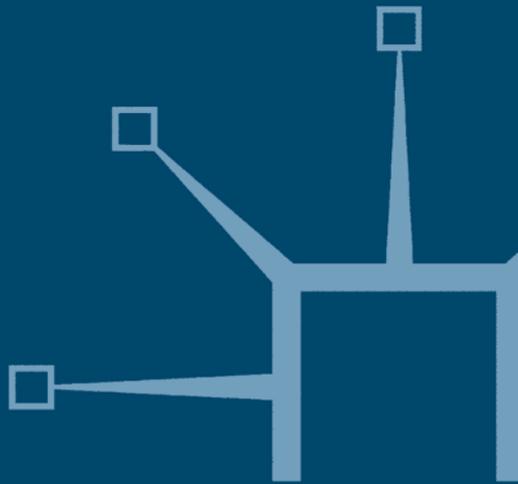


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Conrad's Secrets

Robert Hampson



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Conrad's Secrets

Robert Hampson

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'There is, first, the question of why I never told you my secret: then the question of what my secret really is'

Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Ford,
The Nature of a Crime

*For Andrew Gibson and Kiernan Ryan,
good colleagues and friends*

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List of Abbreviations

Unless stated otherwise, all references to Conrad's works are to the Dent Uniform Edition (London: J. M. Dent, 1923–8). This has the same pagination as the Dent Collected Edition (London: J. M. Dent, 1946–55) and the Oxford World's Classics Edition. The following abbreviations are used for these volumes:

AF	<i>Almayer's Folly</i>
AG	<i>The Arrow of Gold</i>
C	<i>Chance</i>
HoD	'Heart of Darkness'
I	<i>The Inheritors</i>
LE	<i>Last Essays</i>
LJ	<i>Lord Jim</i>
MoS	<i>The Mirror of the Sea</i>
NN	<i>The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'</i>
NLL	<i>Notes on Life and Letters</i>
OI	<i>An Outcast of the Islands</i>
PR	<i>A Personal Record</i>
Res	<i>The Rescue</i>
Rov	<i>The Rover</i>
SA	<i>The Secret Agent</i>
SoS	<i>A Set of Six</i>
TH	<i>Tales of Hearsay</i>
TU	<i>Tales of Unrest</i>
UWE	<i>Under Western Eyes</i>
V	<i>Victory</i>
WT	<i>Within the Tides</i>
Y	<i>Youth: A Narrative and Two Other Stories</i>

The abbreviation CL has also been used throughout to refer to the *Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad* (Cambridge University Press, 1983–2005).

Introduction

I

Conrad's life, like all our lives, is full of secrets. Many of those secrets, as we would expect, relate to his emotional life. In the 85 years since his death, many of the details of Conrad's life have been uncovered – through the exemplary researches of Hans van Marle, who showed generations of Conrad scholars how much information could be extracted from archives; through the investigations involved in the editing of the *Collected Letters*; and through the labours of Conrad's various biographers. However, though much has been uncovered, much still remains in darkness.

For example, in the 'Author's Note' to *Nostramo*, in describing the model for Antonia Avellanos, Conrad recalls his 'first love'. He recalls how 'we, a band of tallish schoolboys, the chums of her two brothers, ... used to look up to that girl just out of the schoolroom herself, as the standard-bearer of a faith to which we all were born but which she alone knew how to hold aloft with an unflinching hope'.¹ A similar figure appears briefly in *The Arrow of Gold*. In his 'Author's Note' to *The Arrow of Gold*, Conrad insists on the novel's basis in personal memory. Then, in the 'First Note', the fictional editor of the 'manuscript' on which the novel is based refers to the female addressee of the original manuscript as 'the writer's childhood's friend' and quotes from a letter to her in which he describes them as 'great chums': 'In fact, I chummed with you even more than with your brothers'.² This seems to allude to the same young woman and the same memory. If there was an attachment to a young woman, Conrad does not keep it secret.

However, when we attempt to identify the woman and the precise circumstances in which the attachment occurred, then we begin to face problems. Frederick Karl notes that, in 1871, when Conrad attended Ludwik Georgeon's boarding school in Kraków, he lived in the same house as the Taube family, which included four brothers and two sisters. With one of these girls, Janina, Conrad was supposed to have fallen in love and to have corresponded in later life.³ This would seem to fit the circumstances to which Conrad had alluded. However, Karl is sceptical of there being 'any intense passion, no less a love affair' at this time (Karl, 101). Zdzisław Najder conclusively kills the idea of any romantic attachment between them by noting that, although Conrad corresponded with Janina later in his life, at the time of his departure from Kraków, she was only eight years old.⁴ Najder observes that Conrad's friends at this time included 'the slightly older Karolina Taube and Ofelia Buszczyńska, as well as a Miss Cezaryna, the fiancée of a professor', and that 'all the pupils at Georgeon's pension sighed for the beautiful Miss Wyżykowska, who lived with the Taubes', but he has to conclude that Conrad's 'first love' cannot be identified (Najder, 40–1).

Karl notes how, subsequently, when Conrad was sent in September 1873 to Lwów to a school for the orphans of Polish patriots, supervised by his second cousin Antoni Syroczyński, he engaged in a flirtation with Antoni's daughter, Tekla, and proposes Tekla as the model for the addressee of the narration of *The Arrow of Gold*. In the Yale manuscript of the 'First Note', however, in a passage that was subsequently cancelled, the writer assures the addressee that she was not his 'first love': 'That experience had come to him the year before in the late summer of his last school holiday.' As Najder notes, this now locates his 'first love' neither in Kraków nor in Lwów but during his holidays in Krynica in 1873 (Najder, 41). Memory is notoriously creative, and Conrad regularly adjusts and fictionalises his past in his retelling of it. Here Conrad keeps his secret by repeatedly placing it in view, producing a screen memory or, rather, successive screen memories. In this process of refiguration, Conrad's imagination was also able to draw on his extensive reading. Karl notes that Antonia Avellanos is based on a figure in one of Conrad's sources for *Nostromo*, Edward B. Eastwick's *Venezuela*, where she is named Antonia Ribiera (Karl, 102). In constructing his fictional country of Costaguana in *Nostromo*, Conrad had drawn on various sources and

produced a composite South American country.⁵ In the same way, as Karl suggests, this repeated story of 'first love' is a composite myth of romance in which Conrad merges various figures including, perhaps, fictionalised memories of his mother as the embodiment of 'the ideal of Polish womanhood'.⁶

As Najder observes, in relation to *A Personal Record*, Conrad's 'reminiscences cannot be regarded as documentary evidence: most of his accounts of events require correction, and there are also surprising omissions'.⁷ At the same time, external evidence for Conrad's early life is also in short supply. At that time, Poland did not exist – it was divided between the occupying powers of Austria, Prussia and Russia – and many of the archives and records were destroyed during the wars of the twentieth century. As a result, as John Stape observes, 'few specifics are known of Conrad's education', and 'frustratingly little is known of Conrad's activities, emotional state, and intellectual development' prior to his departure for Marseilles in 1874.⁸

Conrad's time in Marseilles had its own secrets and generated a corresponding crop of legends. Because of limits of space, I want to mention here only Conrad's attempted suicide.⁹ Towards the end of his time in Marseilles, Conrad ran into financial difficulties, borrowed money from a friend, and then lost the money gambling at Monte Carlo.¹⁰ He then apparently attempted to kill himself by shooting himself in the chest. Whether he really intended to kill himself or merely staged an attempted suicide is impossible to fathom. He had invited his friend to tea and then shot himself shortly before the friend arrived. He had also very conveniently left a list of addresses on his table. As to the seriousness of his injuries, it is worth noting that, by the time Tadeusz Bobrowski, his uncle and guardian, arrived ten days later, he was already up and about. The incident becomes complicated further because his uncle decided to conceal the suicide attempt with the story of a duel, and Conrad adopted this story himself. When his son John noted scars on his father's chest, Conrad explained them by reference to a duel and advised his son of the importance of learning to fence, implying that he had fought a duel with swords. In *The Arrow of Gold*, by way of variation, M. George fights a duel with pistols with Captain Blunt. As with Conrad's accounts of 'first love', the site of the original secret is overgrown with the elaborations of fiction.

The biggest area of secrecy is, inevitably, the area of sex and sexuality. There is, for example, Conrad's laddish reference, in a letter to Edward Garnett written in December 1896, to the 'old days, when I got a ship and started off in a hurry to cram a lot of shore-going emotions into one short evening before going off into a year's slavery upon the sea' (CL1, 323). There is also the late man-of-the-world letter to Christopher Sandeman (14 March 1917), in which he observes: 'A dash of Orientalism on white is very fascinating, at least for me; though I must say that the genuine Eastern had never the power to lead me away from the path of rectitude; to any serious extent – that is' (CL6, 45). Biographers have recorded Conrad's flirtation with the Misses Renouf in Mauritius in 1888 and his emotional interest in Emilie Briquel.¹¹ On 30 September 1888, Conrad's ship, the *Otago*, his only command, entered the harbour of Port-Louis in Mauritius. During his two-month stay on the island, he became friendly with the sisters of an old friend, Captain Gabriel Renouf, and became a regular visitor to the house where they stayed. At the end of his stay in Port-Louis, Conrad asked for the hand of the 26-year-old Eugenie Renouf, apparently unaware that she was already engaged.¹² In 'A Smile of Fortune', which is clearly based on this visit to Mauritius, Conrad writes about a young captain and his flirtation with Alice Jacobus, the daughter of a local merchant, who lived in a house surrounded by a magnificent garden. Najder notes that 'in Port Louis at that time there was a seventeen-year-old Alice Shaw, whose father, a shipping agent, owned the only rose garden in town' (127). Did Conrad draw on his romantic interest in Eugenie Renouf and transfer it to the daughter of the man with whom he had a commercial involvement, or are we to imagine that he had some degree of romantic interest in both women? Conrad met the 20-year-old Mlle Briquel at 'La Roseraie' in Champel in 1895. He listened to her singing and playing the piano; they talked about literature; he organised excursions and taught her to play billiards.¹³ They exchanged letters subsequently, but the relationship cooled – perhaps because Conrad had been presenting himself as an English captain, a role he would be unable to sustain; perhaps because he realised her family would not accept him as a serious suitor; or perhaps because of his involvement with his cousin's widow, Marguerite Poradowska.

The biggest mystery in his emotional life at this time is the precise nature of his relationship with Marguerite Poradowska. Conrad first

met her in Brussels in February 1890 two days before his cousin's death. She was 42 at the time and a successful writer. The pair developed a close relationship – close enough for his uncle to become concerned and write an explicit warning against any further involvement: 'If you are wise you will leave this amusement alone and part simply as friends'.¹⁴ What happened between them subsequently is unrecoverable. The last of Conrad's letters to her from this period was written in June 1895: perhaps there was a break in their correspondence, or perhaps she lost or destroyed all his correspondence for the next five years. As Najder observes: 'For a biographer the gap is quite catastrophic, since it spans both Conrad's marriage and his final decision to settle in England' (Najder, 209). This missing correspondence also, obviously, covered a critical period in their relationship. Najder speculates: 'Did Conrad after all propose and meet refusal? Did either of them commit some kind of blunder? Did Poradowska learn about the flirtation with Emilie?' (210).¹⁵ And where did Conrad's courtship of, and marriage to, Jessie George fit in?

On 23 February 1896, Conrad ended a long letter to Ephraim Redmayne, one of a number of English friends he had made during his time in the *Torrens*, with the announcement of his imminent marriage to Jessie George in March:

I have known the girl for the last two years. She is a person rather in humble life – not pretty but very intelligent and with great qualities of heart. She is one of a numerous family and since the sudden death of the father had been helping the household by working at type-writing in the City. That is where our acquaintance began. (CL9, 23)

But this letter raises as many questions as it answers – in particular, how exactly did their relationship begin? Jessie was working for 'The American Writing Machine Co.' in Queen Street – perhaps in a secretarial role, perhaps not.¹⁶ Conrad avails himself of the ambiguity of 'where' to suggest that they met through work, but he presumably means only that they met 'in the City'. Conrad had a share in a shipping firm, Barr, Moering & Co, and visited their offices in the City regularly.

Jessie's two accounts of their courtship offer little in the way of clarification. In her first memoir, *Joseph Conrad as I Knew Him*, she

begins her account of their 'First days' with the fact of their marriage. In her second memoir, *Joseph Conrad and His Circle*, she mentions how their first meetings were 'sandwiched ... between his last two voyages as Chief Officer of the sailing-ship *Torrens*'.¹⁷ She says they were introduced 'by a friend of his' and the meetings were 'most casual'. This would mean their first meetings took place in the six weeks between Conrad's return from his first voyage in the *Torrens* on 2 September 1892 and his departure on 25 October 1892. Jessie misremembers this as 'the end of 1893'. However, since the relationship 'resumed in 1894' (9), after Conrad's time in the *Adowa*, perhaps she was trying to minimise the long gap between the first introduction and the more serious courtship she describes: the box of flowers sent to her home (9), and his arrival at her door in a hansom-cab (10). How he knew her home address is not explained. She seems to have met Conrad in the company of his friends Adolf Krieger, a partner in Barr, Moering, and G.F.W. Hope, an ex-merchant-service officer turned 'director of companies'. But how did she know them? And what are we to make of her comment, in *Joseph Conrad As I Knew Him*, that she determined from the start of their marriage 'that to all intents and purposes he should feel as free as if he had remained a bachelor'?¹⁸

In this context, it is worth considering another of the puzzles for Conrad's biographers. In 1916, Conrad became friendly with a young American journalist, Jane Anderson. According to Stape, Anderson had 'trained her sights' on Conrad. But, while he is prepared to concede that Conrad's sexual instincts 'had not fallen asleep', he thinks it 'on balance, unlikely' that Conrad 'carried on a full blown extra-marital affair' with her 'under his wife's watchful eye'.¹⁹ Najder confirms Anderson's keenness to meet Conrad (and publishes the remarkable report that she sent her husband after her first visit to the Conrads at Capel House in April 1916).²⁰ She subsequently visited Capel House again with Lord Northcliffe, and then spent a month there with the Conrads that summer, recovering from nervous prostration. In a letter to Richard Curle (20 August 1916), Conrad described her as 'seeking to get herself adopted as our big daughter', but then rather spoils this effect by describing her as 'quite yum-yum' (CL5, 637). Conrad subsequently met up with Anderson in London on various occasions during August and September.²¹ In early September, in a letter to J.B. Pinker, he contemplates asking

Jane to stay with Jessie while he is away (CL5, 652), and a letter to Jessie (14 September 1916) mentions having dinner with Jane in London. In late September, after his two-day tour on a minesweeper and a short flight in a biplane from the Royal Naval Air Station at Yarmouth, Conrad met up with his wife and Anderson in Folkestone. In November, after his 12-day voyage on the Special Service ship out of Edinburgh, he arrives back in Bridlington on the 16th, but returns home on the 24th, after spending time at the Norfolk Hotel, London. Najder observes: 'What he was doing between 16 and 24 November (when he returned home) is not quite clear; probably for some purpose he stayed in London' (486). Knowles suggests he might have been diverted by Jane Anderson.

In *My Father: Joseph Conrad*, Borys Conrad devotes a chapter to 'the entry into our family life of a lady who remains to this day something of a mystery to me'.²² He notes dryly that 'her name was Miss Jane Anderson or Mrs Jane Anderson Taylor, depending apparently on the situation in which she found herself' (117). He mentions his idea that 'she was actually introduced into our home by Lord Northcliffe' and his impression that she was 'mixed up in some way with Joseph Retinger's activities' in Paris (117). Borys is probably being discreet here: Anderson was Northcliffe's lover, and she was sufficiently involved in Retinger's 'activities' to help break up his marriage. During the war Borys takes leave in Paris 'in order to make Jane's acquaintance' (117). He finds her in a suite at the Hotel Crillon and, when he goes to dine with her 'at one of the fashionable restaurants', he discovers 'that she appeared to be upon friendly terms with most of the clientele, the majority of whom seemed to be high-ranking British and French officers' (119).²³ She is also able to give him 'the details about J.C.'s flight over the North Sea and his cruise in the "Q" vessel H.M.S. *Ready*' (119). More surprisingly, 'it appeared that she knew Lieutenant Osborne who commanded her and several of the other officers concerned' (119). Clearly, the implication is that she had met them – perhaps in Conrad's company. Borys concludes by recounting how he overstayed his leave and was arrested, and how Jane was sufficiently well-connected with 'high-ranking British officers' to pull strings to release him from arrest and return him to his unit.

In her first volume of reminiscences, *Joseph Conrad As I Knew Him*, Jessie makes no reference to Jane Anderson. She tells one brief anecdote about Conrad at Lowestoft, which ends with the officers' mess

praising Jessie as 'the right kind of wife' (94). In the later book, there is much more about Jane Anderson, but in a curiously blurred and confusing narrative. She begins by describing how, shortly after Borys had joined up and gone to France, 'a very mysterious and attractive American girl' wished to visit (195). The request is denied, but the young woman turns up later accompanying another American (the journalist Gordon Bruce) who had been invited for lunch. Jessie remarks on 'the very great impression' the unexpected visitor had made on Conrad (196). She records other visits by Anderson – once accompanying Lord Northcliffe; another time attracting the admiration of a French Red Cross officer and angering his wife (196). Any idea of sexual attraction and jealousy is safely transferred to the French couple with the Conrads as amused spectators. The account Jessie gives of Conrad's return from serving on board the Special Service ship begins with her anxiety during the 'twelve days' of his absence and then presents a story about him arriving late because he missed his connection from London after being arrested when he came ashore at Bridlington. The chapter concludes with 'a rather long visit' from their American friend (204). Since this follows immediately after the 'rather trying episode' of having to take Conrad's papers to the police station to demonstrate his naturalisation, there is a suggestion that the 'rather long visit' might have been equally trying. Otherwise, the tone of Jessie's narrative is calmly appreciative ('she made an interesting invalid'). There are just two odd notes. First, when Jane declares that she will look up the Conrads' son in Paris, Conrad is reported to respond: 'None of that, you let the boy alone' (205). As Halverson and Watt observed, if this is true, the implication is that Conrad was 'already aware' of 'her sexual proclivities' (65). Secondly, when Jane leaves, Conrad's 'promise' to meet her for lunch in London is described as 'quite eagerly given' (205).

The other oddness occurs between the chapters. This chapter ends with the arrangement that 'our American friend' would join Jessie and her son John at Folkestone and stay 'for a week or ten days' (205). The next chapter begins with an angry Jessie meeting Conrad off the train in Folkestone: 'I managed to argue myself into a curiously detached mood on my way to the station, and I had myself well in hand by the time the train arrived' (206). She does not explain why she is angry and why she needs to exert self-control. When Conrad arrives, she notes, in silence, his disappointment that Jane is not

with her at the station. And when Conrad upbraids her, 'Have you nothing to say?', she responds ominously: 'A great deal, but I do not think this is the proper place' (206). Clearly something has happened between Jane and Jessie that has affected her feelings towards her husband. Jessie refers to herself being 'indulgent' towards his 'little back-sliding', and her anger at his failure to recognise her 'generosity' (206). The situation begins to clear – for them, though not for the reader – when he refers to the danger of his 'flight', and she responds by chiding him for his 'flight – of fancy': 'I heard a great deal about that, but she told me she had destroyed the letter' (206). Conrad had kept secret his flight in the biplane just as he had concealed from Jessie the full danger of his voyage on a Special Service ship.²⁴ Jessie, however, has been told another secret: about a letter that Conrad had written to Jane Anderson. Conrad continues to talk about the secret flight, and ignores her mention of the letter; Jessie then thinks about her conversation with Jane:

A light fell on the situation, and almost in a flash I saw that our fair American had been amusing herself at my expense. The seriousness of that deliberate attempt to spoil our long understanding affection had probably never struck her and more than likely would not have troubled her if it had. (207)

This is less than illuminating for the reader, but a damning judgement on Jane.

And Jessie hasn't finished yet. She then records another incident, after the war, when she was packing books prior to moving house²⁵ – and a letter falls out of one of the books:

The fair American lady had told a white lie when she said she had burnt the letter she had received from my husband. The letter that would have proved all she had said. It was a very high flown epistle, without signature or superscription, but there was no mistake who had written it. ... But the sentiment expressed came to me as new addressed to another woman. (207)

At this moment, Conrad enters, and, when presented silently with the letter, immediately, and without saying a word, throws it into the fire – and then offers to buy Jessie something that she has been

wanting. She describes this action as 'a usual form of penitence, that followed no accusation and no apology' (208).

As Najder, observes, Conrad was clearly attracted to Jane Anderson.²⁶ Jessie, too, seems to have enjoyed her company initially, although this feeling has clearly worn off by the time she came to write her second memoir. Najder, however, considers it unlikely that Anderson would have boasted 'about Conrad's overtures' to Jessie and thinks that Jessie's story about this confession and the discovery of the letter are 'figments of Jessie's imagination' (487).²⁷ Without going quite this far, it is nevertheless the case that, as with Borys's account, there are significant silences and suppressions. In addition, Jessie's account is marked by emotional turbulences that invite interpretation as jealousy and hostility towards Jane and her husband, although it is less clear whether she felt these emotions at the time or only when she came to write this second memoir. The reference to 'back-sliding' and the concluding description of unspoken negotiations are also highly suggestive. Najder concludes that it is 'not easy to guess to what lengths the flirtation, or love affair, between the young Jane and the aging Conrad went' (487). The only known letter from Conrad to her is couched in terms of friendliness rather than emotional intimacy (certainly not the 'high flown' language of the letter in Jessie's story), and Retinger denied there was any romance between Conrad and Jane (487). However, if Najder implies that Conrad's relations with Jane Anderson did not go beyond attraction and flirtation, he does open the door to other possibilities. He picks up on Jessie's suggestive remark about 'a usual form of penitence' to suggest that, 'Along with the fact that Conrad felt very much at ease in cabarets and night-clubs, all this is in keeping with the stereotype of the husband who now and again amuses himself on the side' (488). In *Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle*, Najder had quoted from the memoirs of Kate Meyrick, the owner of the '43' Club at 43 Gerrard Street, Soho. Mrs Meyrick opened the '43' Club in November 1921 and its regular patrons included Augustus John, Jacob Epstein and J.B. Priestley.²⁸ But Mrs Meyrick also recalled 'Joseph Conrad was another early visitor' and suggests that he became a regular visitor.²⁹ Halverson and Watt note Conrad's letter to Pinker reflecting on Borys's involvement with Jane Anderson: 'If he must meet a "Jane", it's better he should meet her at 19 than at twenty-four'.³⁰ As they observe, the tone of the letter suggests 'a rather relaxed and experienced attitude to sexual relations'

(71). They might also have cited Conrad's letter to John Quinn (January 1917), where he comments on Borys's first leave from the Front: 'We got on extremely well together. We talked not only of War but of the other two Ws also'. After expanding this reference to Wine and Women, Conrad then quotes, from a recent letter from Cunninghame Graham, his friend's approving judgement on Borys: 'he thought he "will be un homme a femmes like You and I"' (CL6, 21).

II

When Conrad proposed to Jessie in February 1896, he apparently insisted on a short engagement: 'All the points in favour of haste he put forward, such as the weather, his health, his work'.³¹ He added as a further inducement 'that he would not live long'.³² When he subsequently met her mother, he added to this idea that he would not live long the expectation that there 'would be no family'.³³ It is well known that Conrad's health was affected adversely by his time in the Congo. Jessie notes that she 'had heard from several of his friends how nearly he had died from dysentery while being carried to the coast' on his return journey from the Congo and how he had subsequently spent 'many months' lying 'between life and death' in the German Hospital in Dalston.³⁴ She also knew that he suffered 'from gout', but confessed herself 'entirely ignorant' of the nature of that affliction.³⁵ In April 1890, he had been appointed by the *Société Anonyme Belge pour le Commerce du Haut-Congo* to take command of one of the company's ships, the *Florida*. He had arrived on the African coast, at Boma, on 12 June and then travelled overland to Kinshasa. When he reached Kinshasa on 2 August, he discovered that the *Florida* had been wrecked during the previous month. He then travelled in the *Roi des Belges* (first as supernumerary, then as temporary master) up to Stanley Falls, where he fell ill with dysentery. In a letter to Marguerite Poradowska (26 September 1890), he confided that, going up-river, he had had fever 'four times in two months' and then, at the Falls, a five-day attack of dysentery (CL1, 62). Captain Duhst, who ran across Conrad in October 1890, noted that he was 'continually sick with dysentery and fever' (Najder, 162). However, Conrad was well enough to take over the command of the *Roi des Belges* for part of the return trip, when the captain fell ill, but

he then became seriously unwell back in Kinshasa, and by December, following a long, slow journey to the coast, he sailed from Boma back to Europe. He was back in London by 1 February 1891, but was obliged to spend March and early April in the German Hospital suffering from gout, malaria, rheumatism and neuralgia.³⁶ In May, he left London for a water cure at the Hotel de la Roseraie in Champelles-Bains, Switzerland.

Martin Bock has written extensively about both Conrad's health and the regime at the Hotel de la Roseraie.³⁷ Conrad described the Hotel as 'a serious hydropathic establishment' that enjoyed 'a considerable reputation among medical men'.³⁸ As Bock observes, Conrad's slightly defensive tone suggests his awareness of the fashionable (and, even faddish) nature of water cures. Conrad had been recommended to take a cure at Champel by his doctor at the German Hospital. As Bock noted, the German Hospital had particular expertise in balneotherapy and hydrotherapy (27). However, Bock argues, the two serious illnesses associated with Conrad's medical difficulties, dysentery and malaria, would not have indicated balneotherapy as an appropriate treatment in contemporary medical thought (27–8).³⁹ From the hydrotherapy treatment that he underwent, Bock deduces that Conrad was being treated for 'dyspeptic neurasthenia' (29) or 'malarial neurasthenia' (28). In other words, Bock reads Conrad's symptoms as the somatic manifestations of a nervous condition. Conrad returned to Champel for further cures in 1894 and 1895, and Bock notes the mental condition that preceded each of them. In July 1894, Conrad wrote to Marguerite Poradowska: 'My nervous disorder tortures me, makes me wretched, and paralyses action, thought, everything!' (CL1, 163–4). The following year, before his third visit, he wrote to her again: 'I am not at all well. To set myself up again, I am quitting my bed and going to Champel for hydrotherapy. ... You know that when I am not well I have attacks of melancholy which paralyse my thought and will' (CL1, 210–11).

Conrad's experiences in the Congo left him with a legacy of bad health for the rest of his life. However, as Bock demonstrates, it wasn't simply ill-health – in the form of dysentery, malaria or gout – that lay behind Conrad's concerns about marriage and his ban on children. As Najder notes, Conrad seems to have suffered from 'persistent ill health' as a child (30). There are recurrent references to kidney troubles in his early years and also, more significantly, to fits

or seizures between the ages of eight and 14. In a letter to Conrad (November/December 1891), for example, Tadeusz Bobrowski reports that Conrad's cousin, Michaś, may have been 'suffering from the same illness as you were – anyway he had a similar fit to yours'.⁴⁰ From this and other family correspondence, Najder suggests that epilepsy was suspected – and that it might have run in the family. Bock draws attention to the 'powerful influence' such a medical suspicion had over Conrad: at this time 'epilepsy was increasingly recognised as linked to both neurasthenia and insanity' (23). Rather than heredity, the conditions of Conrad's childhood, as the son of political prisoners, might go some way to explaining Conrad's symptoms.⁴¹ In October 1861, his father, Apollo Korzeniowski, was arrested for his political activities in Warsaw. In May 1862, Apollo and his wife Ewa were both sentenced to exile for revolutionary activity and were sent, along with Conrad, to Vologda, 300 miles north-east of Moscow. In 1863, they were allowed to move south to Chernikov, near Kiev, but Ewa's health was already damaged, and she died of tuberculosis in April 1865. Apollo Korzeniowski also suffered from tuberculosis and died in 1869. During these years of exile, Conrad had also had recurrent medical problems: migraine, nervous fits, and epileptic symptoms. Tekla Syroczyńska recalled the young Conrad as suffering from 'severe headaches and nervous attacks', and, in May 1873, he was sent to Switzerland, accompanied by a tutor, Adam Pullman, on his doctor's recommendations (Najder, 43).⁴² However, as Bock points out, at the time, tuberculosis, epilepsy and gout were all associated, in the medical knowledge, with insanity – and Conrad was familiar with this connection. Through his knowledge of Lombroso's work, he would have been familiar with the linkage of epilepsy, genius and insanity, and, through his knowledge of Nordau's work, he would have been familiar with the connection between these and degeneracy.⁴³ Conrad's anxiety about his own medical condition was not just the fear of madness that Bock demonstrates, but also, as the riders attached to his proposal to Jessie suggest, a concern about passing on the condition to his children.

Conrad described himself in the post-Congo period as 'recovering slowly from a bad breakdown, after a most unpleasant and persistent tropical disease which I had caught in Africa'.⁴⁴ As Najder has shown, this also describes the pattern of Conrad's writing life, which was marked by ill-health and repeated breakdowns. During

his honeymoon on Ile-Grande, he again fell seriously ill. Jessie records that he suffered from 'shivering fits' and became 'more and more incoherent and rambling in his speech' (JCC, 26). However, she also suggests another reason for this perceived 'incoherence', when she observes that he raved in Polish, 'a habit he kept up every time an illness had him in its grip'. Conrad fell seriously ill again in January 1900. He confided to Cunninghame Graham: 'Malaria, bronchitis, and gout. In reality a breakdown' (CL2, 248). His major breakdown came in January 1910 after he completed *Under Western Eyes*, when an attack of gout was followed by high fever and loss of consciousness. Jessie described him as living 'mixed up in the scenes' of the novel and holding 'converse with the characters'.⁴⁵ He didn't emerge from this bout of illness until early May. Conrad seems always to have been 'highly strung'. Najder cites a letter written by Paul Langlois, who met Conrad on Mauritius. Langlois remembered that Conrad 'had a nervous tic in the shoulder and eyes and anything the least bit unexpected – an object dropping to the floor, a door banging – would make him jump' (Najder, 130). In 1907, a reporter from *T.P.'s Weekly* also commented on Conrad's nervous excitability: 'He is abnormally highly-strung. He is sensitive, intensely susceptible to any slight jarring from outside. His nerves seem to be all on end' (Najder, 383). In addition, Najder convincingly argues that, from early 1891 to the end of his life, Conrad was not merely 'neurasthenic', but suffered from clinical depression (Najder 167–8). This explains both his recurrent bouts of melancholia and his repeated struggles with writing. Conrad's letters to his friends are full of complaints about his inability to work, combined with insomnia, lack of appetite and despair: 'Oh God, how black, black, black, everything is' (CL1, 202). When he refers to a 'long fit of the very blackest depression' (CL7, 13) or describes himself as feeling 'like a dug up corpse' (CL7, 21), this shouldn't be seen simply as self-dramatisation.

If Conrad's major medical secret was his fear not just of insanity but also of degeneracy as a transmissible condition, there are other minor medical mysteries that also deserve to be mentioned. The most significant of these is the mystery of his injury on board the *Highland Forest*. In early 1887, he obtained the position of first mate on the *Highland Forest* and supervised the loading of the ship in Amsterdam. During the voyage, the ship ran into heavy gales and

was subject to heavy rolling because of the poor distribution of the ship's cargo. Conrad recorded what followed:

A piece of one of the minor spars ... flew against the chief mate's back, and sent him sliding on his face for quite a considerable distance along the main deck. Thereupon followed various and unpleasant consequences of a physical order – 'queer symptoms', as the captain, who treated them, used to say; inexplicable periods of powerlessness, sudden accesses of mysterious pain.

When the ship reached Samarang, Conrad signed off and was sent to hospital in Singapore. Najder notes that the ship's papers record that Korzeniowski left 'by mutual consent' as a result of his 'bad leg', but it is not clear whether this 'bad leg' was the result of an injury or whether he had actually been hit by a spar (Najder, 114). In *The Mirror of the Sea*, Conrad described his symptoms as 'inexplicable periods of powerlessness, sudden accesses of mysterious pain' (54–5). Bobrowski was equally puzzled by Conrad's report to him: 'You did not write to me exactly what the trouble is: is it ordinary rheumatism? Or sciatica? – or perhaps paralysis?'⁴⁶ Was this mysterious illness a psychosomatic expression of his feelings of guilt or inadequacy in relation to the loading of the ship? Bernard Meyer relates this episode to Conrad's anxieties about his emotional readiness to take command of a ship.⁴⁷ In *Lord Jim*, Jim is similarly 'disabled by a falling spar' and, as a result, 'spent many days stretched on his back, dazed, battered, hopeless, and tormented as if at the bottom of an abyss of unrest' (LJ, 11). Although Jim's 'lameness persisted', his suffering seems more mental than physical: 'now and again an uncontrollable rush of anguish would grip him bodily, make him gasp and writhe under the blankets, and then the unintelligent brutality of an existence liable to the agony of such sensations filled him with a despairing desire to escape at any cost' (LJ, 11). Jim signs off to go to the hospital in 'an Eastern port' and subsequently takes a berth 'as chief mate of the *Patna*' (LJ, 13); Conrad signed on with the *Vidar*.

III

Although not exactly a secret, Conrad's finances have long been a mystery to Conrad scholars. Cedric Watts, in *Joseph Conrad: A Literary*

Life, laid out the basis for an understanding of Conrad's finances.⁴⁸ He explored the hinterland of Conrad's financial situation: his Polish inheritance; his allowance from his guardian, Tadeusz Bobrowski; and his earnings as a sailor. He paid particular attention to Conrad's earnings as an author, providing useful comparisons with the wages of his contemporaries. More recently, John Stape has attempted to map Conrad's finances and show their current financial equivalents, while Najder, through his attentive reading of Conrad's letters (to which Watts did not have access), has gone a long way to resolve the mystery of Conrad's constant shortage of money, even when he was earning very well indeed from his fiction writing.

When Conrad arrived in Marseilles in 1874, he had an allowance of around 1,000 francs per year from Bobrowski. As we have seen, he found it difficult to stay within this generous limit. Indeed, as Najder notes, at the end of two years, Bobrowski sent him a detailed account showing how he had already spent the entire third year's allowance (Najder, 52–3). In the first half of 1876, Conrad had spent '1,265 francs above the 1,200 from his allowance'; this was at a time when a lieutenant in the French navy was paid 2,000 francs per year and an industrial worker earned 800–900 francs per year (Najder, 52). Conrad's first voyage, on the *Mont Blanc*, had been as a passenger; for his second voyage (on the *Saint-Antoine*), he was paid 35 francs per month (Baines, 55). During the course of his maritime career, Conrad's wages ranged from one shilling per month (in the *Skimmer of the Sea*) to £14 per month as captain of the *Otago*. At the same time, although his official salary was low, the new career he was exploring contained various possibilities for making money on the side. In this context, the prospect of making something extra through a spot of smuggling into Spain or into South America would have had attractions quite apart from the appeal of adventure.

Conrad was aware of other forms of illicit money-making from early on. Thus he wrote to Bobrowski, on 16 August 1877, hinting that Delestang, his former patron in Marseilles, was involved in some kind of shady business (Najder 57). As will be detailed in Chapter 1, his service in the *Vidar* exposed him to various forms of illegal trading. However, the biggest financial scam he encountered was Leopold's Congo. It was his experiences here (explored in detail in Chapter 2) that had the greatest impact on him. Before the Congo, he said, he had been an animal. What he saw in the Congo brought

about an intellectual revolution in Conrad and a political and moral awakening.

Conrad began his career in the Merchant Navy at the time that the service was contracting. He had been trained in sailing ships, and the changeover from sail to steam left Conrad (and other ship's officers) chasing a diminishing number of berths. Thus, while he worked his way up the career ladder of the Merchant Navy and chased after a command, he was also looking out for other career options and kept his eyes open for possible investment opportunities. In 1876, following up an advertisement in *The Times*, he had met a sailing agent, James Sutherland, in his Fenchurch Street office. Through Sutherland, he got a berth on the *Duke of Sutherland*. He also engaged in 'speculations on credit' with Sutherland, which ended with him losing at least half of his yearly allowance (Najder, 86). In 1883, Bobrowski undertook to pay £350 for Conrad's share in the shipping firm Barr, Moering & Co. This was increased to £750 in 1889 (Watts, 18). (Conrad's salary as second mate in the *Riversdale* during 1883–4 was five guineas per month.) In November 1885, he writes to Spiridion Kliszczewski that he is 'sick and tired of sailing about for little money and less consideration' and inquiring about the possibility of borrowing money to invest in whaling (CL1, 13–15). By contrast, in early 1886, Bobrowski noted that he deduced from Conrad's letters that he intended to devote himself to trade 'and stay in London'. He accordingly advised Conrad to 'investigate the London market for wheat flour and granulated sugar' (Najder 108).⁴⁹

In 1889, when Conrad began writing his first novel, *Almayer's Folly*, he was 'living on his savings and a modest income' from his share in Barr, Moering (Najder, 134). In 1894, after the death of his uncle, he also inherited a legacy of 15,000 roubles (around £1,600 at 1890s' exchange rates). As Najder observes, although he continued to search for work, he could afford 'a longer period of unemployment' and could devote more time to writing (Najder, 193). In that same year, he received £20 outright (no royalties) from Fisher Unwin for *Almayer's Folly*. However, in 1895 he seems to have invested almost all his money in South African gold mines, and in April 1896 he seems to have lost 'all, or almost all' his savings (Najder, 230).⁵⁰ *An Outcast of the Islands* had been published in March 1896, and Conrad had received £50 (plus 11 per cent royalties). He had started work on *The Sisters* (but was advised to abandon

it by Garnett) and then on "The Rescuer", the final volume in the Lingard trilogy, with which he was to struggle for many years. Thus, by the end of 1896, Conrad had lost his private income, on which he had relied to support his gentlemanly lifestyle; had abandoned one novel and was stalled on another; and had a new wife to support purely from his income as a writer: in these circumstances, he borrowed £150 from his friend Adolf Krieger and received an advance of £30 from Heinemann on his next book. As Najder notes, this set the pattern for Conrad's future financial situation: 'The state of being in debt and paying off the most urgent obligations with borrowed money was to last for the next fifteen years' (Najder, 236). As Najder presents it, with Conrad earning very little from his early writing, he was repeatedly obliged to borrow money from various friends (including Ford, Galsworthy and Rothenstein) and, after 1900, from his agent J.B. Pinker.⁵¹ However, as Watts noted, from 1897 onwards, Conrad was being paid between £40 and £50 for a story, which would raise further sums when collected in book form, at a time when the average wage for a British male was £56 per year (Watts, 65). Nevertheless, Conrad's expenditure had always exceeded his income, and for the next 17 years he worked under the burden of ever-increasing debts.

Najder notes that, by 1901, Conrad's annual income (from loans and from Pinker, as well as a small sum for the second printing of *Lord Jim*) amounted to just over £650. Conrad's income thus put him in the small minority who earned over £400 per year. In theory, Conrad and his family lived at a level of affluence that was shared by only a small number of people. Najder tries to justify Conrad's household economy by reference to the huge gap in living standards between different classes in this period, and the risk of dropping out of one's class if appearances weren't maintained, but this alone does not explain the level of expenditure sustained by Conrad (Najder, 316). In practice, a large part of Conrad's income consisted of loans needed to service his debts, and, as Najder also notes, even with this level of income, because of the scale of the existing debts he had to pay off, Conrad was regularly penniless (Najder, 316, 319). Pinker recorded that Conrad 'always borrows a sovereign whenever he comes in'.⁵² Indeed, as a result of his dire financial needs, Conrad was awarded a grant of £300 by the Royal Literary Fund in July 1902 (Najder, 323).

In January 1904, Conrad was hit by another financial disaster with the failure of his bank, Watson and Co. – and he was faced with the need to pay off a £200 overdraft.⁵³ A few days later, Jessie Conrad had a bad fall and damaged both her knees – thereafter, she required frequent medical treatment, which constituted a major drain on the family's finances.⁵⁴ By May 1904, Conrad was again penniless and deeply in debt: he owed over £450, quite apart from his debts to Galsworthy, Pinker and Rothenstein (Najder, 357), and Ford was pressing for the repayment of £100 he was owed. As Najder makes clear, Conrad faced the prospect of being declared bankrupt (Najder, 357). In this crisis, as a result of Rothenstein's efforts, Conrad received a further sum of £200 from the Royal Literary Fund.

By the end of 1907, Conrad's fiftieth year, he was in poor health, and, although he had produced such major works as 'Heart of Darkness', *Lord Jim* and *Nostromo*, his books still failed to make significant sales (Najder, 383–4). At the same time, through his financial arrangement with Pinker, he was going deeper and deeper into debt. By 1909, Conrad's debts amounted to £2,250 (Najder, 404). In a letter to Galsworthy, Conrad describes his life at this time: 'I sit 12 hours at the table, sleep six, and worry [the] rest of the time ... For two years I havent seen a picture heard a note of music, hadn't a moment of ease in human intercourse ...'.⁵⁵

It was only in August 1910 that the situation began to improve. First he was given a Civil List Pension of £100 per year. Secondly, in the same month, he was approached by the editor of the *New York Herald* about the possibility of serialising his next novel, *Chance*. Although Conrad turned down this first approach, he accepted a later approach, and *Chance* began serialisation in the *New York Herald* in January 1912. The publication of *Chance* marked a turning point in Conrad's income from his writing: *Chance* and the volume of short stories that appeared in 1912, '*Twixt Land and Sea*, reduced his accumulated debt to Pinker by £900 (Najder, 432). Nevertheless, as Najder observes, although Conrad was making increased income from his writing, this money was largely consumed by his existing debt to Pinker – and he was still obliged to borrow money to cover his expenses (Najder, 431).

Conrad's expenses at this time included the cost of running Capel House (with the wages of three servants); a salary for Miss Hallowes, his secretary; medical bills for himself and his wife – for repeated