us about the voyages of the 'Temolino' from France to the Costa Brava, to the 'Carlists', the betrayal, ambush and the cruel end of comrades and ship, which sank near the Spanish coast. To hide his real activities Conrad had even put his name on the crew-list of the 'Saint Antoine' again (bound for another voyage to the Caribbean).

Not quite so romantic is the story told from Tadeusz Bobrowski. He was informed by Richard Fecht, a German friend of Conrad, that his nephew 'was seriously wounded'. In a conversation between Tadeusz and Fecht the latter said:

*,I think your nephew experienced a ... deep feeling ... if you get my drift ... Liebe, eine große, wahre Liebe ... gnädiger Herr'*  
(love, a true and big love, Sir)

Tadeusz travelled to Marseille immediately and discovered that Conrad had put all his money in a dubious smuggle-affair. In addition he had borrowed money from shady sources (a different version reports that Fecht had borrowed some money to him). Trying to make some quick money by gambling at the Casino in Monte Carlo did not solve the problem. Back to Marseille and waiting for the person whom he earned the money, he shot himself in the chest with a pistol. The bullet went through his body, near his heart without harming any vital organ.

Another version reports about a duel with the American John Blunt and Conrad's love-affair with Paula de Somogy, a girl from Hungary (and mistress of Don Carlos). In this version the impertinent behavior of Blunt might have caused the duel.

Today it is not quite possible to uncover the truth completely. All reports from his uncle speak against the 'romantic' version, but we have to mention that Tadeusz looked at the world with much more serious eyes. In this world there was no place to fight for beautiful Hungarian or Spanish 'Senoritas'. And in addition: Tadeusz was only informed afterwards, so his information was 'second hand'.

In every aspect the situation for Conrad had become critical. Although his uncle supported him financially again, he could not do any wonders at the French Immigration Office. Besides this story of debts and duels the French Government pursued him, because he did not hold any valid immigration paper. This also meant the end of serving on French ships. His time in Marseille had come to an end. The question was: Whereto now ?

Good luck, there is the British Merchant Navy, '*with not as many formalities as in France*'.

The faceless apparition of a City like London might be depressing for native people. To a foreigner, hardly understanding the language, slowly recovering from a serious injury, being able to afford only the cheapest accommodations (small and unpleasant 'rooms') because of financial problems, to this foreigner a City like London could become a

nightmare. Was it this for Conrad ?

However, this time Joseph Conrad wanted to prove himself. He was aged 21, his past adventures had not led him anywhere. He wanted to show his relatives - and especially uncle Tadeusz, who had increased the yearly payments to 950 rubel - that his plan to become a seaman hasn't been the daydreaming of a boy. He wanted to insure them that he was good for something, that he had learned from the incident in Southern France. And he deserved success. He was committed to follow up his way. He was prepared to go on. It should become a hard way and for many years a very lonely way, but he never thought about a return. He had to stand to his decision.

Conrad had joined the crew of the small English steamer 'Mavis' (serving as ordinary sailor) on June 10, 1878. This has been his first position as a 'real sailor' and he had taken a journey from Marseille through the mediterranean to Istanbul. In his memories he wrote about this later: *'I had thought to myself that if I was to be a seaman, then I would be a British seaman and no other. It was a matter of deliberate choice.'*

On June 18 of the same year the ship returned to her home port Lowestoft in England. This was the place where Joseph Conrad first entered British soil.

During the following months he had plenty of time to improve and to perfect his nautical knowledge. Aboard the sailing-ship 'The Skimmer of the Sea' he made small journeys between Lowestoft and Newcastle, interrupted by some time ashore, living in these *'unpleasant rooms'* in London. *'No explorer could have been more lonely. I did not know a single soul of all these millions that all around me peopled the mysterious distances of the streets. I cannot say I was free from a little youthful awe, but at that age one's feelings are simple. I was elated'*, he wrote later about this first weeks in London, while his uncle answered: *'You wanted it. You have done it ... prepare for the consequences of your decisions.'*

Maybe not the kind of answer a young and lonely guy expected. But Conrad stood to his way. He clearly saw that his momentary situation was depressing, but he trusted in the future and he believed this time would pass and he shall collect the rewards for his consistent way. *'I was pursuing a clear aim, I was carrying out a deliberate plan of making out of myself, in the first place, a seaman worthy of the service, good enough to work by the side of the men with whom I was to live; and in the second place, I had to justify my existence to myself, to redeem a tacit moral pledge.'*

On October 12, 1878 he 'signed on' for the 'Duke of Sutherland' which was bound for Australia. The ship arrived there end of January 1879. They started their voyage back home first days of July and on October 19, 1879 Conrad was back in London, where he left the ship. From mid-December 1879 to end of January 1880 he was again at sea, this time aboard the steamer 'Europa', which visited several ports in the mediterranean.

During this time (aboard the ships and ashore) he was busy learning for his certificate as Second Mate. He passed the test on June 1, 1880. Not even two years after stepping on English soil for the first time, he had become an officer of the British Merchant Navy. This must have been a great satisfaction for him, a proof that he was on his right way and a proof of his abilities to serve as a seaman.

On top of this it was his first masterpiece in a foreign language. It ment that he had learned not only English conversation within two years, but also he had learned nautical terminology. It is quite sure that the auditors of the 'Board of Trade' did not pay much attention to the fact Conrad was no British citizen and had just learned the language. Rather, one must accept that the 'Board of Trade' did not make it too easy to a man who spoke with a hard accent (Conrad mentions something in this direction in his memoirs).

There is some evidence that Conrad was not only involved in nautical themes during this period, but had also started paying close attention to English literature. Most likely he had read Shakespeare, Byron and other classics. This must have been his first literary contact with a language in which he finally became a master. Uncle Tadeusz was quite impressed from the quality of his nephew's writings and in more than one letter he urged him to write for Polish newspapers about his experiences at sea. Conrad did not answer directly, but he never wrote a single word for a newspaper in Polish language.

In 1901 he wrote - as a reaction to some reproaches from Poland for not writing in his mother tongue: *'I have in no way disavowed either my nationality or the name we share. It is widely known that I am a Pole and that Józef Konrad are my two Christian names, the latter being used by me as surname so that foreign mouths should not distort my real surname. It does not seem to me that I have been unfaithful to my country by having privied to the English that a gentleman from the Ukraine can be as good as sailor as they, and has something to tell them in their own language. I consider such recognition as I have won from this particular point of view, and offer in silent homage where it is due.'*

Already on August 21st, he accepted a new position as third officer on the ship 'Loch Etive', which again travelled from London to Australia and reached the port of Sydney on November 24th. This was Conrad's first position in a responsible command and he was rewarded with some good critics from his employers.

More trips followed. The voyage of the 'Palestine' turned out to be Conrad's worst and most adventurous of all. The ship was bound for Bangkok. Because of heavy weather it took three weeks for the way from London to Newcastle (to load the cargo, consisting of coal). On the voyage through the Channel there was another severe storm and the ship leaked. The repair of the ship took place in Falmouth and lasted for another eight months. Not enough of bad luck: While passing the Bangka-Strait (east of Sumatra) and before they reached the Gulf of Siam the coal in the ship's hull began to burn. The ship could not be saved and the crew (with Conrad) had to abandon the ship. The crew had to go into the lifeboat. This crew consisted of three officers (one English, one Irish and Conrad), nine sailors (one from Norway, one Irish, one from Belgium, a black man of unknown heritage, two from Devon, three from Cornwall) and a shipboy.

After about twelve hours in the small lifeboat they finally reached the port of Muntok on Bangka Island. This should become the very first close impression for Conrad of 'the East', which he described as intensely in his later works. He processed his experiences from this shipwreck in his work 'Youth'. After six days on Bangka Island the crew was saved and taken to Singapore aboard the 'S.S. Sissie', and Conrad was on his way back to England.

During these years there was a frequent exchange of letters between Conrad and his uncle. Uncle Tadeusz never got tired to remind him about moral, discipline and conscientiousness, while Conrad himself was already more than prepared to follow his way. Nevertheless he had some ideas as well about working as an office-clerk for a London company or going into the whaling business. None of this plans came true.

In July 1883 he met again Tadeusz Bobrowski in Marienbad. Their first idea was to meet in Cracow, but on advice from his doctors Tadeusz took a cure at the spa in Marienbad. It was their first personal meeting since Marseille and they spent a few quiet weeks in Teplice (Czech Republic). Conrad always had a close contact to his uncle, he trusted him and he enjoyed the conversation with him. Tadeusz Bobrowski was a man *'standing in the middle of life'*, intelligent, caring and his advice to Conrad was greatly respected.

Many sea-voyages followed. He was Second Mate aboard the 'Riversdale' (belonging to the ship-company 'Barr, Moering & Co') on a trip from London to Madras and the following

year aboard the 'Narcissus', again as Second Officer. In December 1884 he passed the next examination and received his certificate as a 'First Officer'. He was aged 27 years now. While uncle Tadeusz had already cut the yearly payments to his nephew in the past, this examination was another reason to reduce it again to an only symbolic amount. With Conrad's thirtieth birthday Tadeusz stopped these payments.

The next ship was the 'Tilkhurst', on which Conrad served as Second Mate on her trip from Hull via Singapore to Calcutta. The ship came back to her home-port on June 17th, 1886, where Conrad left the ship in Dundee, to prepare himself for the next examination - the Captain's certificate. Before that he had claimed British citizenship and became a British citizen on August 18th. He finally passed his 'Certificate of Competence' (the Captain's Certificate) on November 11th that year. Starting December 28th he served as Second Officer aboard the 'Falconhurst'.

For somebody not familiar with the Navy business it might be strange to see that a First Officer is serving as Second Mate and a man who holds the 'Captain's Certificate' is working in second position as well. However, good jobs were rare and the chance to get a position which reflected one's education was low. The ship owners had their fixed crew, especially when talking about coveted, responsible jobs one had to wait for years for an adequate offer - if you had no good luck. On a voyage from the Netherlands to Java in 1887 (on board the ship 'Highland Forest' commanded by Captain John McWhirr) Conrad became ill from an unknown disease. He had to undergo some treatment at a hospital in Singapore. Years after this only brief stay at a hospital his experiences inspired him for some lines in the first part of 'Lord Jim'.

After being released from hospital he did not return to Europe this time, but on August 22nd he accepted a very comfortable offer, serving aboard the 200-tons-steamer 'Vidar', going on a fixed route between the two Greater Sunda Islands Borneo and Celebes. Conrad held the position of the First Officer on this ship. The difference to his previous voyages could not have been bigger. There were the strict regulations of the British Navy, here was the life of a privileged white man who only had to give some orders and otherwise could think of himself as being a fine guy. However, Conrad was aware of the morbidity of his new job. It is also possible that this sort of life on a small coastal steamer was too easy for him. He could endure it only for five months. Anyhow, at the beginning of 1888 he terminated the job. These experiences can be found later in his story 'The End of the Tether', but the people, landscape, islands, villages and rivers of this region play a major part in some of his best works.

In January 1888, while waiting for a ship in Singapore, he was offered - very much to his own surprise - the command of the barque 'Otago', a 350-tons two-master. The captain of the ship had died at sea and the ship was now anchored in Bangkok and should be sailed to Sydney and onto Mauritius. Conrad accepted the offer with great pleasure, and later he wrote: *'Half-an-hour later, putting my foot on her deck for the very first time, I received the feeling of deep physical satisfaction. Nothing could equal the fullness of that moment, the ideal completeness of that emotional experience which had come to me without the preliminary toil and disenchantments of an obscure career ...'*

On January 24th he took over command of the ship 'Otago'. Before that he had bought new clothes in Singapore to adjust with his new position as a captain. His idea of proper clothing did not result in wearing a uniform, but in having a nice and decent lounge-suit with a vest, bowler and walking stick. It was reported that his manners were appropriate as well. He was always accurate, did not care so much about flatteries, kept his distance and was exemplary in every respects. A man, truly responsible for the lives of his crew and the fate of his ship.

The 'Otago' sailed from Sydney through the 'Torres-Strait', reaching the Indian Ocean and continuing to Mauritius, where she arrived on September 30th. During the two months waiting for new cargo in Mauritius Joseph Conrad fell in love with Eugenie Renouf, daughter of a french civil servant. It appears that Mademoiselle Eugenie had locked him in her heart also, but had forgotten that she was engaged already. So at the end of November the 'Otago', commanded by Joseph Conrad, left the island of the beautiful daughters. Destination: Australia. The port this time: Melbourne.

There he ended - at his own request - his job as captain of the ship 'Otago'. As a passenger aboard the 'Nürnberg' he travelled back to London. The precise reasons for his termination are not really known, but it is a fact that Conrad often made quick decisions during his lifetime.

Sometimes he terminated a job from one day to the next, without any clear reason. Sometimes he knew he would give up a nice or even just comfortable time.

It is possible that it was his wish to visit England again, after a long period of absence, or he wanted to meet again with his uncle. Today we do not know why he did it.

But another fact is known: In fall 1889 he started with his first novel 'Almayer's Folly', which was published more than five years later. Conrad's work on this novel was interrupted quite often. For a long time he carried the first chapters with him on his voyages. Writing was a very time-consuming and demanding work for him and he was always struggling for words, while he carried on with the story of Almayer.

And this - writing literature - was his second masterpiece, much more of a challenge than learning English conversation some years ago. Eleven years after having learned his first English words, he was writing a novel in English language now. Although he spoke fluently French and - of course - Polish he had decided to put his ideas on paper using the English language. One has to add that during the years in England he did not have too much contact with other people (this would have helped him to improve his conversation and style). Of course, as mentioned in another chapter, he was already acquainted with English literature and he had read the classics and some newer books. But to find words which must be considered of being excellent in his first work already, makes this almost a miracle. Conrad always strongly disliked if his work was put in the category of 'miracle'.

He wrote: *'One of them bears upon the question of language. I have always felt myself looked upon somewhat in the light of a phenomenon, a position which outside the circus world cannot be regarded as desirable. It needs a special temperament for one to derive much gratification from the fact of being able to do freakish things intentionally, and, as it were, from mere vanity', and 'English was for me neither a matter of choice nor adoption ... if I had not written in English I would not have written at all'.*

In February 1890 Conrad visited his fatally ill relative Alexander Poradowski in Brussels. Alexander died two days after Conrad arrived and left a 42 year old widow named Marguerite Poradowska. Conrad was immediately fascinated by her. She was born in France, was interested in art and literature and had written a book and several literary articles herself.

Conrad was attracted by her in an erotic way also, but it looks as they had decided to keep a strictly platonic friendship. In any way he kept a heavy exchange of letters with her. In these letters we can find some more details about his life and mental state - in particular about the process of his books and texts. In his letters he usually addressed her with 'my dearest aunt'. Tadeusz Bobrowski had first warned Conrad from the relationship with Marguerite (who was nine years older than Conrad) and expressed his belief that this might not be the proper relationship for his nephew.

Mid-February Conrad travelled from Brussels to Warsaw and onto Kazimierowka, the estate of his uncle, where he stayed until the middle of April. It was his first visit to Poland

since sixteen years.

Already since fall of 1889 Conrad had looked for a new position as a captain or at least for a responsible position, but he did not find anything to fit him. Finally he accepted the job of being captain of a river-steamer on the Congo-river. Aboard the steamer 'Ville de Maceio' he travelled from Bordeaux to Central Africa. He reached the town of Boma on June 12th, 1890 (Boma is located at the Congo-river approx. 100 kilometers from the coast). Starting in Matadi he began his 300 kilometer walk to Kinshasa, where he arrived on August 2nd. To his disappointment the ship which was supposed to be commanded by him was not available. For the moment his dreams of becoming a river-captain had ended. But because he was already there and to get to know the area, he proceeded his journey on a very small and ageing steamer up-river to the Stanley falls. On their way back the captain of the small steamer became ill and Conrad took over command. In addition aboard this little steamer (named 'Roi de Belges') was a young, seriously ill agent of the company Conrad worked for. The young man died before they reached Matadi. The agent Kurtz in his book 'Heart of Darkness' is modeled after this youngster. Conrad even adopted his name almost correctly. 'Kur(t)z' in German means short; and the real name of the agent was 'Klein' (small).

Joseph Conrad spent about eight months in Africa and his disgust towards the 'lords' of this country could not have been bigger. The Congo-area belonged to Belgium, more precisely to the Belgian king Léopold II, who was involved in a cruel exploitation of the country and its people, using several companies and 'agents'. Ivory had become very fashionable in Europe and could be sold with enormous profit. Conrad was highly indignant about the things he saw. In his 'Last essays' he clearly pronounced his disgust towards these circumstances.

However, disappointed and disgusted, he terminated his job with the company 'Société Anonyme Belge pour le Commerce du Haut-Congo' at the end of October and in December 1890 he went back to Europe.

Joseph Conrad had been ill quite often during his lifetime. Already as a child he did suffer from different diseases, as a youngster he suffered from headaches, disturbed sleep and other health problems. When he was grown up there had been plenty of physical difficulties also. The voyage to the Congo added some more problems, like attacks of fever and rheumatism. At the beginning of 1891 he had to undergo some medical treatment because of that. But before and after this treatment there were days when he could hardly leave the bed. In May of the same year he spent one month at a hospital near Geneva to cure from his illness. But more important than the physical problems, this voyage had brought to him another serious disease: depression.

It is quite possible that the confrontation with Africa, where - in the beginning - he had seen himself as a sort of explorer (and finally had to realize, he was no more than a helping hand for organisations which were interested in financial profit only), had caused this depression. To see how this 'companies' shamelessly exploit people, animals and land, this could have been a major point. It is also possible that the sort of life he had been living so far did not quite satisfy him. One cannot forget that the time of the sailing-ships was coming to an end very rapidly. It had become very difficult to get a position on a sailing-ship. The world had changed to steamers and more than half of Conrad's nautical knowledge was obsolete.

It might be true that many of the great writers suffered from depression. Maybe it is an essential condition for a great writer and it is also correct to say that most of these artists fought against depression using alcohol. When we talk about American writers of the last century awarded with the Nobel Prize in Literature five out of six drank away their depression.

Conrad - as far as we know - did not pay much attention to alcohol, but his illness depression was existing. And some questions could come up with this. The question if he would have started to write without his pessimistic view of the world. The question if it was sort of loophole for him to order his thoughts on paper, giving an explanation for the world and for the situation. Maybe it was kind of a quiet talk between the two parts of Conrad's mind: the part of him which was '*standing on the ground with both feet*' and the other part '*doubting everything*'. Maybe it had become essential for him to write down the impressions and thoughts in order to understand. We do not know it.

All works he'd left us (besides the first chapters of 'Almayer's folly') were written after the Congo experience. But it is quite certain that our literary world would be a bit poorer, if Conrad would not have made this journey to Africa. For sure, Africa had changed him. His apprehension for 'business-people' of every kind was never too big, but his experiences in the Congo area put an extra element into his brain.

But if one just wants to see it from the literary point of view: His experiences there were brought to paper in the tale 'Heart of Darkness' more than ten years later. It must be admitted that he had followed his own journey quite fastidious. He was using his personal diaries as well (first time for him to write a diary) to write this story.

At the beginning of 1891 - just returned to London - he rented a small flat in Gillingham Street, which served him as a home for the next five years when he was in England. In the middle of November he was at sea again, this time as the first officer aboard the elegant three-master 'Torrens' on the way to Adelaide.

On the 'Torrens' he travelled two times between England and Australia and these had been his last voyages on a sailing-ship. During this trips and when he was ashore he continued writing his first story 'Almayer's Folly'. He was writing very slowly and doubtridden about the possible success. On one tour he met a young passenger named 'Jacques' (who had just finished his studies at Cambridge). To him he presented the already finished chapters of his manuscript. He handed the few pages over with this words:

*"It is a sort of tale," I answered, with an effort. "It is not even finished yet. Nevertheless, I would like to know what you think of it."*, and when he asked him if it would be worth finishing, Jacques answered: *"Distinctly," in his sedate, veiled voice, and then coughed a little. "Were you interested?" I inquired further, almost in a whisper. "Very much!"*

(from: A Personal Record)

On his way back to Europe in March 1893 he got to know John Galsworthy (1867 - 1933), who was later awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, and the teacher Edward L. Sanderson. The three men were on good terms with each other soon. It was the beginning of friendships which lasted for a lifetime. Conrad also kept regular contact with the family of Sanderson for many years. He left the ship by the end of July in London for visiting his uncle again (from August until September the same year). He could not know it was their last personal meeting. Tadeusz Bobrowski died on February 10th, 1894.

On November 29th of the year before Conrad had accepted a position on the steamer 'Adowa'. This ship was carrying emigrants from Rouen to Canada. Als already mentioned, the crisis of sailing-ships had not spared him. It was quite impossible to find a decent job on the few sailing-ships that were left. Therefore many seamen had to accept a job on a steamer. After the return of the 'Adowa' from Rouen to London he did quit the job at the beginning of 1894. He was not aware that with this decision he had quit his 'sea-life' for good. Although he was looking for another job in the naval business for some years he should never again 'set his foot on deck' of a ship as a professional.

On April 24th of this year the manuscript of 'Almayer's Folly' was finally finished and Conrad sent it to the publishing company 'T. Fisher Unwin'. After that he received another treatment in Switzerland, which did not bring great relief to him. Six months later 'T. Fisher Unwin' informed Conrad that they are willing to publish his work. Already during the time in Switzerland he had started a new text with the title 'An Outcast of the Islands'.

Because of the contact with the publishing-company 'T. Fisher Unwin' Conrad got to know Edward Garnett on October 8th, 1894. Garnett was working as an editor and senior reader for this publisher. Later he became Conrad's friend and literary advisor.

With the beginning of the second book, with the acceptance of his first work and with the new acquaintances in literary circles one thing was quite clear now: Conrad had been a seaman. A new part of his life was to follow now. A book about him titles 'The three lives of Joseph Conrad'. What followed was the third part.

For Conrad were the next twenty years - working as a writer - years of suffering from shortage of money, deprivations and self-doubts. As late as 1914 he was to have real - also financial - success with his writing, which enabled him to pay off his debts and to live a secured life. For now he could not imagine what was ahead of him, but there was no chance for a return. Even until the year 1900 he was sometimes thinking of working as a seaman again (being really disappointed by the fruitlessness of his doings). However, the termination of his sea-job had not been the idea of a single moment, but his poor health had driven him to look for another way of living. We cannot say which way he would have been taken if his health would have been more stable. But it is true to point out that he had accepted writing as a new challenging, frustrating, but interesting activity. Thin-skinned or not, he had to proof himself one more time.

Already in 1891 Tadeusz Bobrowski had written in a letter to Conrad: *'Thinking over the causes of your melancholy most carefully I cannot attribute it either to youth or to age. No, it came from ill-health, from the wretched sufferings in Africa, but also from something more: the habit of reverie which I have observed to be part of your character. It is inherited; it has always been there, in spite of your active life.'*

On April 29th, 1895 'Almayer's Folly' was published under the pen-name Joseph Conrad. The critics of this work were very positive, reaching from *'quite amazing'* to *'first class'* and *'absolutely worth reading'*. But only a few copies of the book were sold.

During another treatment in Switzerland Conrad got to know Emilie Briquel. This new romance lasted until fall of 1895, when Emilie met a doctor and finally announced her engagement with him.

In September of this year Conrad finished the work on his second novel 'An Outcast of the Islands' and began writing a new story, called 'The Sisters'. Edward Garnett, who had also literarily promoted D.H. Lawrence and John Galsworthy, advised Conrad to stop working on this project, because he thought it does not compare with the other works. *'I do not want to spend my life in a cockloft'*, he had told Garnett, when the two discussed the financial part of a writers career. Garnett remembered Conrad being a man with *'brilliant eyes, now narrowed and penetrating, now soft and warm ... whose speech was ingratiating, guarded and brusque turn by turn. I had never seen before a man so masculinely keen yet so femininely sensitive'*. 'An Outcast of the Islands' was published in March 1896, while 'Sisters' was only published in 1928 after Conrad's death.

The next main event in Conrad's life was his marriage with Jessie George. Jessie was sixteen years younger than he was. A great amount of historians had been puzzled by this marriage already. It looks like that neither bride nor bridegroom were aware of a relationship so close to result in a marriage. Conrad proposed the question of marriage while he was visiting a museum with Jessie. And just a sentence after his proposal he

complained about the bad weather. Something of a romantic touch, isn't it ? A possible statement could be that he was aged 38 now and he might have found it reasonable to be married. Some people brought up the idea that Conrad hardly knew anybody in England, or - after the short affair with Emilie he had had - he was ready to give his life a touch of more security, of hold. The positive sides of Jessie when it came to cooking and general housework might also have been a reason for him. However it was: It should turn out they had made the right decision.

Though Jessie was not - at least not from the beginning - interested in his literary work, and Conrad did not bother her with 'serious talks' the marriage was to last. And the relationship of the differing couple became much better during the years. Jessie spoiled him and took care of him as good as possible. She kept him from being bothered by the 'normal daily grind'. Even after both her knees were seriously injured during an accident in 1904 - she was not to recover from this - she remained being a caring wife and mother.

They got married on March 24th, 1896 and the couple spent the honeymoon in Brittany. In his book 'The Secret Agent' (published in 1907) he wrote about life in a marriage being sort of bizarre. He describes the life of Mr. Verloc (not his own) with this words:

*'Mr Verloc loved his wife as a wife should be loved - that is, maritally, with the regard one has for one's chief possession. This head arranged for the night, those ample shoulders, had an aspect of familiar sacrednes - the sacredness of domestic peace.'*

During the time in Brittany he wrote some stories, for example 'An Outpost of Progress', 'The Lagoon', 'The Idiots' (the stories were put together in the book 'Tales of Unrest'). There were days on which he wrote a good amount of words, but also times he had to fight for every single word. He was depressed quite often, not only during the times when he was in search for proper words, and he was afraid of being able to write in a '*state of intoxication*' only. His writing-problems caused a heavy physical and psychological overload to him, which came up mostly after having finished a particular work. The most serious mental breakdown came in 1910. It was very clear, the burden of 'wanting to write' (together with the certainty of 'having to write' for financial reasons) lasted heavily on his shoulders.

In addition to this in August 1896 he had lost almost all his money, consisting of the money he had saved and of his uncle's inheritance, which he had put in the shares of a goldmine in South Africa. '*I, who have never sought in the written word anything else but a form of the Beautiful ...*', he wrote later, and '*Perhaps I should not have used the word 'literary'. That word presupposes an intimacy of acquaintance with letters, a turn of mind, and a manner of feeling to which I dare lay no claim. I only love letters; but the love of letters does not make a literary man, any more than the love of the sea makes a seaman. And it is very possible, too, that I love the letters in the same way a literary man may love the sea he looks at from the shore - a scene of great endeavour and of great achievements changing the face of the world, the great open way to all sorts of undiscovered countries.*' (from: A Personal Record)

On September 27th the Conrad's came back to England and rented a house in Stanford-Le-Hope, near the delta of the Thames river. Shortly after he started to work on 'The Nigger of the Narcissus', a work which was - for a change - carried out relatively easy. He also accepted this story after it was finished, which did not apply to all of his writings.

Most of his lifetime Conrad was 'on the move'. He was not built for just sitting quietly at one place. Now, with the years as a seaman behind him, he moved quite often. Already in March 1897 the couple moved to the new home Ivy-Walls.

More works came. Sometimes he wrote on two different stories at the same time, for example 'Karain' or 'The Return' are such stories. During this period he also made more acquaintances with other authors. In February 1897 he got to know Henry James, a bit

later he started exchanging letters with the Scottish publisher William Blackwood (who published 'Youth' and 'Lord Jim' later). In November 1897 he met the adventurer, politician and writer Robert Cunninghame-Graham and the correspondent and writer Stephen Crane, who had become well known (in particular in the USA) with his book 'The Red Badge of Courage'. He became a friend with both his colleagues.

On January 15th 1898 the first of two sons was born and was baptized Borys. To his friends Conrad reacted as if this had nothing to do with him. This was a more or less typical behavior of him (he changed that in his later years). He was not willing to give some 'family-news' to his friends and colleagues. His ideal was that his friends had to care only about the subject writing (or similar important, world-moving themes). Also one has to admit that Conrad lived a life of loneliness, which had brought him away from - let's call it the routine of family-life. He had not chosen this sort of life, but he didn't do anything against it. Also he did not really have a normal relationship with the people surrounding him, with his neighbors, but he was interested in 'bright people', who were able to transport the issues of interest. And we have to say, Conrad was very much irritated, insecure and sensitive when he was talking - especially to people he did not know very well. He always tried to adjust himself to his dialogue partners, but was not very good in this. It is possible - some historians believe in it - that he felt valueless, because as a seaman he had learned a 'real job' (in comparison with some of his fellow writers) and re-emphasized he is no common seaman any more.

Maybe a few lines from his autobiography could clear up this:

*'I would not unduly praise the virtue of restraint. It is often merely temperamental. But it is not always a sign of coldness. It may be pride. There can be nothing more humiliating than to see the shaft of one's emotion miss the mark of either laughter or tears. Nothing more humiliating! And this for the reason that should the mark be missed, should the open display of emotion fail to move, then it must perish unavoidably in disgust or contempt. No artist can be reproached for shrinking from a risk which only fools run to meet and only genius dare confront with impunity. In a task which mainly consists in laying one's soul more or less bare to the world, a regard for decency, even at the cost of success, is but the regard for one's own dignity which is inseparably united with the dignity of one's work.'*  
and also: *'He stands there, the only reality in an invented world, among imaginary things, happenings, and people. Writing about them, he is only writing about himself. But the disclosure is not complete. He remains, to a certain extent, a figure behind the veil; a suspected rather than a seen presence - a movement and a voice behind the draperies of fiction.'*

(from: A Personal Record)

Conrad's view of his own works and of the works of writers which he admired was a very complex thing. On one side he had the opinion that only the artist was able to create the 'real reality' in the way that it was his part to put a literary meaning into the event; on the other hand he doubted everything, even his own well-considered words. In this point he did hardly believe in any thoughts or formulation. Not only his own words *'I have never learned to trust it. I can't trust it to this day. A dreadful doubt hangs over the whole achievement of literature'* are proof for this. A quote from the painter Berthé Morisot (1841 - 1895) could fit here even better and might give an indication about his doubts. She had said:

*'My own ambition was limited to wanting to capture something of what goes by, just something, the smallest thing. And yet, this ambition is excessive.'*

This ambivalence in Conrad's point of view remained an important subject throughout his

life as a writer. Also he was quite aware of this situation. His idea was to produce a work to make us see, as already mentioned ... *'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, above all, to make you see'*, but *'in a measure explain the aim of the attempt.'*

Conrad was the producer as well as the sharpest critic in one person.

'Youth' and 'Tales of Unrest' are stories from this period, while he often tried to work on the text of 'The Rescue' - and often put it aside. This text was not to be finished before 1919. But his ambivalent thoughts - and his doubts - are true for almost all of his work.

On October 26th, 1898 the Conrad's moved again. This time to a house near Hythe / Kent, named 'Pent Farm'. The next thirteen years should become the most productive and significant period of his time as a writer. Almost all the great works were published in the years between 1898 and 1911, such as 'Heart of Darkness', 'Lord Jim', 'Nostromo' and 'Under Western Eyes'. But it was not only his writing problems, which caused agony and despair for him, but also the problems from the financial side bothered him. For many years his agent James Pinker supported him to a remarkable extent. As late as 1914 the popularity of Conrad had reached a level which enabled him not only to live from his writings, but to pay off his debts also. Conrad wrote more than 1000 letters to Pinker, most of them carrying the wish for more patience. *'I am not one of your 25 year old geniuses'*, he wrote to him in anger, when Pinker insisted in the delivery of a new story. After 'Lord Jim' was finished in July of 1900 the Conrad's went on a five week vacation to Belgium. About the finishing of 'Lord Jim' he wrote to Galsworthy:

*'The end of 'Lord Jim' has been pulled off with a steady drag of 21 hours. I sent my wife and child out of the house (to London) and sat down at 9 a. m. with a desperate resolve to be done with it. Now and then I took a walk round the house, out at one door in at the other. Ten-minute meals. A great hush. Cigarette ends growing into a mound similar to a cairn over a dead hero. Moon rose over the barn, looked in at the window and climbed out of sight. Dawn broke, brightened. I put the lamp out and went on, with the morning breeze blowing the sheets of (the manuscript) all over the room. Sun rose. I wrote the last word and went into the dining-room. Six o'clock I shared a piece of cold chicken with Escamillo (the dog of the Conrad's) (who was very miserable and in want of sympathy, having missed the child dreadfully all day). Felt very well, only sleepy; had a bath at seven and at 1:30 was on my way to London.'*

The novel 'Lord Jim' received some euphoric criticism. Yet it was not a big success. The novel appeared first in 'Edinburgh Monthly Magazine' and was published as a book on October 15th, 1900. Only a few people bought the book.

Conrad's next project regarded the collaboration with Ford Madox Ford (Ford's real name was 'Hueffer'). Together with Ford he wrote several stories starting from the year 1900. Mister Hueffer, based on the reports of some witnesses, must have been sort of a 'strange person'. He was rejected by most of Conrad's friends, but Jessie Conrad disliked him the most. There must have been several arguments between Jessie and Conrad because of his companion. Ernest Hemingway later wrote about him: *'I had always avoided looking at Ford when I could and I always held my breath when I was near him in a closed room, but this was the open air ...'*

(Hemingway; A moveable feast)

Some of his works from this 'great period' clearly show the financial situation he was trapped in. One of his best known stories today is 'Heart of Darkness' (widely known also because of the 1979 movie 'Apocalypse Now', directed by Francis Ford Coppola), but some critics pay attention to the fact that 'Heart of Darkness' has a very long beginning, but a short climax and end. Finally, they say, this novel is only sort of a longer short-story.

Thomas E. Lawrence once said about Conrad's literature:

*'He's absolutely the most haunting thing in prose that ever was ... I wish I knew how every paragraph he writes (... they are all paragraphs: he seldom writes a single sentence...) goes on sounding in waves, like the note of a tenor bell, after it stops ... it all ends in a kind of hunger.'*

(Lawrence had met Conrad in 1920 at the home of the author Hugh Walpole and he visited him on July 18, 1920 in Bishopsbourne).

If one compares 'Heart of Darkness' with 'Nostromo' we have to realize that 'Nostromo' differs in the way that it is the ultimate experiment of dealing with a tremendous tale, which includes the literary production of a complex state. However, both novels belong to the most brilliant works from Conrad and to the most influential pieces of literature from the beginning of the 20th Century.

Conrad defended Hueffer desultorily against his critics *'he is not such a bad guy'*. In reality he had needed him to act as audience, producer of ideas, proofreader, secretary and so on. Even Henry James thought that Ford could *'ruin Conrad's style'*. Anyway: It is true that Conrad and Ford Madox worked together on several books (including 'Nostromo'). In 1909 the relationship ended abruptly.

In January 1905 the Conrad family went for vacation to the island of Capri. They stayed until May. The health-problems of Joseph Conrad had reached a new climax during this time. He recovered slowly in winter and spring 1905/1906. Next years vacation was planned for Montpellier. On August 2nd, 1906 the second son, John Alexander, was born. Brother Borys became seriously ill in January next year and had to be treated in Geneva.

The next relocation of the Conrad's was about to come. After their return to England they moved to Someries in Bedford, to be followed in 1909 by a new move to Aldington (again near Hythe). Als already mentioned: At the end of January 1910 Conrad had a complete physical and mental breakdown. The collapse followed just right after he had finished the novel 'Under Western Eyes'. His enduring difficulties with texts and finances might have caused it.

He recovered in April of this year and again started his work. The first story he wrote afterwards was 'A Smile of Fortune'. And in 1910 - no surprise - the family moved again; now to Ashford and to the so-called 'Capel House'. 'Under Western Eyes' was published in October 1911, but neither critics nor audience did really recognize this. Only a few copies of the book were sold. In 1913 Conrad found a publisher for his American readers in the publishing company 'Doubleday, Page & Co.', which increased the circulation of his books quite a lot. In order to celebrate this occasion he had decided to purchase a car from a Cadillac-dealer.

The same year he first met with the mathematician and philosopher Bertrand Russell (1872 - 1970), who should recall a conversation with Conrad:

*'In all this I found myself closely in agreement with him. At our very first meeting, we talked with continually increasing intimacy. We seemed to sink through layer after layer of what was superficial, till gradually both reached the central fire. It was an experience unlike any other that I have known. We looked into each other's eyes, half appalled and half intoxicated to find ourselves together in such a region.'*

However, the best known quote from Russell might be: *'The trouble with the world is that the stupid are cocksure and the intelligent are full of doubt.'*

A quote which perfectly describes Conrad's feelings.

'Chance' was published at the beginning of 1914 and it was the first real - financial - success for Conrad. Critics and readers acclaimed the story as a brilliant tale. Only the publishing of 'Chance' made it possible for Conrad to pay his debts and to stabilize his financial situation. After many years of living from borrowing money now time had come to

withdraw himself from these circumstances. The very same year the first biography about Joseph Conrad was published (written by Richard Curle), and the work on the novel 'Victory' had ended in June 1914.

In July 1914 Conrad and his family visited his homeland Poland - first time for him since 1893. This trip ended up in disaster. The Conrad's got involved in the first battles of the beginning World War I. The trip was made upon invitation from Otolia Retinger, the wife of a Polish friend. After visiting some places of his youth and five days in Cracow the family had to escape to Zakopane on August 2nd, where Conrad's cousin Aniele Zagorska lived. There the Conrad's hid for some time. On October 7th they organized a horse-carriage and left Zakopane, holding a travel-permission signed by General Kuck, the Austrian commander in Cracow. They arrived in Vienna on October 11th - with plenty of luck and under great danger - on a train, carrying mostly wounded soldiers. From Vienna the Conrad's proceeded to Genoa. They arrived back in England on November 3rd.

Back to his literary career: The work 'Within the Tides' (published February 1915) helped some more to make the name Conrad known to a wider audience. It was also greatly respected by critics. The same year Conrad's son Borys - not even 18 years old - joined the British Army as a volunteer. Conrad identified himself clearly with his new home during the war. Especially from 1916 on, when Germany more or less took over command in WWI, he was seriously concerned, while he was kind of neutral towards Austria. 1918 he wrote an article, called 'The Crime of Partition', in which he demanded more solidarity from England and France with Poland. He wrote this article with great loyalty to his Polish heritage, hardly hiding how upset he was.

Some critics believe Conrad's literary power was already gone at that time. However, there are many reasons for not accepting this for all of his work from this period. Among the best works of his later fiction we can find 'The Shadowline', a work of perfect and poetic clarity. There are other fine (shorter) works as well. In November 1916 Conrad spent about two weeks on board the H.M.S. Ready. This sailing-ship was supposed to search for hostile submarines.

In 1917 as well as in 1918 Jessie Conrad was undergoing some intense medical treatment because of her injured knees. In 1919 the Conrad's moved again; this time to Spring Grove / Kent. Conrad ended the work on 'The Rescue' at the end of May 1919. He had started to write this text more than twenty years ago. And shortly afterwards - the same year - there was another move to Bishopsbourne near Canterbury. This should become the last address of Joseph Conrad.

In 1921 the Conrad family travelled through France and on to Corsica, where Conrad started to work on the novel 'Suspense'. Not only Conrad and his wife took part on this voyage, but also son Borys, a driver and a female servant for Jessie joined the group. However, the expedition did not bring great relief to Conrad's health. Although they visited Marseille and other places of his early life, Conrad usually incapsulated himself behind books and papers. Not even the meeting with Gérard Jean-Aubry (Jean-Aubry was one of the first to write a biography about Joseph Conrad), a dear friend and translator of his works, could make him feel better.

He might have thought about the way of his life and whereto it had led him. The financial success was there, but he was miles away from feeling comfortable with his life and his situation. Maybe he was aware of that he might had written 'the great words' already.

In October 1921 he started writing the novel 'The Rover'. This should become his last complete novel. The manuscript, which he ended in 1922, had again forced all power out of him and his mental and physical condition was extremely bad. The stories written after 'The Rover' are - and this is not at all typical for him - made under the influence of some expected success, for a broad and paying audience. He also tried himself in writing very

romantic love-stories during this period, and did not really succeed with it.

From April to June 1923 he made a voyage to the United States, following an invitation from his American publishers. He visited New York and Boston and read from his works in front of a large audience. Never before he had read from his books in front of several hundred listeners. The very positive and warm reaction of his American readers touched him. From Boston and New York he wrote several letters to his wife, in which he told her about the *'attentive Americans'*.

Also in early summer 1923 Conrad was offered knighthood by the English Prime-Minister MacDonald - on behalf of King George V. Conrad rejected.

Despite of many years suffering physical problems Conrad's death came suddenly and unexpected. *'My head seems clearer now than in months'*, he told his friend and biographer Richard Curle just a few days before his death.

Joseph Conrad died on August 3rd, 1924 at 8.30 in the morning in his house in Bishopsbourne from a heart-attack. He had suffered a first attack the day before. On August 3rd he was sitting again in his working-room - alone, when he suddenly shouted *"Here ... !"*. He fell down and was dead.

Today, Conrad's works are widely considered to be world-literature. Some critics - such as Jakob Wassermann - declared him being sort of a 'describing author'. Nothing could be wronger. Conrad was not so much involved in 'describing' something, but in transmitting a position, an attitude, a point of view. Of course, he was no modern author in this sense, he did not want to revolt against common literature or to invent words perfectly new. He also disagreed with exercises and tests in this direction. This he left to some of his successors. He was more engaged in transporting moral aspects than in defining new arts. However, the figure of Marlow - used in some of his best novels - still stands as a perfect solution to get the 'personal touch' of the writer to his readers. And Marlow enabled Conrad also to jump back and forward with the time-schedule of his stories. This Marlow, acting as a man who knows life, speaking with a sorrowful, sometimes questioning voice, who entertains his listeners with his stories - his yarn - this man is just the type of person Conrad wanted to be himself. But he was not. He had said: *'From all things I wish most ... to have some more self confidence ...'*

Conrad wrote in 'A Personal Record': *'Those who read me know my conviction that the world, the temporal world, rests on a few very simple ideas; so simple that they must be as old as the hills. It rests notably, among others, on the idea of Fidelity.'* *'He hated it to be placed in front ... was very subtle ... an esthete ... and most of all a poet. Sometimes he was unhappy, difficult in his moods, then again easy, warm at heart ...'* said a visitor. And André Gide added: *'He was a Polish aristocrat to his fingertips...'*

The influence of Joseph Conrad on generations of authors is great: He influenced such writers as Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Graham Greene, F. Scott Fitzgerald and many others, while Conrad himself never denied being influenced by Maupassant.

In his later years Conrad had worked very hard on adjusting the view the world should have of him and of his art - after his death. This was a point which attracted him a lot and he spent many hours to produce so-called 'Author's Notes' (in total 21), explaining articles, introductions and so on to his already existing work, so as if he had to explain his life and work to everybody. But also - being a very shy person by nature - as Jerry Allen wrote: *'he had drawn about himself a shielding screen'* (for most of his lifetime). His roots were in between the times, so to say between the 'Victorian age' and the modern times, but he

was timeless in every sense. In an article on Ernest Hemingway Ernst Schnabel finds the resemblance with Conrad: *'It was 'Lord Jim's', in general Conrad's, moral and it consisted of the fact that you have to realize being noble does not entitle noble people to anything besides taking full responsibility for themselves, which includes the responsibility for all the world as well'.*

And Virginia Woolf (1882 - 1941) wrote after Conrad's death:

*'Suddenly, without giving us time to arrange our thoughts or prepare our phrases, our guest has left us; and his withdrawal without farewell or ceremony is in keeping with his mysterious arrival, long years ago, to take up his lodging in this country. For there was always an air of mystery about him. It was partly his Polish birth, partly his memorable appearance, partly his preference for living in the depths of the country, out of ear-shot of gossips, beyond reach of hostesses, so that for news of him one had to depend upon the evidence of simple visitors with a habit of ringing door-bells who reported of their unknown host that he had the most perfect manners, the brightest eyes, and spoke English with a strong foreign accent. ... Therefore, though we shall make expeditions into the later books and bring back wonderful trophies, large tracts of them will remain by most of us untrodden. It is the earlier books - Youth, Lord Jim, Typhoon, The Nigger of the Narcissus - that we shall read in their entirety. For when the question is asked, what of Conrad will survive and where in the ranks of novelists we are to place him, these books, with their air of telling us something very old and perfectly true, which had lain hidden but is now revealed, will come to mind and make such questions and comparisons seem a little futile. Complete and still, very chaste and very beautiful, they rise in the memory as, on these hot summer nights, in their slow and stately way first one star comes out and then another.'*

## Literature and Source References :

- The Thunder and the Sunshine; Jerry Allen; Putnam, N.Y., 1958
- The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad; Volume 9, Uncollected Letters and Indexes; Edited by Laurence Davies, Owen Knowles, Gene M. Moore, J. H. Stape, 2007
- The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad; Volume 8, 1923–1924; Edited by Laurence Davies, Gene M. Moore, 2007
- The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad; Volume 7, 1920–1922; Edited by Laurence Davies, J. H. Stape, 2005
- Joseph Conrad's Letters to His Wife; London, 1927
- Letters from Joseph Conrad; Edward Garnett; Indianapolis, 1928
- Conrad to a Friend; Richard Curle; N.Y., 1928
- Joseph Conrad: Lettres francaises; G. Jean-Aubry; Paris, 1930
- A Preface to Conrad; Cedric Watts; Longman, 1982
- Joseph Conrad and The West; Jacques Darras; New York/London, 1982
- The Eternal Solitary: A Study of Joseph Conrad; Adam Gillon; Boston, 1982
- Joseph Conrad: Times Remembered; John Conrad; Cambridge, 1981
- The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad; Eloise Knapp Hay; University of Chicago Press, 1963, 1981
- Conrad's Later Novels; Gary Geddes; Montreal, 1980
- Conrad: 'Almayer's Folly' to 'Under Western Eyes'; Daniel R. Schwarz; MacMillan, 1980
- Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives; Frederick R. Karl; Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1979
- Conrad's Early Sea-Fiction; Paul Bruss; Lewisburg, Penn.; 1979
- The Romantic Fate in Lord Jim; Paul Kirschner; Ariel, 1979
- Joseph Conrad: The Way of Dispossession; H.M. Daleski; London, 1977
- James & Conrad; Elsa Nettels; University of Georgia Press, 1977
- The Fellowship of the Craft; C.F. Burgess; N.Y., 1976
- Conrad: A Commemoration; Norman Sherry; Routledge & Kegan, 1976
- Language and Being: Joseph Conrad and the Literature of Personality; Peter J. Glassman; Columbia University Press, 1976
- Conrad's Eastern World; Norman Sherry; Cambridge University Press, 1966
- Conrad's Western World; Norman Sherry; Cambridge University Press, 1971
- The Last Twelve Years of Joseph Conrad; Richard Curle; London, 1928
- Ernest Hemingway, 49 Depeschen, Reportagen 1920 - 1956; Ernst Schnabel, Rowohlt, Hamburg, 1969
- Joseph Conrad; Peter Nicolaisen; Rowohlt, Hamburg, 1988
- Autobiography; Bertrand Russell; George Allen & Unwin; London, 1967 - 1969
- The Sea Years of Joseph Conrad; Jerry Allen; McGrawHill, 1965
- The Multilingualism of Joseph Conrad; Alicia Pousada; University of Puerto Rico, 1994
- Joseph Conrad; Virginia Woolf; The Common Reader, 1924
- A Personal Remembrance; Ford Madox Ford; Duckworth, London, 1924
- Reminiscences of Conrad; John Galsworthy; Heinemann, London, 1927
- Joseph Conrad as I Knew Him; Jessie Conrad; Heinemann, London, 1926
- Joseph Conrad Life and Letters; editiert von G. Jean-Aubry; Heinemann, London, 1927
- Conrad: The Later Fiction; Daniel R. Schwarz; Macmillan, London, 1982
- Oxford Reader's Companion to Conrad; Owen Knowles, Gene M. Moore; Oxford University Press, 2000
- Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle; Zdzislaw Najder; Cambridge University Press, 1983