

THE
CAMBRIDGE EDITION OF
THE WORKS OF
JOSEPH CONRAD

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-14140-7 — The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'
Joseph Conrad, Edited by Allan H. Simmons
Frontmatter
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THE NIGGER OF THE *NARCISSUS*
A TALE OF THE SEA

THE CAMBRIDGE EDITION OF THE WORKS OF
JOSEPH CONRAD

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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 Conrad's *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* and of its prefatory matter. The Cambridge text of the novella is based on the extant manuscript preserved in the collection of the Rosenbach of the Free Library of Philadelphia. The selected copy-text is emended to incorporate authorial revisions drawn from later authoritative documents as well as editorial emendations. The copy-texts for the 'Preface' and 'To My Readers in America' are, respectively, the revised typescript held at Everett Needham Case Library, Colgate University, Hamilton, New York, and the manuscript held at the Rosenbach of the Free Library of Philadelphia. The appendices present materials relevant to the publication history and the real-life circumstances Conrad drew upon for his novella.

The 'Introduction' provides a literary history of the work focussed on its genesis, sources and early reception, including its place in Conrad's life and art. The essay on 'The Texts' traces the volume's

textual history, examines the sources 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 'Textual Notes' deal with cruxes and textual issues. The 'Explanatory Notes' comment on specific readings that require glosses, dealing with sources, identifying real-life place-names and related matters. A glossary deals with nautical terms. 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', 'Explanatory Notes' and nautical glossary are intended primarily for a non-specialist audience.

The support of the institutions listed on p. ix 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.

THE GENERAL EDITORS

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A number of individuals kindly supplied information or generously shared their expertise. My most profound debt of thanks is to two dear friends: the late J. H. Stape, whose engagement with, and influence upon, this volume (as upon the Cambridge Edition in its entirety) has been profound; and Owen Knowles, for his unstinting advice, instruction and support. Thanks are due to Andrew Pursell for assistance with verifying the serial transcriptions; to Alston Kennerley for advice on nautical matters; to Peter Lancelot Mallios for research at the US Copyright Office; and to Don Shewan for his work on the maps.

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Donovan's endeavours to bring Conrad's serializations into the digital age with *Conrad First: The Joseph Conrad Periodical Archive* (www.conradfirst.net) have proved valuable. I am also grateful to Laura Kiernan, John Young, Susan Brown and Stephen Arata for their help in seeing the volume through the vetting processes established by the Committee on Scholarly Editing of the Modern Language Association. Lastly, at Cambridge University Press, gratitude is due to Linda Bree for on-going support and advice; to Victoria Parrin, who saw the volume through production; and to Hilary Hammond, whose careful and sensitive copy-editing has enriched the text in numerous ways.

The facsimiles preceding the textual essay are reproduced by courtesy of the Rosenbach of the Free Library of Philadelphia; the Everett Needham Case Library, Colgate University Library, Hamilton, New York; and the University of California, Riverside.

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 (1870–8); in the British merchant service, mainly as a junior officer sailing in the Far East and Australia (1879–early 1890s); after a transitional period (early 1890s), as writer of critical esteem (1895–1914); as acclaimed writer, although perhaps with his greatest work already achieved (1915–24). After 1895 the history of Conrad's life is essentially the history of his works.

Publication dates given below are those of the English book editions, except for those of the present volume. Only the first serial appearance of essays is noted.

1857	December 3	Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski Nałęcz (coat-of-arms) born in Berdyczów in the Ukraine 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)
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
1880–1		Third mate in <i>Loch Etive</i> (to Sydney)
1881–3		Second mate in <i>Palestine</i> and <i>Riversdale</i> (Eastern seas)
1884	June 5	Departs Bombay as second mate in <i>Narcissus</i>
	October 16	<i>Narcissus</i> docks at Dunkirk
	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)

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1887–8		First mate in <i>Highland Forest</i> , <i>Vidar</i> (Eastern seas)
1888–9		Captain of <i>Otago</i> (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 as second-in-command, then temporarily as 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
	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> . Marries Jessie George
	April 9	Arrives on Île-Grande. Honeymoons in Brittany until early September, with intermittent work on ‘The Rescuer’. Writes three stories later collected in <i>Tales of Unrest</i>
	mid-August	Probably begins <i>The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’</i>
	September	Settles in Stanford-le-Hope, Essex

1897		Begins friendship with R. B. Cunninghame Graham; meets Henry James and Stephen Crane
	January 17	Finishes drafting <i>The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'</i>
	July 26	Its serialization begins in the <i>New Review</i> (August–December); signs Memorandum of Agreement with William Heinemann
	August–September	Serialized in several American newspapers through the Bachelier Syndicate
	August	Writes 'Preface' to <i>The Nigger</i>
	October 18	Returns last batch of the story's corrected proofs
	December 2	<i>The Nigger of the 'Narcissus': A Tale of the Sea</i> published by Heinemann in England (March 1898, by Dodd, Mead in America under the title of <i>The Children of the Sea: A Tale of the Forecastle</i>)
1898		Meets Ford Madox (Hueffer) Ford and H. G. Wells
	January	Alfred Borys Leo Conrad born
	April	<i>Tales of Unrest</i>
	October	Moves to Pent Farm, Postling near Hythe, Kent, sub-let from Ford
1900	September	Begins association with literary agent J. B. Pinker
	October	<i>Lord Jim</i>
1901	June	<i>The Inheritors</i> (with Ford)
1902	November	<i>Youth: A Narrative and Two Other Stories</i>
	December	'Preface' privately printed as a pamphlet by J. Lovick, Hythe
1903	April	<i>Typhoon and Other Stories</i>
	October	<i>Romance</i> (with Ford)
1904	October	<i>Nostramo</i>

CHRONOLOGY

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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</i> in America)
	October	<i>'Twixt Land and Sea</i>
1913	September	<i>Chance</i> , with 'main' publication date of January 1914
1914	February or March	Writes 'To My Readers in America' for Doubleday, Page and Company reissue of <i>The Nigger</i>
	April or May	'To My Readers in America' and 'Preface' published as an advertising pamphlet by Doubleday, Page and Company
	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>
1916	April	Revises <i>The Nigger</i> for collected edition
1917	March	<i>The Shadow-Line, A Confession</i>
1919	March	Moves to Spring Grove, near Wye, Kent
	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	November	<i>The Secret Agent</i> staged in London
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>

ABBREVIATIONS AND NOTE ON EDITIONS

ABBREVIATIONS

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

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| Berthoud | Jacques Berthoud, 'Introduction: Conrad and the Sea', <i>The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'</i> . Oxford: Oxford World's Classics 1984, pp. vii–xxvi |
| <i>Bibliography</i> | William R. Cagle, 'A Bibliography of Joseph Conrad'. Typescript, unpublished |
| <i>CR</i> | <i>Joseph Conrad: The Contemporary Reviews</i> . General Editors Allan H. Simmons, John G. Peters and J. H. Stape, with Richard Niland, Mary Burgoyne and Katherine Isobel Baxter. 4 vols. Cambridge University Press, 2012 |
| Davis and Rude | Kenneth W. Davis and Donald W. Rude, 'The Transmission of the Text of <i>The Nigger of the "Narcissus"</i> ', <i>Conradiana</i> , 5 (1973), 20–45 |
| Garnett | Edward Garnett, ed., <i>Letters from Conrad: 1895 to 1924</i> . Nonesuch Press, 1928 |
| Jessie Conrad | Jessie Conrad, <i>Joseph Conrad As I Knew Him</i> , Heinemann, 1926 |
| Keating | George T. Keating, comp., <i>A Conrad Memorial Library: The Collection of George T. Keating</i> . New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1929 |
| <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 |
| Peters | John G. Peters, ed., <i>Conrad in the Public Eye: Biography / Criticism / Publicity</i> . Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008 |

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- Portrait in Letters* *A Portrait in Letters: Correspondence to and about Conrad*, ed. J. H. Stape and Owen Knowles. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996
- Wise Thomas J. Wise, *A Bibliography of the Writings of Joseph Conrad: 1895–1921*. Second Edition. Dawsons, 1921

LOCATIONS OF UNPUBLISHED DOCUMENTS

- Colgate Everett Needham Case Library, Colgate University
- Princeton Firestone Library, Princeton University
- Rosenbach The Rosenbach of the Free Library of Philadelphia
- Rushden Heinemann Archive, Random House Group Library & Archive, Rushden, Northamptonshire
- Yale Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University

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 identified by author, title and date only.

INTRODUCTION

JOSEPH CONRAD began writing *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (1897) in the summer of 1896, towards the end of a prolonged and artistically productive honeymoon in Brittany during which he wrote his first three short stories. He completed it in mid-January 1897 at home at Stanford-le-Hope, Essex, on the Thames estuary. Drawing directly upon his two decades as a professional sailor in the French and British merchant navies, Conrad's third book not only marked a break with the Malay world of his first two novels, *Almayer's Folly* (1895) and *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896), but also announced his as the definitive new voice in maritime story-telling. Indeed, the novella made such an impact on his contemporaries that Conrad would never quite free himself from the 'sea writer' tag that its critical success encouraged.

Within the next two decades – and despite the diversity of his fictional settings and themes – Conrad would become so identified with the sea in the public imagination that he felt constrained by it, expressing a hope as late as 1923 that he could get 'get freed from that infernal tale of ships, and that obsession of [*sic*] my sea life'.¹ To his friend Edward Garnett, the professional editor and publisher's reader who was a moving presence behind the book, Conrad's new work confirmed his dual 'ties' to a nationality that he had formally adopted a decade previously: 'In his apostrophe to England, as the *Narcissus* is racing up the Channel, Conrad has defined the spiritual tie that bound him for twenty years to the merchant service, a tie that crystallized, later, in his fame and place in English literature.'² Written by an émigré former master-mariner in his third language (after Polish and French), *The Nigger* was immediately recognized, and has now long been regarded, as among the greatest fictions about the sea in the English language.

¹ Conrad to Richard Curle, 14 July 1923 (*Letters*, VIII, 130).

² Edward Garnett, 'Introductory Essay', *Conrad's Prefaces* (1937), p. 10. For a discussion of Conrad and England, see Allan H. Simmons, 'The Art of Englishness: Identity and Representation in Conrad's Early Career', *The Conradian*, 29, no. 1 (2004), 1–27.

The volume marks a turning point in Conrad’s art and career in significant ways: his first fiction to be set mainly at sea, it is also the first to take up a specifically ‘English’ subject; and it is not only boldly experimental in its handling of narrative voice, but also confident in its exploration of the possibilities of literary impressionism. If that were not enough, Conrad also discovered a form that he was to find particularly congenial: the novella, an intermediate genre between the long short story and the full-length novel. And, lastly, in this work dealing with English types and characters he found a new voice, learning to constrain a style that, in his earlier fiction, was at times overly rich and, as his critics had observed, over-elaborate. *The Nigger* also marks another departure: breaking with his first publisher, the testy T. Fisher Unwin, Conrad aligned himself with the house of Heinemann, a firm headed by a man more interested in serious, ‘highbrow’ fiction, and who nurtured his clients and cared about their development. Written at a moment when Conrad had settled upon authorship as the means of earning a living and supporting a family, *The Nigger* is an audacious novella making an important contribution to both the maritime mythology of the seafaring nation and the avant-garde practices of an emergent literary Modernism.

This discussion will examine the story’s complex and diverse origins, its autobiographical, literary and historical sources and, with an emphasis on the early years, its critical reception.

ORIGINS

THE MONTH OF March 1896 was one of several new beginnings for Conrad: on the 4th, T. Fisher Unwin published his second novel, *An Outcast of the Islands*; on the 24th, he married Jessie George, whom he had met two years before; and, on the following day, the couple travelled to Brittany for a six-month honeymoon. On the eve of his marriage, and upon the advice of Edward Garnett, Conrad abandoned work on *The Sisters*, an unfinished novel focussing on a disillusioned young Ruthenian painter who abandons his native land for Paris and on two Basque sisters who, orphaned, have likewise left their country for the French capital. Making little headway with this unpromising, second-hand material, he turned to a third novel set in the Far East and dealing with the exploits – partly fictional, partly real – of Tom Lingard, an English seaman–adventurer. Then entitled ‘The Rescuer’, it too was soon abandoned and finally completed only

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Joseph Conrad, Edited by Allan H. Simmons

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some twenty years later as *The Rescue* (1920). In this project, Conrad was encouraged by Garnett, to whom he confessed: ‘you have driven home the conviction and I *shall* write the sea-story – at once (12 months)’.¹ Recognizing how his own experiences fitted him for this task, he playfully continued that he would prove to be ‘a wise old man of the sea’. Playfulness aside, the wisdom turned out to be not only deep but also broad, with the sea story that he would actually develop – *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’* – touching upon a range of fundamental human themes worked out through the microcosm of shipboard life.

While the ‘sea-story’ that Garnett had counselled proceeded fitfully, Conrad retained a ‘hazy idea’ that he would ‘present to the reader the impression of the sea – the ship – the seamen’.² It seems clear that this impulse remained, but mainly in the distant background, while he turned from ‘The Rescuer’ – ‘that fatal manuscript’³ – to write two short stories, completing ‘An Outpost of Progress’ in July and ‘The Lagoon’ in August. In their settings and atmosphere the tales acknowledged particular phases of the author’s life: an isolated riverine trading post in West Africa and, delving further back still, the remote island regions of the Malay Archipelago. While these shorter pieces deflected Conrad’s attention from ‘The Rescuer’, they illustrate how he was continuing to mine the rich seams of his personal experience. And ironically, his struggles with ‘The Rescuer’ were to uncover possibly the richest seam of all: his twenty years as a merchant seaman.

In early July 1896, Conrad asked Garnett to send the first part of ‘The Rescuer’ to G. F. W. Hope, wanting this long-standing friend and former professional sailor ‘to look over the seamanship of my expressions’.⁴ It is precisely this attention to nautical detail and terminology – to ‘seamanship’ itself – that characterized Conrad’s next venture into short-story writing, as he began what would eventually become *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’*.⁵ Albeit by a circuitous route, Garnett’s encouragement had indeed led to a ‘sea-story’, dedicated to him in due course with Conrad calling it ‘Your book’.⁶ He had made a start on it by the time he returned from Brittany in early September,

¹ Conrad to Garnett, [23/24 March 1896] (*Letters*, 1, 268).

² Conrad to Garnett, 10 June 1896 (*Letters*, 1, 287).

³ Conrad to Garnett, 5 August 1896 (*Letters*, 1, 296).

⁴ Conrad to Garnett, 10 July [1896] (*Letters*, 1, 291).

⁵ For a discussion of Conrad’s ‘turn to the sea’, see William E. Messenger, ‘Conrad and His “Sea Stuff”’, *Conradiana*, 6 (1974), 3–19, and Berthoud (1984), pp. vii–xxvi.

⁶ Conrad to Garnett, 24 August 1897 (*Letters*, 1, 375).

a month earlier than anticipated, fleeing poor weather. Back in Britain, the Conrads spent their first month between Conrad's Gillingham Street lodgings, near London's Victoria Station, and as guests of Fountaine and Nellie Hope in Stanford-le-Hope before setting up home there. Jessie Conrad records that their new home's 'greatest attraction' was its proximity to these friends.¹ Regular conversation with Hope could only have helped to sharpen *The Nigger's* maritime focus. He was a former *Conway* boy and retired merchant officer who had sailed in the *Duke of Sutherland* before Conrad. He was also a keen small-craft sailor recalled, along with his yacht, the *Nellie*, in 'Heart of Darkness'.² For Conrad, living close to the Thames, with its recollection of departures and homecomings, must also have stimulated memories.

As John Dozier Gordan put it: 'Conrad's two careers cast light upon one another.'³ For his part, Conrad came to recognize his unique fitness for the task, telling the American collector John Quinn, when selling him the manuscript, that it was a story 'no one else could have written'.⁴ As well as bringing into intimate correspondence the professional careers of Józef Korzeniowski, the sailor, and Joseph Conrad, the writer, *The Nigger* marked the transition between them.

In *A Personal Record* (1912), Conrad attributes the beginnings of his writing career to Karel Olmeijer, whom he had met in Berau in late 1887 and early 1888: 'But if I had not got to know Almayer pretty well it is almost certain there would never have been a line of mine in print.'⁵ But where Almayer provided a fulcrum, as it were, for Conrad's Malay fictions, turning to the sea for his inspiration involved him in an altogether deeper engagement with autobiography. As Conrad recognized in 'To My Readers in America' (1914), a short note he wrote for Doubleday, Page's 'Deep Sea' edition of the novella (1914), *The Nigger* was a testamentary celebration of a life that now lay long behind him:

It is the book by which, not as a novelist perhaps, but as an artist striving for the utmost sincerity of expression, I am willing to stand or fall. Its pages are the tribute of

¹ Jessie Conrad, *Conrad as I Knew Him* (1925), p. 41.

² On Hope's sea career and early relations with Conrad, see G. F. W. Hope, 'Friend of Conrad', ed. Gene M. Moore, *Conrad Between the Lines: Documents in a Life*, ed. Gene M. Moore, Allan H. Simmons and J. H. Stape (2000), pp. 1–56.

³ John Dozier Gordan, *Joseph Conrad: The Making of a Novelist* (1940), p. 26.

⁴ Conrad to John Quinn, 8 December 1912 (*Letters*, v, 144).

⁵ *A Personal Record*, ed. Zdzisław Najder and J. H. Stape (2008), p. 83.10–12.

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my unalterable and profound affection for the ships, the seamen, the winds and the great sea – the moulders of my youth, the companions of the best years of my life.

After writing the last words of that book, in the revulsion of feeling before the accomplished task, I understood that I had done with the sea, and that henceforth I had to be a writer. And almost without laying down the pen I wrote a preface, trying to express the spirit in which I was entering on the task of my new life.¹

This new task involved an exploration of the psychology of a ship's crew, a group of men sharing a special bond and identity, depending upon diverse skills exercised for the common good, and, by the nature of their united endeavours against the elements, at times forced to confront their collective and individual mortality. Conrad likened his subject to that of his friend Stephen Crane's in *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), 'the psychology of the mass', only his focus is not men confronting the enemy on the battlefield but on men in the forecabin in a struggle for their economic, and at times, actual survival: 'the crew of a merchant ship, brought to the test of what I may venture to call the moral problems of conduct'.² In the process, the narrative dramatizes Conrad's famous belief that 'the world, the temporal world, rests on a few very simple ideas . . . It rests notably . . . on the idea of Fidelity'.³ His avowed intention was, he explained, 'to present a group of men held together by a common loyalty and a common perplexity in a struggle not with human enemies but with the hostile conditions testing their faithfulness to the conditions of their own calling'.⁴ As Jacques Berthoud has noted, Conrad 'weighs up the meaning of his life as master-mariner, and does not find it wanting'.⁵ Complex in its ambitions, what is, in fact, a fairly simple and straightforward story depicting the interactions among a group of men – not the exploits of a hero – is made to carry a heavy burden.

SOURCES

THE NOVELLA draws upon three distinct sources: Conrad's experience in the British Merchant Navy from the late 1870s to 1894,

¹ p. 130.15–26 Subsequent references to the texts of the present edition appear in round brackets.

² 'Stephen Crane' (1923), *Last Essays*, ed. Harold Ray Stevens and J. H. Stape (2010), pp. 72.20, 72.22–24.

³ *A Personal Record* (2008), p. 17.14–17.

⁴ *Last Essays* (2010), p. 72.14–18.

⁵ Berthoud (1984), p. vii.

recent literary works of sea fiction – in particular, the work of French writers – and on contemporary events and concerns that his audience would have had fresh in mind.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL

THE VOYAGE DESCRIBED in *The Nigger*, charting the ship's homeward journey from Bombay harbour to the Port of London, has its origins in Conrad's voyage out from Bombay (present-day Mumbai) and inward to Dunkirk, in northern France, between early June and mid-October 1884, during his service as second mate in the real-life *Narcissus*. The Agreement and Account of Crew for this voyage (preserved at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich) not only records details – he was engaged on 28 April at a rate of £5 per month and discharged on 17 October – but also provides important shaping correspondences between the factual and fictional voyages, including the death at sea of one Joseph Barron, a 35-year-old Able Seaman, on 24 September as the ship neared her destination. It is impossible to be precise about the location since the captain's log has not survived. (In the novella, James Wait dies 'within sight of Flores' (117.15), the most north-westerly island in the Azores Archipelago.) But the fictional voyage Conrad describes is ultimately a synthesis of his experiences at sea, stretching over nearly two decades. As he confessed to his publisher: 'It took me twenty years of pretty hard life to find that book.'¹

By the time he signed on in the *Narcissus*, Conrad had a decade of nautical experience behind him, spent in French and British ships seeing the colonial world from the deck of a merchantman in an age when Britannia truly did 'rule the waves'. He had signed off from his previous ship, the *Riversdale*, in Madras (present-day Chennai) on 17 April with a bad conduct record, having quarrelled with her irritable master. He then travelled by train to Bombay, an 800-mile (1,300 kilometre) journey, where he managed to find a berth in the *Narcissus* for her homeward journey to Europe, round the Cape of Good Hope. This spirit of returning home to England directs the emotional as much as the physical progress of the fictional ship. As Henry James remarked in 1906: 'No one has *known* – for intellectual use – the things you know, & you have, as the artist of the whole

¹ Conrad to S. S. Pawling, 5 November 1897 (*Letters*, ix, 51).

matter, an authority that no one has approached.¹ In this manner *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* provides the reader with a compendium of Conrad's years as a sailor, drawing upon the particular details of a single voyage and embellishing these with incidents from other voyages and, more generally, knowledge of shipboard life and routine gained from a career spent at sea. Thus, Conrad shaped the story along the lines of his experience in the *Narcissus* and then drew upon his life at sea generally to add psychological depth and colour.

In a conversation in June 1924 with his friend and first biographer, the French music critic G. Jean-Aubry, Conrad recalled the 'awful gale in the vicinity of the Needles, south of the cape, of which I have tried to give an impression in my book'.² Alongside such correspondences to incidents in the *Narcissus's* actual voyage are fictional moments that are composites of lived experience. For example, he claimed that the novella's first scene was inspired by 'the embarkation of the crew at Gravesend aboard the same *Duke of Sutherland*'³ in which he had served some five years previous to his employment in the *Narcissus*, while its conclusion is taken 'from other voyages which I made under similar circumstances'.⁴ Of course, the relationship between life and art works both ways, and, as Jean-Aubry astutely noted, it is from *The Nigger* and *The Mirror of the Sea* that 'we know what Conrad's life was like, not only during the voyage of the *Narcissus*, but during the twenty years he spent on board sailing ships'.⁵

The characters in the novella offer the best example of how freely Conrad quarried his experience for his fiction.⁶ As he reminded Jean-Aubry: 'I do not write history, but fiction, and am therefore entitled to choose as I please what is most suitable in regard to characters and particulars to help me in the general impression I wish to produce.'⁷ Accordingly, the prototype for Wait was a sailor who 'belonged' (in seaman parlance) not to the *Narcissus* but to the *Duke of Sutherland*, whose crew did indeed include a sailor of sub-Saharan African descent who died 'just' after the 'awful gale' off the Cape but whose name he had

¹ Henry James to Conrad, 1 November 1906 (*Portrait in Letters*, p. 58).

² See Appendix A, p. 265.

³ Appendix A, p. 265. For a detailed discussion of Conrad's service in this ship, see Allan H. Simmons, 'Conrad and the *Duke of Sutherland*', *The Conradian*, 35, no. 1 (2010), 101–25.

⁴ Appendix A, p. 265.

⁵ G. Jean-Aubry, *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters* (1927), 1, 78.

⁶ For details on the real-life crew, see Appendix B.

⁷ Appendix A, p. 265.