

Recent Letters of Joseph Conrad Reveal His Real Literary Ideals

Conrad and His Public

Joseph Conrad, Author of "The Arrow of Gold"

Author Reveals His Belief In the Public at Large

By Rebecca Drucker

The figure of Joseph Conrad is a strange and provocative one. It grows to gigantic proportions with the finest and most characteristic of his work, but its solitude is invincible. There is a discriminating and worshipful public, and a following of disciples and interpreters, but only Mr. Conrad himself can transmit his human quality. The temptation to see him as a demigod overcomes every one who interprets him.

Some of the obscurity is rent by a group of letters connected with the publication of his latest novel, "The Arrow of Gold." In these Conrad sets forth some of his own emotions about this novel and gives us a glimpse of his feelings about his craft.

"The Arrow of Gold," he writes on December 21, 1918, to Mr. Doubleday, of Doubleday, Page & Co., his publishers, "is a subject which I have had in mind for some eighteen years, but which I hesitated to take up till now. This state of mind may be to an American appear very silly and ineffectual, and I won't attempt to apologize for my opinion that work is not to be rushed at simply because it can be done or because one suffers from mere impatience to matter of new matter of any sort is fully justified only when it is done at the right time; just as the potentiality and the energy of a fire-charge is justified only when a house is on fire. To have a house on fire, the citizens' houses with streams of water simply because the pumps are new, the organization perfect and a laudable energy must have an outlet, would be an absurd proceeding and, very likely, give serious offence to the reasonable part of the public. Some feeling like this, just as strong but of a different kind, is what I had in mind when I found the mood didn't carry much on my way, having finished that novel in about ten months. This for a piece of creation depending so much for its truth on actual brush strokes, one may say is rather a short time, especially as it was also an essay, I won't say in a new technique (there is nothing new under the sun), but in a method of presentation which may be new, especially in J. C.'s art—if such a thing as J. C.'s personal art exists. I wouldn't like to have to demonstrate this in set terms; but I am sure that it does exist.

"You have too much knowledge of human nature not to understand after what I have said that I feel a particular interest in that book, which is so much of a portrait of vanished years of feeling and once likely actuating power and of people who probably are all at rest by now. I am sufficiently of a democrat to detect the same in the work of any writer of some small self-appointed aristocracy in the vast domain of art or letters. As a matter of feeling—not as a matter of business—I want to be read by many and not by a few. I am sure that I pride myself that there is no sense in my writing, either thought or image, that is not accessible, I won't say to the meanest intelligence (meanest is a vulgar word), but to the simplest intelligence that is aware of all of the world in which we live."

And in people appear quite simply disclosure which will seem extraordinary to those who have visualized Joseph Conrad as an artist aloofly preoccupied with the problems of his craft, and a consciousness of his audience. "I accept the favorable opinion of your pronouncement about the public. I have been always too democratic in my feelings (if not in my politics) not to dislike intensely the idea of being the writer of a small and exclusive circle. I have always wanted to be my book accepted in the widest possible sphere of mankind. Mercenary considerations have but little to do with that desire, though I am not ashamed to admit that success is welcome in any way, and mainly as the outward sign of recognition.

"I think that in all conscience I have worked hard enough for it. The book of which you speak so kindly is the product of the twenty-three years of my writing life. To have moved you to the expression of such warm sympathy is a success of the best kind."

"I am very much cheered up by your anticipations of a popular success. Such as the book is I have done my best for it, and the rest is for you and the other proof of a life hereafter

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young warriors of the Garden City to do it will cost you nothing because I have an idea that there will be a good many critics out for my scalp on account of those pages which can be so easily misunderstood. I have tried to do it in a rhetorical subtleties and all declamation in his piece of work, round which my thoughts have been working for twenty years before I mustered courage enough to put pen to paper. Now it is done and I am not ashamed of it. I really think that as far as freshness of feeling, directness of sensations and honesty of purpose are concerned the thing is so good for a youngster of sixty! But not a line has been faked in deference to prejudice or from personal fear of consequence. Still, one cannot help thinking of one's readers—the old and new friends of my writing life. I feel a little as if I were giving myself away, for, indeed, psychologically it is quite a disclosure of an unusual temperament.

The singular circumstances of Conrad's wandering sea life and the fact that he translates his own Slavic soul into English literature account somewhat for his isolation from the current of contemporary novel-writing. But it is chiefly accomplished by an acute and overwhelming individual sense of the quality of life. The shambles, the blind chances, the fantastic barbarism of the elements he sees, not as the essential stuff of adventure, but as the setting for the drama of man pitted in a desperate attempt to emerge from a harsh and immensely indifferent universe some sense of meaning and continuity in life. In the imbedded movement of romance he imbues a deeper spiritual realm.

It is this quality, making him too large for either the accepted forms of romance or realism to hold, which has made the actor has an yet no expression. Sometimes the mechanism of his narration is intricate, as in "Lord Jim," in which the tale is picked up and revealed in flashes by a variety of men in a desperate attempt to ward from the end. But, vague in outlines and intangible in suggestions, it captures the finest precision of emotion.

The "Arrow of Gold" is out of the key of Conrad's other tales. The shambles and intrigues of a band of gun-runners are only the faintly throbbing undercurrent to the major theme, which is the love of a Spanish girl, an adherent to the Spanish religion, a minister of the last of the Pretenders, for a young English captain. For one thing, it is the most complete portrait of a woman Conrad has ever done—infinite and subtle detail. For another, it is a more direct narrative than Conrad's novels usually are. It is involved by no backward glances, but it is a fine novel should be, a bridge between a profound intelligence into human nature and human curiosity.

A Roumanian Novel

Slavici's "The Lucky Mill" Is Sordid But of Great Power

Translated by A. Mircea Eghesiu, D.D. Sordid but compelling little novel is "The Lucky Mill," the first book of Ioan Slavici to appear in translation in this country. Slavici, heralded by the public as a Roumanian's foremost living author, is a writer of power and a keen observer of human emotions. His present volume tells the story of a peasant, Ghizta, and his wife, who move to a tavern called "The Lucky Mill" to better their lot. Ghizta's weakness for money brings him into the power of the sinister Luca, a mercenary capitalist swineherd. Gradually Ghizta is drawn into Luca's world of robbery and murder, and in a wild orgy of blood and thunder (literally) Ghizta, his wife and Luca all meet violent ends. Even the Lucky Mill perishes in flames.

The tale itself is a gloomy potpourri of crime and punishment, but the character drawing is masterly throughout and the depiction of rural life in Roumania bears the stamp of authenticity. Other works from Slavici's pen should be worth waiting for.

Slavici tells his story simply, with the editor's comment, but the translation is so obviously inept that the reader's interest frequently is diverted by the prolix phrasing of the adaptor. Such passages as the following lead one to hope that Slavici cannot read "English":

"As many ravines as there are in the mountains, they are full of swineherds; necessarily there must also be a great many swineherds for their surveillance."

It is doubtful also whether Roumanians use expressions like "bonehead," "cook" and "fifty-fifty." Even the punctuation is consistently incorrect. But with "The Lucky Mill" is the work of an able craftsman. Let us hope that his next work to be published in this country will be more skillfully translated.

"Three Tremendous Trifles" BY FELTON B. ELKIN'S. BY Duffield & Co. and the folk who produce one-act plays for the benefit of intelligent animals always are on the alert for new skits, but they will find little available material in Felton B. Elkin's "Three Tremendous Trifles." Mr. Elkin gives complete stage directions for the production of a play, but the play does not always follow. Of the three trifles only the first, "The Belgian Baby," is sufficiently tremendous to merit a home on the stage.

By the grace of God and the good sense of Hough, Mary Warren is stricken blind the day she arrives at Two Forks Valley, so she is spared the far from prepossessing appearance of the man who has been advertising his "Lighthouse Bureau" as "a well-to-do and chivalrous farmer of abundant means and large holdings."

"To Maria, as it were, a breath uncouth, but we held our breath until she stepped into Gage's shack. We expected she would share our own horror. We even feared that she would be a woman of that awful method Gage would take to reject her. But no! Along with Mary's sight must have gone her sense of smell and touch. That Sim's wash pan was also the dish pan was the only discrepancy Mary apparently noted. We grew suspicious of Mary's sensibilities, and there intruded into our enjoyment Hough's unusual romance a sudden sense of missing plumbing. Such personal matters as bathing facilities and the like crowded to our mind, and we wondered why they didn't occur to Mary, the astute Mary."

But Hough insists that Mary was completely deceived, and if you are a puddle, and want to enjoy the rest of the story, you'll believe it. At any rate, Mary achieves a clean up in the slant, and Sim, the slyest unlettered rancher who found himself possessed of a lovely woman with whom he hadn't the right to feign a common, bestial man regenerated. Back of the mild blue eyes and beneath the dirty shirt is a heart as tender as a woman's. A shy amazement and a great wonder are born in Sim's mind as the coming of Mary Warren, and out of his love springs a mighty tact, that forbids contact with a woman he realizes is out of his ken. They marry, and for days and weeks Sim protests and worships his wife, without touching her hand or accepting the kiss she shrinkingly offers. Finally, a few hours before Mary returns her sight, Sim is killed in saving the great dam from destruction by Bolshevik laborers.

Though Mary is rather lacking in susceptibility, not that she is unsexed, but that she is so simple, and that Mary and the reader who he shouldn't fear her sight, and rather lacks color in her love, Sim Gage is a splendid figure in his fight with the coming of the girl, but after she had been courted and won she died, leaving her memory as the saying goes, to haunt him. This

THE SOUL OF ANNE RUTLEDGE. Abraham Lincoln's romance. By Herbie Babcock. Philadelphia, Philadelphia, Philadelphia.

Mrs. Babcock has discovered that Abraham Lincoln, the unknown Mrs. Rutledge, his sweetest, a soul that she has put little of either into this book.

Lincoln met Anne at New Salem, Ill., where his father-in-law owned the mill, Mississippi to New Orleans, stuck for a few hours on a dam. He came to the town and fell in love with the girl, but after she had been courted and won she died, leaving her memory as the saying goes, to haunt him. This

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Henry James Moves On

Volume of His Short Stories Shows Him at Many Stages

TRAVELLING COMPANIONS. By Henry James. Published by Doubleday, Page & Co., Inc. Price \$1.75.

By Virginia Tracy
Two critics were recently disputing about a young actor; one being disagreeably impressed by the audience's pleasure in a half developed ability, a performance only partially executed. The counsel for the defence insisted, "But, at any rate, what's so interesting as just this stage, where you can still see the wheels learning to go round; when the actor has an yet no expression. Sometimes the mechanism of his narration is intricate, as in "Lord Jim," in which the tale is picked up and revealed in flashes by a variety of men in a desperate attempt to ward from the end. But, vague in outlines and intangible in suggestions, it captures the finest precision of emotion."

The earliest story is that "De Grey" in which the reader, while becoming acquainted to a reverberation as from a distant "Mystery of Udolpho," is now and then violently startled by a flash of Henry James; an author who is fairly grown up by the time we reach the clumpy and pulpy but unmistakably sensitive naturalism of "Travelling Companions." Here the author is found already at his own great game which remained so long and so splendidly his deep preoccupation; that effort to compose into one scheme human-made beauty and the groping trend of human lives; to work out amid emotions and sometimes actual scenes occurring in ruined amphitheatres and galleries and cathedrals and the color of mystery-drenched civilization, some communication between mankind and the glories men have made. This is last sight of in "Guests' Confession," a novelette of the most sophisticated realism, full of the frustrations and ailments and intimate atrocities of later days. "Professor Fargis" is a hideous little masterpiece in the same manner. But in "Adina" and "At Sella" and "The Sweetheart of Mr. Brissout" it comes into its own; these stories, too, are adventure itself—adventure warm and deep with the glow of tragic backgrounds against which the passages of their own light and swift brilliance, their fresh, unwearied faith in romantic action, their belief that despite all the empty nuts we pick up through life some of its treasure a few pearls, shines out as dear and fugitive as youth. The first two are pure romances shown us by the loveliest fantastical light, but those to whom genius remains the great advantage of their own light and swift brilliance, their fresh, unwearied faith in romantic action, their belief that despite all the empty nuts we pick up through life some of its treasure a few pearls, shines out as dear and fugitive as youth.

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Some Recent Novels

Wildness of the West Still Holds Its Place in Fiction

THE SAEBURNER. By Emerson Hough. Published by D. Appleton & Co. Illustrated. 319 pages. Price, \$1.60.

"Some folks is too damn dirty," ejaculated Wid Gardner, as he looked over the shanty occupied by Sim Gage, rancher of Two Forks Valley, and Wid struck it about right. In fact, Gage was the last word in dirt. His rude hovel was an accumulation of fourteen years' mess—dirty dishes, dirty bed clothing, dirty everything. Sim himself was squat and shapeless, with mild blue eyes that peered out from a scraggly mass of hay-colored hair, unkempt, unclean. He had been shaved for weeks, or months, and his beard, unreaped, showed dirty colors, as of a field partially ripening here and there. "His neck," so Hough tells us, "was grained, red and wrinkled as that of an ancient turtle," and on his body was strung, by means of rope suspenders, all the clothing he possessed—clothing which never changed, winter or summer.

Hough juggles with the sensibilities of his readers in depicting such a hero for his novel, and then daringly brings from Cincinnati to mate with Sim a girl who is essentially fastidious, clean in her mode of living, shunning dirt or disorder, and almost abnormally sensitive to anything unwholesome or unpleasant.

By the grace of God and the good sense of Hough, Mary Warren is stricken blind the day she arrives at Two Forks Valley, so she is spared the far from prepossessing appearance of the man who has been advertising his "Lighthouse Bureau" as "a well-to-do and chivalrous farmer of abundant means and large holdings."

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Pale Purple Passion

Elinor Glyn's "Family" Is a Warmed Up Affair

FAMILY. By Elinor Glyn. Published by D. Appleton & Co. 315 pages. Illustrated. Price, \$1.50.

"Then he kissed her neck, insolently and pushed her of his knee." "He kissed her until her lips were bruised." "The man again held her in close embrace—biting the lobe of her ear until she gave a little scream." "He kissed her almost roughly." "But Verisschenko, with a fierce savagery which she adored, crushed her in his arms." "She flung herself into his arms and almost strangled him in his furious embrace."

"She felt that he was mocking her, suddenly turned and bit his arm, her teeth meeting in the cloth of his fur-lined coat."

Elinor Glyn's "Family" is a novel of passion quiet in the spirit of the old days before eight oases gloves had been substituted for bare hands, the toe hold barred or mass plays abolished. That is, "Family" seems to be a novel of rough passion, but since Freudian methods have been introduced to interpret the subconscious mind of authors a doubt arises. Mordell has pointed out that the most pastoral piece of writing may conceal a hidden erotic content. In "Family," for instance, when he wrote of the various lakes and autumn leaves, was thinking of other things entirely. Is it not possible that exactly the reverse may be true of the West Glyn? According to our interpretation, Mrs. Glyn has a suppressed desire to enter a convent. In the effort to keep it suppressed she turns to her husband's pale purple passion, but with all their mutual strenuous love making and their death of anything approaching actual passion.

Even Mrs. Glyn cannot devise enough strangling and biting episodes to make an entire novel, and so she adds sentimental and philosophical passages about love which are somewhat more tiresome than the various aggressive incidents described.

"Loving," writes Elinor Glyn, "throbs with delight in the flesh; it thrills the spirit with reverence. It glorifies into beauty common things, it draws nearer in sickness and sorrow, and is not the sport of change. When woman loves truly she has the passion of the mistress, the selfish tenderness of the mother, the dignity and devotion of the wife. It is a passion of snow, all will and frankness, firm and reserve, she is authoritative and obedient—queen and child."

"Family" tells the story of Sir John Ardrey, who fears that he will do without an heir and accordingly invites his cousin, Denzil Ardrey, to take his place briefly unknown to Lady Ardrey. All this is a bit thick, of course, but we did not mind it. The success of Elinor Glyn has always amazed us. There is a large public for tempestuous novels of passion, but it does not seem to us that Mrs. Glyn makes them very pure. H. B.

"Without the Walls" Is a Reading Play

WITHOUT THE WALLS. By Katrina Trask. Published by Doubleday, Page & Co. 315 pages. Price, \$1.50.

Katrina Trask labels her latest effort in dramatic form a "reading play," but it is evident throughout that "Without the Walls" is planned for the footlights. The story is a simple melodrama of the love of a Hebrew soldier for a Roman soldier in the fatal hour of the fall of Jerusalem, A. D. The eternal father bids his daughter wait a while for the return of her own race, and on her return she is released by the earthquake following the fall of the city.

Here is the stuff of stageworthy melodrama, but Mrs. Trask's attempt to tell her tale day by day necessitates frequent shifts of scene, and the material difficulties involved rather than the author to ticket her play for the close. The chief objection to making plays for the close is that such works are inevitably shallow, but "Without the Walls" may be rescued by some one on the trail of a grand opera libretto, for the play, with its religious and pageantry, seems fated for a musical setting.

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