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978-1-107-00550-1 - Joseph Conrad: Tales of Unrest

Edited by Allan H. Simmons and J. H. Stape

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THE
CAMBRIDGE EDITION OF
THE WORKS OF
JOSEPH CONRAD

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TALES OF UNREST

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GENERAL EDITORS' PREFACE

JOSEPH CONRAD'S PLACE in twentieth-century literature is now firmly established. Although his novels, stories and other writings have become integral to modern thought and culture, the need for an accurate and authoritative edition of his works remains. Owing to successive rounds of authorial revision, transmissional errors and deliberate editorial intervention, Conrad's texts exist in various unsatisfactory and sometimes even confused forms.

During the last years of his life he attempted to have his works published in a uniform edition that would fix and preserve them for posterity. But although trusted by scholars, students and the general reader alike, the received texts published in the British and American collected editions, and in various reprintings of them since 1921, have proved to be at least as defective as their predecessors. Grounded in thorough research in the surviving original documents, the Cambridge Edition is designed to reverse this trend by presenting Conrad's novels, stories and other prose in texts that are as trustworthy as modern scholarship can make them.

The present volume contains critical texts of the stories collected in *Tales of Unrest* and its 'Author's Note' (1919). The Cambridge texts of the stories are based on various copy-texts – the manuscripts, typescripts and early printings that have survived. The selected copy-texts are emended to incorporate authorial revisions drawn from later authoritative documents as well as editorial emendations to correct errors. The copy-text of the 'Author's Note', the revised typescript held in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library, is treated in the same way.

The 'Introduction' provides a literary history of the work focused on its genesis, sources and early reception, including its place in Conrad's life and art. The essay on 'The Texts' traces the textual history of the volume, examines the origins of its individual texts and explains the policies followed in editing them. The 'Apparatus' records basic textual evidence, documenting the discussion of genealogy and authority in 'The Texts: An Essay' as well as other editorial decisions, and the

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'Textual Notes' deal with cruxes and textual issues. Appendices present Conrad's prefatory statement written for the reprinting of 'An Outpost of Progress' in *Grand Magazine* in 1906; Charles Le Goffic's poem 'Les Sept Innocents de Pleumeur', of interest for documenting the real-life figures behind 'The Idiots'; and a compilation of borrowings and echoes in 'The Return' from Guy de Maupassant's 1885 novel *Bel-Ami*. The 'Explanatory Notes' comment on specific readings that require glosses, dealing with sources, identifying real-life place-names and related matters, as well as explaining nautical terms and foreign words and phrases. Supplementing this material are maps and illustrations.

The textual essay, textual notes, appendices and 'Apparatus' are designed with the textual scholar and specialist in mind, while the 'Introduction' and 'Explanatory Notes' are intended primarily for a non-specialist audience.

The support of the institutions listed on p. vii has been essential to the success of this series and is gratefully acknowledged. In addition to those, and the individuals and institutions listed in the Acknowledgements, the General Editors and the Editorial Board also wish to thank the Trustees and beneficiaries of the Estate of Joseph Conrad, Doubleday and Company and J. M. Dent and Company for permission to publish these new texts of Conrad's works.

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A number of individuals kindly supplied information or otherwise shared their expertise, and we should especially like to thank the following: Richard M. Berrong, Mary Burgoyne, Laurence Davies, Véronique Pauly, Yasuko Shidara and Harold Ray Stevens. Owen Knowles has generously commented and advised on many aspects of this project since its inception, and special gratitude is due to him. We should also like to thank David Holdeman for useful comments on textual issues and Captain Alston Kennerley for his advice on matters nautical. We are grateful to Alexandre Fachard, Susan Klein and Robert W. Trogdon for on-site readings of the originals. Thanks for assistance with support tasks are due to Catherine L. Tisch and, for early work on which this project relies, to Gale Graham. Stephen Donovan's endeavours to bring Conrad's serializations into the digital age with *Conrad First: The Joseph Conrad Periodical Archive* (www.conradfirst.net) has proved valuable. Gratitude is expressed to the staff of the Surrey Historical Centre, Woking, who kindly assisted our consultation of the Centre's collection of Unwin papers. Lastly, gratitude is also expressed to Linda Bree and Maartje Scheltens at Cambridge University Press for steadfast support and helpful advice; to Liz Davey, who saw the volume through production; and to Leigh Mueller, whose careful and sensitive copy-editing has enriched the text in numerous ways.

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The facsimiles that precede the textual essay are reproduced by courtesy of the Houghton Library of Harvard University and the Rosenbach Museum and Library, Philadelphia.

CHRONOLOGY

JOSEPH CONRAD’S life may be seen as having several distinct stages: in the Ukraine, in Russian exile and in Austrian Poland before his father’s death (1857–69); in Austrian Poland and the south of France as the ward of his maternal uncle (1870–78); in the British merchant service, mainly as a junior officer sailing in the Far East and Australia (1878–early 1890s); after a transitional period (early 1890s), as writer of critical esteem (1895–1914); as acclaimed writer, although perhaps with his greatest work achieved (1915–24). After 1895 the history of his life is essentially the history of his works.

Publication dates given below are those of the English editions, except for those of the present volume.

1857 December 3	Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski (Nałęcz coat-of-arms) born in Berdyczów in the Ukraine, part of the Russian Empire, to Apollo Korzeniowski and Ewelina (or Ewa), née Bobrowska, Korzeniowska
1862 May	Apollo Korzeniowski, his wife and son forced into exile in Russia
1865 April	Ewa Korzeniowska dies of tuberculosis
1867	Conrad visits Odessa with his maternal uncle Tadeusz Bobrowski; perhaps his first view of the sea
1868	Korzeniowski permitted to leave Russia
1869 February	Korzeniowski and Conrad move to Cracow
May	Korzeniowski dies
1870	Conrad, ward of Bobrowski, begins study with tutor, Adam Pulman
1873 May	Visits Switzerland and northern Italy
1874 October	Takes position in Marseilles with Delestang et Fils, wholesalers and shippers
1875	Apprentice in <i>Mont-Blanc</i> (to Caribbean)
1876–7	In <i>Saint-Antoine</i> (to Caribbean)

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1878 late February or early March	Attempts suicide
April	Leaves Marseilles in British steamer <i>Mavis</i> (Mediterranean waters)
June	Lands at Lowestoft, Suffolk; first time in England
July–September	Sails as ordinary seaman in <i>Skimmer of the Sea</i> (North Sea)
1878–80	In <i>Duke of Sutherland</i> (to Sydney), <i>Europa</i> (Mediterranean waters)
1880	Meets G. F. W. Hope and Adolf Krieger
June	Passes examination for second mate
1880–81	Third mate in <i>Loch Etive</i> (to Sydney)
1881–4	Second mate in <i>Palestine</i> , <i>Riversdale</i> , <i>Narcissus</i> (Eastern seas)
1884 December	Passes examination for first mate
1885–6	Second mate in <i>Tilkhurst</i> (to Singapore and India)
1886	Submits ‘The Black Mate’, perhaps his first story, to <i>Tit-Bits</i> competition
August	Becomes a British subject
November	Passes examination for master and receives ‘Certificate of Competency’
1886–7	Second mate in <i>Falconhurst</i> (British waters)
1887–8	First mate in <i>Highland Forest</i> , <i>Vidar</i> (Eastern seas)
1888–9	Captain of barque <i>Otago</i> (Bangkok to Australia and Mauritius)
1889 autumn	Begins <i>Almayer’s Folly</i> in London
1890 February–April	In Poland for first time since 1874
May–December	In the Congo. Second-in-command, then temporarily captain, of <i>Roi des Belges</i>
1891	Manages warehouse of Barr, Moering in London
1891–3	First mate in <i>Torrens</i> (London and Plymouth to Adelaide)
1893	Meets John Galsworthy and Edward L. (‘Ted’) Sanderson (passengers on <i>Torrens</i>)
autumn	Visits Bobrowski in the Ukraine

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November	Signs on as second mate in <i>Adowa</i> , which sails only to Rouen and back	
1894 January	Signs off <i>Adowa</i> , ending career as seaman	
February	Bobrowski dies	
autumn	Meets Edward Garnett and Jessie George	
1895 April	<i>Almayer's Folly</i>	
1896 March	<i>An Outcast of the Islands</i>	
March 24	Marries Jessie George	
March 25	Leaves London, via Southampton, for St-Malo	
March 27	In Lannion, stays some ten days at Hôtel de France	
April 9	Arrives on Ile-Grande. Honeymoons in Brittany until September, with intermittent work on 'The Rescuer'. Writes three stories later collected in <i>Tales of Unrest</i> and begins <i>The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'</i>	
May 22	'The Idiots', begun this month, completed by this date	
June-July	Writes 'An Outpost of Progress'	
July 22	Plans for a volume of short stories, dedicated to Edward Garnett, discussed with Unwin	
August	Writes 'The Lagoon'	
early September	Returns to England and settles in Stanford-le-Hope, Essex. 'An Outpost of Progress' accepted by <i>Cosmopolis</i>	
September 11	Returns proofs of 'The Lagoon' (sent 5 September) to Smith, Elder & Co., publishers of <i>Cornhill Magazine</i>	
October	'The Idiots' in <i>Savoy</i> . American copyright application made for 'The Lagoon', 'The Idiots' and 'An Outpost of Progress' with required deposit copies printed by Macmillan of New York	
1897	Begins friendship with R. B. Cunninghame Graham; meets Henry James and Stephen Crane	
January	'The Lagoon' in <i>Cornhill Magazine</i>	
January 17	Finishes drafting <i>The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'</i>	

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xx	CHRONOLOGY
February 7	Returns proofs of ‘An Outpost of Progress’ to T. Fisher Unwin and announces having begun ‘Karain: A Memory’
April 14	Sends the recently completed ‘Karain’ to Unwin and moots writing ‘a London story’, the eventual ‘The Return’
May 8	Blackwood’s receives ‘Karain: A Memory’ through Unwin
summer	‘An Outpost of Progress’ in June and July issues of <i>Cosmopolis</i>
August	First instalment of <i>The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’</i> in <i>New Review</i> (concludes in December)
August–September	Writes ‘The Return’ with an eye to completing the volume of short stories
September 28	Returns proofs of ‘Karain’ (sent by Blackwood’s on 3 September)
October 29	‘Karain: A Memory’ in November issue of <i>Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine</i>
November 8	Posts to Unwin copy for four stories for <i>Tales of Unrest</i> , with ‘The Return’ to come
November 24	Sends Unwin ‘The Return’ to complete copy for the volume
December	<i>The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’</i> . Returns proofs of <i>Tales of Unrest</i> to Unwin
1898	Meets Ford Madox (Hueffer) Ford and H. G. Wells
January 15	Alfred Borys Leo Conrad born
January 31	Charles Scribner’s Sons of New York accepts Unwin’s terms for publishing <i>Tales of Unrest</i>
mid-February	Scribner’s begins setting its edition from a bound copy of Unwin’s edition
March 25	<i>Tales of Unrest</i> published by Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York (2 April by T. Fisher Unwin in England)
October	Moves to Pent Farm, Postling near Hythe, Kent, sub-let from Ford
1899 February–April	‘The Heart of Darkness’ in <i>Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine</i>

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1900 September	Begins association with literary agent J. B. Pinker	
1901 June	<i>The Inheritors</i> (with Ford)	
1902 November	<i>Youth: A Narrative and Two Other Stories</i>	
1903 April	<i>Typhoon and Other Stories</i>	
October	<i>Romance</i> (with Ford)	
1904 October	<i>Nostromo</i>	
1905 June	<i>One Day More</i> staged in London	
1906 August	John Alexander Conrad born	
October	<i>The Mirror of the Sea</i>	
1907 September	<i>The Secret Agent</i> . Moves to Someries, Luton, Bedfordshire	
1908 August	<i>A Set of Six</i>	
1909	Moves to Aldington, Kent	
1910	Moves to Capel House, Orlestone, Kent	
1911 October	<i>Under Western Eyes</i>	
1912 January	<i>Some Reminiscences</i> (as <i>A Personal Record in America</i>)	
October	<i>'Twixt Land and Sea</i>	
1913 September	<i>Chance</i> , with 'main' publication date of January 1914	
1914 July–November	Visits Austrian Poland with family; delayed by outbreak of First World War; returns via Vienna and Genoa	
1915 February	<i>Within the Tides</i>	
September	<i>Victory</i>	
1917 March	<i>The Shadow-Line</i>	
1919 March	Moves to Spring Grove, near Wye, Kent. Dramatic version of <i>Victory</i> opens in London	
August	<i>The Arrow of Gold</i>	
October	Moves to Oswalds, Bishopsbourne, near Canterbury, Kent	
1920 June	<i>The Rescue</i>	
1921 January–April	Visits Corsica. Collected editions begin publication in England (Heinemann) and in America (Doubleday)	
February	<i>Notes on Life and Letters</i>	
1922 August	<i>Tales of Unrest</i> in Eveleigh Nash & Grayson's 'Nash's Famous Fiction Library'	
November	<i>The Secret Agent</i> staged in London	

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xxii	CHRONOLOGY
1923 May–June	Visits America, guest of F. N. Doubleday
December	<i>The Rover</i>
1924 May	Declines knighthood
August 3	Dies at Oswalds. Roman Catholic funeral and burial, Canterbury
September	<i>The Nature of a Crime</i> (with Ford)
October	<i>The Shorter Tales of Joseph Conrad</i>
1925 January	<i>Tales of Hearsay</i>
September	<i>Suspense</i> (unfinished)
1926 March	<i>Last Essays</i>
1928 June	<i>The Sisters</i>

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ABBREVIATIONS AND
NOTE ON EDITIONS

ABBREVIATIONS

[London is the place of publication unless otherwise specified.]

<i>Bibliography</i>	William R. Cagle and Robert W. Trogdon, ‘A Bibliography of Joseph Conrad’. Typescript, unpublished
<i>CH</i>	<i>Conrad: The Critical Heritage</i> , ed. Norman Sherry. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973
<i>Documents</i>	<i>Conrad between the Lines: Documents in a Life</i> , ed. Gene M. Moore, Allan H. Simmons and J. H. Stape. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000; also published as <i>The Conradian</i> , 25, no. 2 (2000)
Garnett	<i>Letters from Conrad, 1895–1924</i> , ed. Edward Garnett. Nonesuch Press, 1928
Gordan	John Dozier Gordan, <i>Joseph Conrad: The Making of a Novelist</i> . Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1940
Hervouet	<i>The French Face of Joseph Conrad</i> . Cambridge University Press, 1990
Jessie Conrad	Jessie Conrad, <i>Joseph Conrad as I Knew Him</i> . Heinemann, 1926
<i>LBM</i>	<i>Joseph Conrad: Letters to William Blackwood and David S. Meldrum</i> , ed. William Blackburn. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1958
<i>Letters</i>	<i>The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad</i> . General Editors Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies, with Owen Knowles, Gene M. Moore and J. H. Stape. 9 vols. Cambridge University Press, 1983–2007
Mundy	Rodney Mundy, <i>Narrative of Events in Borneo and Celebes, Down to the Occupation of Labuan, from the</i>

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Journals of James Brooke, Esq. 2 vols. John Murray, 1848
Portrait in Letters *A Portrait in Letters: Correspondence to and about Joseph Conrad*, ed. J. H. Stape and Owen Knowles. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996; also published as *The Conradian*, 19, nos. 1–2 (1995)

LOCATIONS OF UNPUBLISHED DOCUMENTS

Berg Berg Collection, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations
BL British Library
Princeton Fireshore Library, Princeton University
Rosenbach Rosenbach Museum and Library, Philadelphia
TTU Special Collections Library, Texas Tech University, Lubbock
Yale Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut

NOTE ON EDITIONS

REFERENCES TO Conrad’s works are to the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad where these have been published. Otherwise, references are, for the sake of convenience, to Dent’s Collected Edition, 1946–55, whose pagination is identical with that of the various ‘editions’ published by Doubleday throughout the 1920s. References to the Cambridge Edition take the following form: title (year of publication), whereas publication dates are not provided for citations from Dent’s Collected Edition.

Citations from critical and other works are to author, title and date of publication.

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INTRODUCTION

THAT CONRAD'S FOURTH volume of fiction was a collection of short stories is more a matter of happenstance than of careful planning. The book that ought to have appeared immediately after *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896) was 'The Rescuer' (later *The Rescue*), a novel set, like its predecessors, in the Malay world and variously drawing on the exploits of Captain William Lingard (1829–88), a larger-than-life trader-adventurer whose activities Conrad had learned of during his days in the Far East. More than *Almayer's Folly* (1895) and *An Outcast of the Islands*, however, 'The Rescuer' was to treat the sea and life at sea, subjects Conrad was just beginning to explore. In this he was certainly stimulated by his proximity to the English Channel as he and his wife honeymooned on the coast of Brittany from the end of March to early September 1896. Begun with enthusiasm, 'The Rescuer' quickly proved problematic. As Conrad lamented to Edward Garnett, the confidant and guide whose advice had shaped his début as a writer: 'Now I've got all my people together I don't know what to do with them' (*Letters*, I, 288).

As his frustration with his new novel increased, Conrad turned his hand to writing short fiction, beginning with 'The Idiots', composed in May 1896. It was not, in fact, his first attempt at a story. *An Outcast of the Islands* had begun as a short story called 'Two Vagabonds', but it grew into a full-length novel and, in due course, was given a new title. There is also the thorny issue of 'The Black Mate' (1908), a jaunty tale possibly – but by no means certainly – written in the mid-1880s for a competition held by *Tit-Bits*, a popular magazine appealing to a wide, not especially sophisticated readership.¹ In any event, Conrad, who clearly found writing 'The Idiots' congenial, was soon planning a volume of short fiction.

By early November 1896, and settled in Stanford-le-Hope, Essex, he foresaw this collection comprising 'about 55000 words (in all the 4

¹ For a discussion of the story's dating, see Keith Carabine, "'The Black Mate': June–July 1886; January 1908', *The Conradian*, 13 (1988), 128–48.

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stories) to go to a Publisher with' (*Letters*, 1, 312). Its contents were then to include three stories completed in France – 'The Idiots', 'An Outpost of Progress' and 'The Lagoon' – and another begun there, the eventual *Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*. Conceived as a story about men at sea, the latter rapidly expanded beyond its original conception and length, and, as Conrad confessed to Garnett, 'I am letting myself go with the *Nigger*' (*Letters*, 1, 312). Not until this novella was seen into print in the prestigious *New Review* did he return to compose 'Karain: A Memory' and 'The Return' to complete the contemplated book of short fiction. *Tales of Unrest* (1898), then, brings together five short stories from the period 1896–7, composed as a relief from 'The Rescuer' or, after Conrad had abandoned that novel, with the collection specifically in view. This Introduction examines the origin of the stories, their coalescence into a volume, their sources and early critical reception.

ORIGINS

BRITTANY: LATE MARCH TO
EARLY SEPTEMBER 1896

AT THE END of March 1896, Joseph Conrad left Waterloo Station for Brittany with his new wife, having in mind both a honeymoon and a period of concentrated writing away from the distractions and expense of London. He had begun his project in hand, 'The Rescuer', earlier that month. The recently launched novel and a portable typewriter – a wedding gift from his publisher, T. Fisher Unwin, and his wife, Jane Cobden Unwin – accompanied him.¹ Urged on by the unstinting praise of Edward Garnett (the publisher's reader at Unwin's who had recognized the special quality of *Almayer's Folly*), writing at first went smoothly: 'Excellent, oh Conrad. Excellent. I have read every word of *The Rescuer*, & think you have struck a new note.'² The 'new note' was, it seems, struck none too soon, for a reviewer had already observed of *An Outcast of the Islands* that 'it is to be hoped that in his next venture he will choose a fresh set of characters and a more exhilarating story. He should endeavour to avoid the danger into which so many specialists in fiction fall of wearying the public by the many repetitions of their

¹ Conrad to T. Fisher Unwin, 9 April 1896 (*Letters*, 1x, 28). For details about the model of the typewriter and a description of it, see 'The Texts', pp. 188–9.

² Edward Garnett to Conrad, 26 May 1896 (*Portrait in Letters*, p. 22).

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first success.’¹ As it turns out, Conrad not only was beginning life as a married man, but also was on the brink of a transformative moment in his career.

With his narrative developing, he began to experience increasingly debilitating and prolonged bouts of writer’s block, accompanied by crises of confidence in himself and his material: ‘I am so afraid of myself, of my likes and dislikes, of my thought and of my expression’ (*Letters*, I, 273). Trying doggedly to force ‘The Rescuer’, he found that the work simply became more intractable. Dependent upon his pen for his livelihood, no longer single and, like most writers, uncertain about his future prospects, he could ill afford the luxury of creative inertia. As he remarked to Karol Zagórski, a Polish relative, ‘The literary profession is . . . my sole means of support’ (*Letters*, I, 266).

In an attempt to overcome both material pressures (the need for steady production and regular income) and creative ones (the need for a breakthrough with ‘The Rescuer’), Conrad turned his hand to a short story that could be marketed for ready cash while the longer project continued to evolve; this new turn also offered a respite from what were beginning to be unavailing struggles at his desk – ‘the helplessness that trammelled the work in hand’, as he called it.² The financial pressure proved both irksome and time-consuming and would continue to be so for several years. Conrad had accepted Unwin’s offer of a single payment of £20 for the copyright with no royalties for *Almayer’s Folly* (*Letters*, I, 176); perhaps slightly less than £30 for ‘The Idiots’;³ and for the second short story he wrote, ‘An Outpost

¹ *The Australasian* (Melbourne), 13 June 1896, p. 1145.

² Conrad to Unwin, 28 May 1896. A letter surviving only in incomplete form, this is published in part in *Letters* IX (31–2). The extract cited here is not included in the transcription in *Letters* IX, but appears in Gordan, p. 220.

³ Following his stated belief that the *Savoy* paid ‘tolerably well (2g[uinea]s per page?)’ (*Letters*, I, 293), some commentators claim that Conrad was paid this amount, but this is to overlook later correspondence with Unwin recording surprise that the price was to be less than 30s per page (*Letters*, I, 329). Peter D. McDonald, for instance, claims that Conrad received ‘about £37.16[s]’, presumably calculated at 2 guineas per page for twenty pages, less Unwin’s 10 per cent commission (*British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice 1880–1914* (1997), p. 179 n. 34). Although the exact figure is unknown, it was still, on a word-to-pound basis, a good return for work completed, representing either better than a third or nearly half the national average income: in 1886 for an adult male 23s 6d to 24s per week, and in 1906 28s 6d to 29s 6d (A. L. Bowley, *Wages and Income in the United Kingdom since 1869* (1937), p. 49). Calculated on the higher figures, these yield annual average incomes of £62 8s in 1886 and £76 14s in 1906, making Conrad’s earnings for less than a month’s work on ‘The Idiots’ quite respectable. He mentions Unwin’s terms, typical of literary agents of the period:

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of Progress', the *Cosmopolis* paid £50.¹ For a fledgeling writer in a crowded market, these were acceptable – even good – prices; but Conrad's financial anxieties were compounded by the fact that his honeymoon coincided with the loss of investments he had made in a South African mining company,² probably his inheritance from his maternal uncle and guardian, Tadeusz Bobrowski.

A further complicating factor was that Garnett, upon whose friendship and mentoring Conrad relied, had contracted typhoid fever,³ signalled by a six-week gap in their correspondence between mid-April and 22 May, during which 'The Rescuer' was laid aside and 'The Idiots' written. What advice Garnett would have offered Conrad is impossible to guess, but the fact that Conrad embarked upon this new venture independently is testament to his burgeoning self-confidence as a writer. Coinciding with this period, and possibly strengthening the belief that authorship was, indeed, the right path for him, were the generally favourable reviews of *An Outcast of the Islands*, then being forwarded to him through his publisher.

Another new departure in Conrad's writing can be detected in 'The Idiots', for instead of depending upon retrospect, the story involved a plunge into quotidian realities, drawing upon the cultural specificities and rugged, windswept landscape of coastal Brittany. Not only was this a wholly new, and no doubt invigorating, course, but it was also a complete break from his hitherto established pattern of working up memories of life in South-East Asia. As his first biographer, G. Jean-Aubry, rightly noted, 'The Idiots' is 'the only work that Conrad ever wrote immediately after an actual experience on the spot'.⁴

For a writer mired in a long work that still lacked focus, the short-story genre's compression and brevity offered obvious advantages.

'I shall send it ['Karain'] to Unwin; ask him to place it (on 10% Com[mission])' (to Garnett, 7 February 1897, *Letters*, I, 338).

¹ Conrad received £45 after Unwin had deducted his commission (*Letters*, I, 301, 350). By way of comparison are the £4 per 1,000 words received by Margaret Oliphant, the sum of £1,000 that Arthur Conan Doyle received for a series of twelve Sherlock Holmes stories in 1892, and the £1,500 Rider Haggard earned for his full-length *Joan Haste* (1894); see McDonald, *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice 1880–1914*, p. 140, and Mike Ashley, *The Age of Storytellers: British Popular Fiction Magazines, 1880–1950* (2006), p. 149.

² Conrad to Garnett, 22 July 1896 (*Letters*, I, 292). For details about the mining company Rorke's Roodepoort, Ltd, see Conrad to E. L. Sanderson, 24 August 1895 (*Letters*, I, 238–42; revised text: *Letters*, IX, 255–9).

³ Conrad to Constance Garnett, 17 April 1896, and 25 April 1896 (*Letters*, I, 275, 277).

⁴ *Joseph Conrad: Life & Letters* (1927), I, 164 n. 2.

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Conrad could turn to writers he admired, for advice, as it were, on presentation and development; and he also had the example of successful recent practitioners.¹ Whereas the formal models for ‘The Rescuer’ are more difficult to discern, those for ‘The Idiots’ are readily traceable to French writers, hardly a surprising fact given that Conrad was once again in day-to-day contact with his second language.

Although not yet aware of it, his resolution to suspend work on ‘The Rescuer’ was the first step towards laying it aside altogether, a decision he would make in early 1899. When he returned to the novel in 1918, it was, to all intents and purposes, a new work, just as he was a different writer. ‘The Idiots’ represents a decisive breakthrough.² Having found the genre to his taste – writing a short story had indeed ‘rescued’ him from bootless labours on ‘The Rescuer’ – it is no surprise that Conrad continued his explorations in the form: ‘In desperation I took up another short story. I must do something to live and meantime perhaps a ray of inspiration may come and light me along the labyrinth of incertitudes where I am now lost’ (*Letters*, I, 296). With ‘The Idiots’ written in ‘the intervals of squirming’ over ‘The Rescuer’ (*Letters*, I, 281), Conrad established a pattern that would recur over the next two decades: composition became layered and interpolated; shorter works were written in the interstices of longer ones; and new works were composed in the gaps of stalled ones. As John Dozier Gordan succinctly put it, ‘After the summer of 1896 alternation became almost a principle’ (p. 109). The project of a volume of short fiction was both a canny financial decision and an encouragement to further writing. Moreover, should ‘The Rescuer’ continue to evolve painfully or fail to advance at all, Conrad would still have a volume ready for press, as turned out to be the case.

Written in June and July 1896, ‘An Outpost of Progress’ proved to be yet another nail in the coffin of ‘The Rescuer’, a work made up, as far as has been discovered, mainly of second-hand materials – reading and port gossip and Eastern lore. ‘An Outpost’ is more clearly based upon personal observation and memory. Working on the story, Conrad re-lived his harrowing experience in what he would later and

¹ In mid-May 1896, he wrote to the anonymous reviewer of *An Outcast of the Islands* in the *Saturday Review*, who turned out to be H. G. Wells, then in his heyday as a short-story writer. In 1896 alone, Wells saw ten stories into print in a host of magazines, later mainly collected in *The Plattner Story and Others* (1897).

² For a detailed history of composition and revision of this and the others stories in this volume, see ‘The Texts’.

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unforgettably call the ‘heart of darkness’, confiding to Unwin: ‘All the bitterness of those days, all my puzzled wonder as to the meaning of all I saw – all my indignation at masquerading philanthropy – have been with me again, while I wrote’ (*Letters*, 1, 294). During the ‘three weeks or so’ it took to complete the tale, his humour was ‘sardonic’ and his mood ‘savage’.¹ He found the departure from the Malay Archipelago liberating, providing, as he says in the ‘Author’s Note’ to *Tales of Unrest*, a ‘very different atmosphere . . . a different moral attitude . . . new reactions, new suggestions, and even new rhythms for my paragraphs’;² and with each story Conrad was making discoveries, trying out new directions as well as extending territory already claimed.

‘An Outpost of Progress’ also demonstrated to him that material lay in his experience in the Congo, and a year and a half later he would return to it in the novella he initially called ‘The Heart of Darkness’. The ironic mode of ‘An Outpost of Progress’, not only different from, but also to some extent at odds with, the tone and mood of ‘The Rescuer’, was an advance in method, as if Conrad were trying out forms in order to expand his range and develop a fresh, more richly coloured and flexible voice. The story is also freer in its combination of realism and irony, and the more Conrad moved towards the example of Flaubert – whose spirit, he claimed, hovered over the writing of *Almayer’s Folly* – the further he turned from his chosen method in the novel that was underway.

His next story, ‘The Lagoon’, written during August 1896, returns to the Malay world in which ‘The Rescuer’ is set and was possibly seen as a stimulus for a return to work on the novel. He admitted his attraction to the material as something almost fated: ‘The short story like a fell disease got me under – and the Rescuer has to wait.’⁴ In retrospect, however, Conrad saw the story as marking the end of his ‘first phase, the Malayan phase’ (5.5) of his writing. ‘The Lagoon’ shares with ‘The Rescuer’ its backward glance at the landscapes and

¹ Jessie Conrad, pp. 38, 109. Mention of a ‘large box containing clothes, books and other articles’ forwarded to the Conrads in Brittany (Jessie Conrad, p. 36) provided the basis for a speculation that it ‘probably also contained’ Conrad’s Congo notebooks and so stimulated the memories that occasioned ‘An Outpost of Progress’ (G. Jean-Aubry, *The Sea Dreamer: A Definitive Biography of Joseph Conrad*, trans. Helen Sebba (1957), p. 220).

² See p. 6.18–21. Subsequent references to the texts of the present edition appear in round brackets.

³ *A Personal Record*, ed. Zdzisław Najder and J. H. Stape (2008), p. 19.7.

⁴ Conrad to Unwin, 9 August 1896 (*Letters*, 1, 298).