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INTRODUCTION

In *Conrad's Eastern World* I tried to recreate the world Conrad knew during his years as a sailor in far eastern waters between 1883 and 1888. I was concerned there on the one hand to make a contribution to Conrad biography, since those significant years had remained relatively undocumented, and on the other to seek out those suggestions in the life of the east, in the gossip of the ports, which became Conrad's heritage as a seaman and which were used by Conrad the novelist. Conrad himself suggested the possibility of his inspiration having derived from actual events and people when he stated: 'One's literary life must turn frequently for sustenance to memories and seek discourse with the shades. . .'¹ Events of which he retained 'memories' might have been noted in official records or newspapers of the area; 'shades' might be those of once-living men whose descendants might be traced. Biography and source material were, therefore, intimately linked in the case of those stories which returned to his experiences in the far east for their inspiration.

In this sequel to *Conrad's Eastern World* the direction could not be the same. The works selected for study ranged over the period 1896 to 1906 in terms of dates of composition, and only one major work, *Heart of Darkness* (1899), and one short story, 'An Outpost of Progress' (1896), looked back to Conrad's personal experience, in this instance his Congo visit of 1890-1. Thus, the biographical element must of necessity be smaller, since Conrad's life *as a writer* is well documented and that life, except in certain specific circum-

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stances, did not provide source material for the works being dealt with. The world of a South American republic or of the London anarchists was not in any substantial way part of Conrad's experience either at the time of writing *Nostromo* (1904) and *The Secret Agent* (1906) or at any period earlier in his life.

I have, however, been able to make certain contributions to Conrad biography where it is important to the works studied. Conrad's period in the Congo has been further illuminated by the addition of new material, and an unusual but interesting influence upon Conrad revealed by the study is that of certain friendships he formed in the course of his life, particularly those with G. F. W. Hope, A. P. Krieger, R. B. Cunninghame Graham, and Ford Madox Ford. All of these friendships in some way affected his creative life. Graham and Ford not only guided Conrad towards particular subjects for novels, but each contributed further in supplying Conrad with necessary background material and to a slight degree with the inspiration for particular characters based upon themselves. It would seem likely, for example, that Charles Gould in *Nostromo* owes something in history and appearance to Graham, and that Ford makes an appearance in 'The Informer'. G. F. W. Hope, Conrad's sailor friend, made his contribution to *Heart of Darkness* and I have been fortunate in discovering a formerly unknown account of Conrad written by Hope. A. P. Krieger, until now a shadowy and insubstantial figure in Conrad's life, can be seen to have been involved, if my account of him is acceptable, in an unexpected but substantial way in *The Secret Agent*.

In the course of my search certain unhopd-for bonuses came my way: one was an early and previously unknown manuscript by Conrad taking the form of notes for a novel, the other was an unexpected contact with the son of one of Conrad's friends of his Mediterranean days—Cesar Cervoni.

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So far as Conrad's source material was concerned, it became possible to detect a strong movement away from inspired analyses of personal experience or the related experiences of others (which is in some ways the mark of an amateur) to the contemplation of material entirely outside the bounds of his own experience (which in some ways is the mark of a professional). Such a movement, for some of his works at least, was inevitable. Conrad drew a great deal upon his past experience, but this was bound to be worked out in time. To Cunninghame Graham he wrote on 7 October 1907, 'Living with memories is a cruel business. I—who have a double life one of them peopled only by shadows growing more precious as the years pass—know what that is.'² And so an extension of possible subjects by means of reading was a natural development. More and more, as he progressed as a novelist, Conrad turned to reading, not simply as in his early days in order to buttress his limited knowledge of the far east, but in order to find the plot itself, the characters in all their variety, and the themes. In writing to his aunt, Madame Poradowska, after the French translation of *The Secret Agent* had appeared, Conrad said: 'for you well know that anarchy and anarchists are outside my experience. . . I created this out of whole cloth',³ and I hope to show how far Conrad went in order to create *The Secret Agent* 'out of whole cloth'. A vast literature must have been 'consumed' by Conrad in his study prior to the beginning of a novel. That it was precisely in those subjects where he was farthest from his own basic experience that he succeeded most, is a measure of this remarkable novelist's extraordinary achievement.

For Conrad, writing was a 'cruel business': 'I sit down religiously every morning, I sit down for eight hours every day—and the sitting down is all. In the course of that working day of 8 hours, I write 3 sentences which I erase. . . sometimes

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it takes all my resolution and power of self control to refrain from butting my head against the wall.’⁴ It became no less cruel, no less arduous when it was a matter of breathing life into material derived primarily from reading than it had been when he was mainly resuscitating memories of the past.

Finally, the change in source material reveals a change of interest. The exploration of the nature of such qualities as ‘courage’ and ‘fidelity’ within an isolated, dangerous, but morally neutral area of sea or river has given way to an interest in more public concerns, and as the settings have moved from the far east to the ‘western world’ of South America, the Congo, and London, so the interest now lies partly in the examination of the nature of specifically ‘western’ movements—colonial exploitation, material progress, left-wing revolutions. The individual is now seen in relation to such backgrounds, and thus the three major works studied are related as explorations of ‘man in society’. In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad deals with a primitive society but one which is both explored and exploited by the colonists from a more evolved society; here his concern is with the extent to which, once he is in a situation of isolation and primitiveness, the disciplined white man is sustained by a code of behaviour evolved in his civilised society. In *Nostramo*, Conrad moved from a primitive society to a young emerging one, where the struggle is for social power and wealth; the forces here—the greed, power-hungriness and awful cruelty—blindly promote or impede or are stimulated by the actual building-up of the economic substructure, the ‘material interests’. In his ‘darkest’ novel, *The Secret Agent*, Conrad turns to the fully evolved society which in contrast is liberal, relatively humane and protected, yet which has its underside of cruelty and savage force, where even love kills people. It is Conrad’s ability to see through the public claims being

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made in certain fields of activity such as these that accounts for the increasingly ironic—even desperate and cynical—tone.

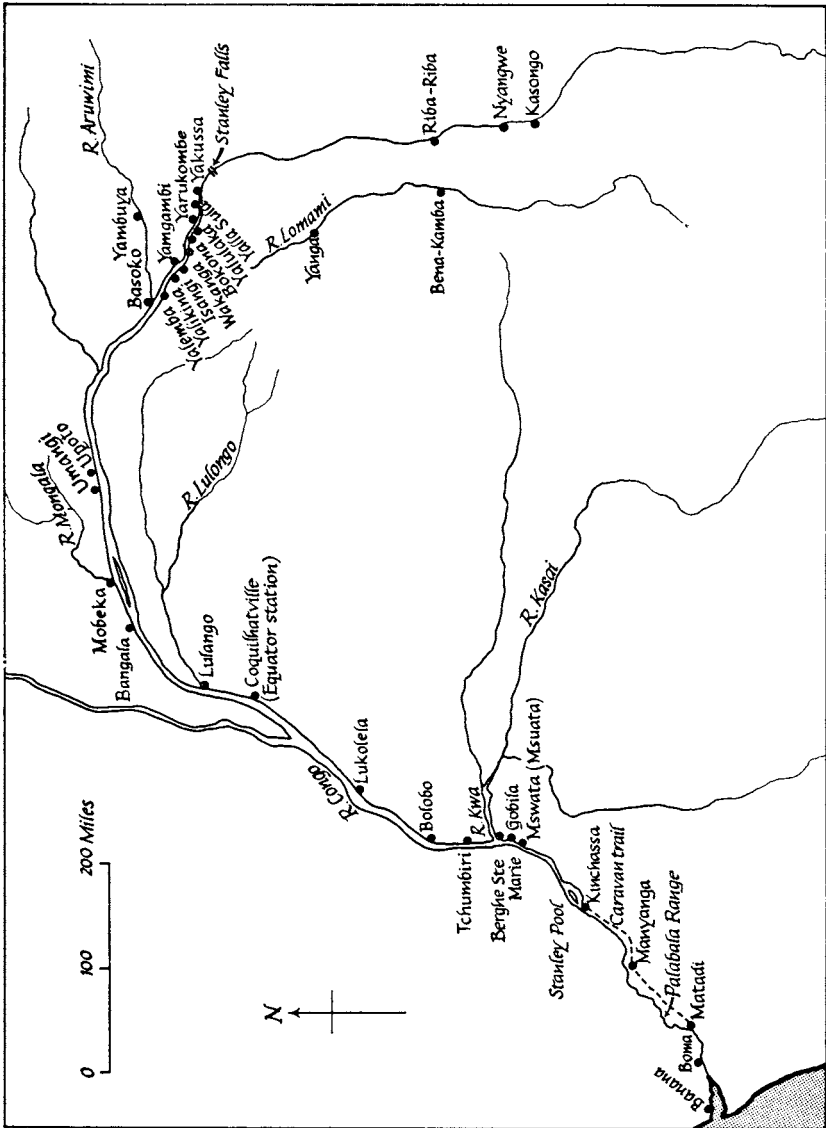
I shall consider first *Heart of Darkness* in relation both to Conrad's own connection with Africa and to the sources he found there for the novel and for his short story 'An Outpost of Progress'; and secondly the sources of *Nostramo* and 'Gaspar Ruiz', both having a South American setting; and finally *The Secret Agent* and the short stories, 'The Informer' and 'An Anarchist', the last two representing Conrad's preliminary attempts to deal with the then popular subject of anarchy and anarchists.

In the conclusion I have tried to reveal the movement of Conrad's mind over his material, to present the evolution of Conrad's fiction, and at each stage to monitor the intricate changes which Conrad made to his sources so that the processes of his art can be seen whole.

Cambridge University Press
0521298083 - Conrad's Western World
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HEART OF DARKNESS

Cambridge University Press
 0521298083 - Conrad's Western World
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THE FASCINATION OF AFRICA

'*Heart of Darkness* is . . . experience pushed a little (and only very little) beyond the actual facts of the case',¹ Conrad claimed of this short novel, and, as a result, the natural inclination has been to take Marlow's experience in the story as that of Conrad. His first biographer, G. Jean-Aubry, stated that 'the adventures which the author lends to Marlow, his mouthpiece, are no other than those of which he himself was at the same time witness and victim'.² This would lead, naturally, to the further identification between the commercial agent Kurtz of *Heart of Darkness* and the particular commercial agent in the Congo at the time of Conrad's visit who was called Klein, whose name appears in the manuscript of *Heart of Darkness*, and who, like Kurtz, died on the down-river trip. And this also is stressed by Jean-Aubry: 'it is beyond a doubt . . . that between these two persons, one real and the other imaginary, there was more than a simple resemblance of name'.³

The artistic finish of the story, however, and Conrad's own confessed aim of wishing, as he states in his Author's Note, to give 'that sombre theme . . . a sinister resonance',⁴ suggest a quite significant process of transmutation between experience and the completed fiction. "'Youth'", he records, 'in its facts, in its inwardness and in its outward colouring, begins and ends in myself', but in *Heart of Darkness* it was 'no longer a matter of sincere colouring. It was like another art altogether'.⁵ But not enough has been known about Conrad's Congo experience outside the story, in spite of his Congo diary, to allow for any but the most tenuous of speculations about the relation between fact and fiction.

Cambridge University Press
0521298083 - Conrad's Western World
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Heart of Darkness

If we were able to extend our knowledge of this period of Conrad's life we *should* discover to what extent personal experience formed Marlow's journey; but we should also be able to demonstrate what Conrad meant by experience 'pushed a little beyond the actual facts'; and we should be able to decide whether that 'sombre theme' of the tale was part of his actual experience or whether it derived from Conrad's imaginative working over that experience. We should then be in a position to consider the nature of Conrad's literary skill in developing the 'sinister resonance'.

It has been possible to add to our knowledge of the Congo Conrad knew, and of his experiences there, and to recreate also the particular influences and ideas surrounding the colonisation of that part of Africa at that time which had some bearing on Conrad's story. I have pieced this information together from contemporary newspaper accounts, particularly from the *Mouvement Géographique*,* and from private and official documents. This new information suggests that Conrad did not have the limited but moral success of Marlow; on the contrary, the experience was for him singularly unproductive and distressing and, worse perhaps, frustrating. It shows that Mr Klein, reputed source for Kurtz, had as little of the devil in him as could be possible, and that even the more probable source for Kurtz, whom I have discovered, was not corrupted in quite the same way by the Congo as Kurtz was. And, as one might expect in a story that has such metaphysical overtones, even in terms of geographical fact Marlow's journey moves away from Conrad's. But the basis of the journey, its rhythm of movement from station to station on the river and its motivations, is certainly retained by Conrad, and experience and story can most usefully be studied in terms of this pattern.

* A small weekly review, published in Brussels, and the official organ of the Independent State and the commercial companies of the Belgian Congo.

The Fascination of Africa

I shall deal, therefore, with the obtaining of the command of the river-steamer on the Congo which involves the death of the previous captain; the sea journey from Europe to Boma ('the seat of government') at the mouth of the Congo; the first stage of the up-river journey by steamer from Boma to Matadi (the 'Company Station'); the overland journey from Matadi to Kinchassa (the 'Central Station'); the final stage of the up-river journey by steamer from Kinchassa to Stanley Falls (the 'Inner Station'); and the descent of the river.

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'...to understand the effect of it [the experience] on me', says Marlow at the beginning of his tale, 'you ought to know how I got out there, what I saw, how I went up that river' (p. 51). As to how he got out there, Conrad's experience was very much that of Marlow. Marlow had returned to London after 'six years or so' sailing in the east, and Conrad in 1889 had just returned to London after intermittently sailing in the east since 1883, ending with fourteen months as master of the *Otago*. Marlow finds difficulty in getting another berth, and so at that time did Conrad when, in his Bessborough Gardens lodgings, he began writing *Almayer's Folly*. Determining to try for a job in the Congo with a trading company, Marlow makes use of his relatives on the continent to get him a job, and Conrad obtained his post as skipper of a steamer on the Congo with the Société Anonyme Belge pour le Commerce du Haut-Congo (SAB) through the influence of his aunt in Brussels, Marguerite Poradowska.

Marlow quickly got his appointment, but it took several months before a vacancy came up for Conrad, and when it came it was a more significant appointment than Marlow's. Marlow is appointed simply as skipper of a steamboat on the river, but Conrad wrote to his cousin, Karol Zagórski: 'As far as I can make out from my "lettre d'instruction"