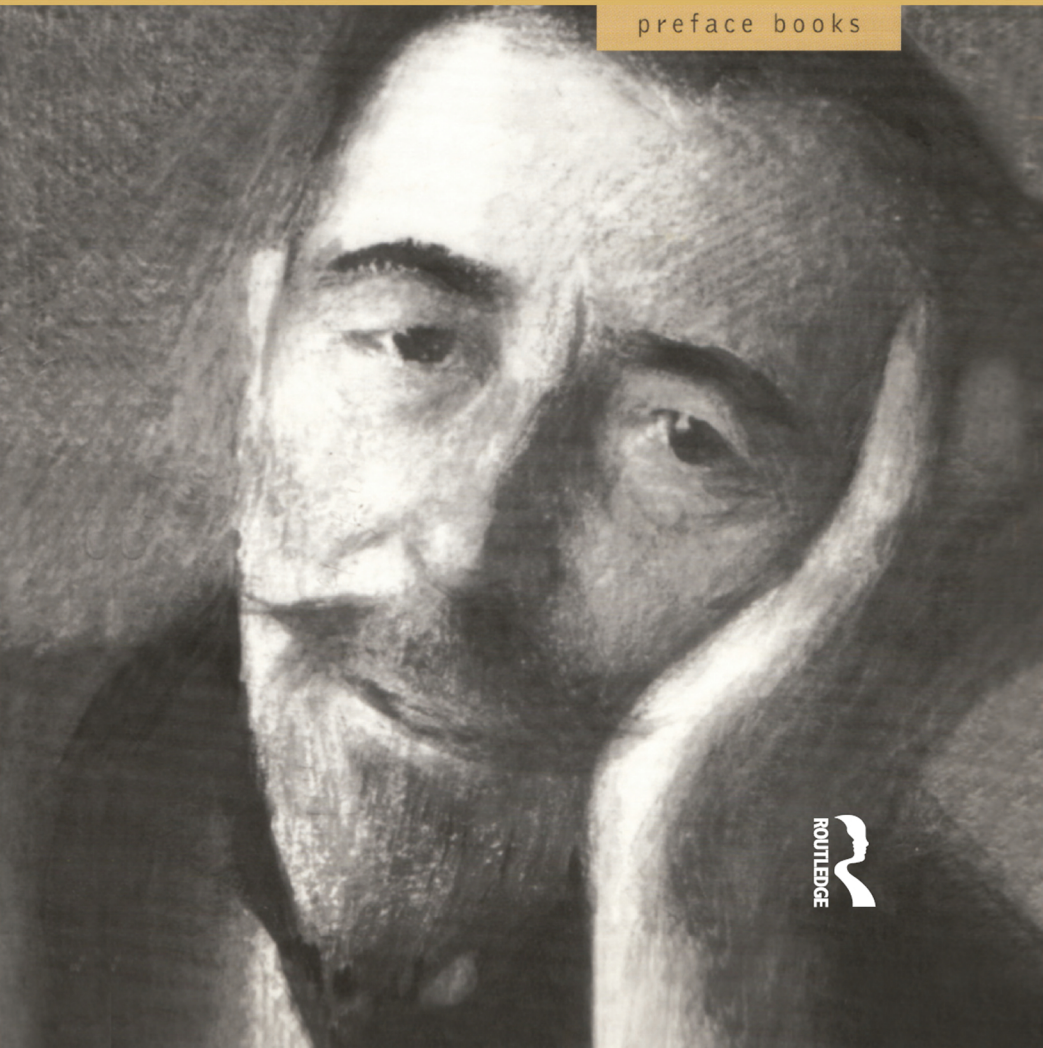


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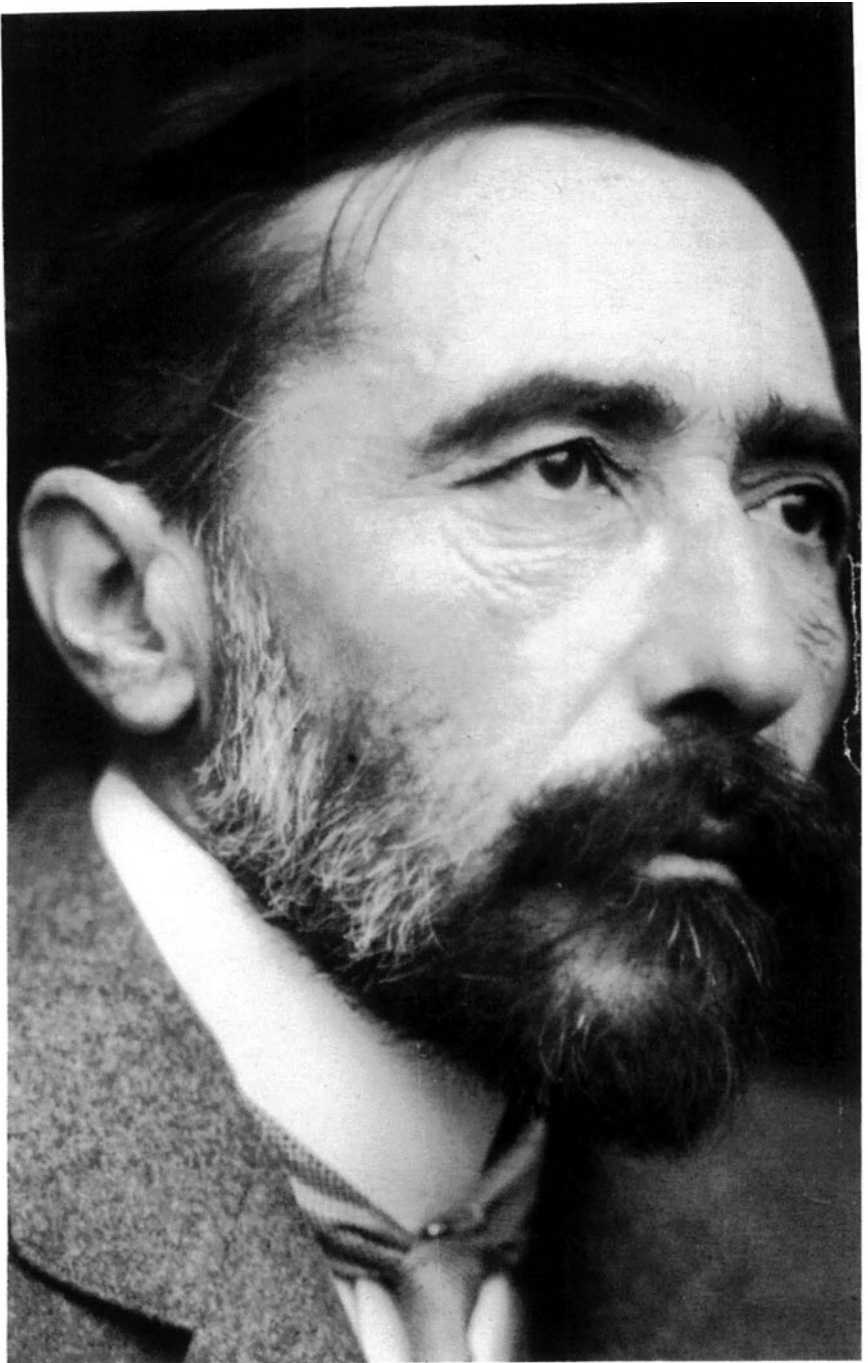
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*Joseph Conrad in 1904*

A PREFACE TO  
CONRAD  
CEDRIC WATTS

SECOND EDITION

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# Foreword to the first edition

This authoritative volume sets forth both informed personal response and academic knowledge in the service of the student of the novels of Joseph Conrad. The views that this Polish novelist held constituted a unique aristocratic and artistic reading of human nature and its aims and philosophy: they have to some degree been heard from other Europeans or Americans in our century but before Conrad hardly at all in England. Cedric Watts, offering an account of his subject's beliefs and literary output, furnishes the reader at the same time with an introduction to much early twentieth-century thought and culture also.

The earlier sections that constitute Part One, whose rationale is explained on pp. 7–8, should be read as varied modes of access to Conrad's own writings. They govern the highly effective discussion of his art following in Part Two. Here, after a close commentary upon a number of passages from the novels in order to accustom the reader to the linguistic development and modernist overtones of a writer who came to English out of Polish and through French as his second language, follows a substantial essay on *Nostramo*. I know no more thorough and yet imaginative discussion of this novel than forms the crown of the whole Preface. How Conrad's varied experiences prepared him for writing that masterpiece is one of the principal purposes and accomplishments of Dr Watts's contribution to the series. This he does most helpfully after an extensive and intimate awareness of everything that Conrad left us, through which he speaks most powerfully to us today.

MAURICE HUSSEY  
General Editor

Maurice Hussey died suddenly in June 1991. The Publishers and author would like to pay tribute to his wisdom, inspiration and friendship as Editor of Preface Books. He will be sadly missed.

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# Acknowledgements and editorial notes

Unless otherwise specified, quotations from Conrad's novels, tales, essays and autobiographical volumes are taken from the Collected Edition published by J.M. Dent & Sons, London, between 1946 and 1955. (This Collected Edition does not include all Conrad's works.)

In any quotation, a row of three points (. . .) indicates an ellipsis already present in the printed text, whereas a row of five points indicates an omission that I have made. When discussing *Nostramo*, I correct the novel's accentuation of Spanish names.

When preparing Part One of this book, I was helped by Jocelyn Baines' *Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography*, Norman Sherry's *Conrad and His World* and Zdzisław Najder's *Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle*. In Parts One and Two I have drawn on my previous writings about Conrad, particularly *Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness': A Critical and Contextual Discussion*, *The Deceptive Text: An Introduction to Covert Plots* and *Joseph Conrad: A Literary Life*.

For advice and guidance, I am indebted to the late Maurice Hussey (the original General Editor of the series) and to R.A. Foakes, M.B. Hryniewicz-Moczulski, Barbara Koc, Susan Salters and Alan Sinfield. To Hans van Marle I owe special gratitude for his generously unstinting help in many matters concerning Conrad's life and works. Preparation of the second edition of my *Preface to Conrad* has enabled me, accordingly, to make various revisions; and I apologise to these advisors for any blemishes which, in spite of careful checking, may mar the new text. I thank all those reviewers, colleagues and students who made encouraging comments on the first edition and whose suggestions have helped me to bring the second edition up to date. I have added substantial new material to Chapters 7, 8 and 9, and to the Reference Section. Numerous minor changes have been made to the other parts of the book.

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# Abbreviations

With a few clearly-indicated exceptions, the quotations from Conrad's novels, tales, essays and autobiographical works are from the Collected Edition published by J.M. Dent & Sons (London, 1946-55).

- AF** Joseph Conrad, *Almayer's Folly* (London: Dent, 1947).  
**Baines** Jocelyn Baines, *Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1960).  
**BB** Joseph Conrad, *Letters to William Blackwood and David S. Meldrum*, ed. William Blackburn (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1958).  
**CL** *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, ed. Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Vol. I, 1983; Vol. II, 1986; Vol. III, 1988; Vol. IV, 1990).  
**CN** Albert Guerard, *Conrad the Novelist* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958).  
**CP** Avrom Fleishman, *Conrad's Politics* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967).  
**CWW** Norman Sherry, *Conrad's Western World* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1971).  
**EG** *Letters from Conrad, 1895 to 1924*, ed. Edward Garnett (London: Nonesuch Press, 1928).  
**HD** 'Heart of Darkness' in 'Youth', 'Heart of Darkness' and 'The End of the Tether': *Three Stories* (London: Dent, 1946).  
**KRZ** *Joseph Conrad: Centennial Essays*, ed. Ludwik Krzyżanowski (New York: Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences, 1960).  
**LCG** *Joseph Conrad's Letters to R.B. Cunninghame Graham*, ed. Cedric Watts (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969).  
**LE** *Joseph Conrad: Last Essays* (London: Dent, 1955).  
**LL** *Joseph Conrad: Life & Letters*, ed. G. Jean-Aubry, 2 vols (London: Heinemann, 1927).  
**N** Joseph Conrad: *Nostromo* (London: Dent, 1947).  
**Najder** *Conrad's Polish Background*, ed. Zdzisław Najder (London: Oxford University Press, 1964).  
**NLL** Joseph Conrad, *Notes on Life and Letters* (London: Dent, 1949).  
**NN** Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (London: Dent, 1950).

*Abbreviations*

- PR* Joseph Conrad, *A Personal Record* (London: Dent, 1946).  
*R* Joseph Conrad, *The Rescue* (London: Dent, 1949).  
*SL* Joseph Conrad, *The Shadow-Line* (London: Dent, 1950).  
*TH* Joseph Conrad, *Tales of Hearsay* (London: Dent, 1955).  
*TLAS* Joseph Conrad, *'Twixt Land and Sea: Three Tales* (London: Dent, 1947).  
*TU* Joseph Conrad, *Tales of Unrest* (London: Dent, 1947).  
*UWE* Joseph Conrad, *Under Western Eyes* (London: Dent, 1947).  
*V* Joseph Conrad, *Victory* (London: Dent, 1948).  
*Y* Joseph Conrad, *'Youth', 'Heart of Darkness' and 'The End of the Tether': Three Stories* (London: Dent, 1946).

The only legitimate basis of creative work lies in the courageous recognition of all the irreconcilable antagonisms that make our life so enigmatic, so burdensome, so fascinating, so dangerous – so full of hope.

(Joseph Conrad: letter to the *New York Times*, 2 August 1901)

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## Part One

### *The Writer and his Setting*

# Chronological table

## CONRAD'S LIFE

- 1853
- 1856 Marriage of Apollo Korzeniowski to Ewelina Bobrowska at Oratów in partitioned Poland.
- 1857 Birth of their son, Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski (later to be known as Joseph Conrad).
- 1859 Family moves to Żytomierz.
- 1860–61
- 1861 Apollo arrested in Warsaw for patriotic conspiracy.
- 1862 Conrad's parents exiled to Vologda, Russia; he accompanies them.
- 1863 Family moves to Chernikhov.
- 1865 Death of Conrad's mother.
- 1866 Stays with uncle at Nowochwastów.
- 1869 Death of Apollo Korzeniowski.

## OTHER EVENTS

- Crimean War begins.
- Crimean War ends. Freud born.
- Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*.  
Baudelaire, *Fleurs du mal*.
- Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*.  
Darwin, *Origin of Species*.
- Dickens, *Great Expectations*.
- Turgenev, *Fathers and Sons*.
- Polish uprising.
- Birth of Kipling.
- Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment*.
- Tolstoy, *War and Peace*.

*Chronological table*

1870	Taught by Adam Pulman in Kraków.	Dickens dies. Lenin born.
1871	Also taught by Izydor Kopernicki.	Dostoyevsky, <i>The Devils</i> .
1872	Resolves to go to sea.	George Eliot, <i>Middlemarch</i> .
1874	Leaves Poland for Marseille to become a seaman.	Hardy, <i>Far from the Madding Crowd</i> .
1875	Sails Atlantic in <i>Mont-Blanc</i> .	Thomas Mann born.
1876	Serves as steward of <i>Saint-Antoine</i> .	Death of George Sand.
1877	Possibly involved in smuggling arms.	Tolstoy, <i>Anna Karenina</i> .
1878	Suicide attempt. Later enters British Merchant Navy.	Afghan War. Congress of Berlin.
1879	Serves on <i>Duke of Sutherland</i> .	Ibsen, <i>A Doll's House</i> .
1880	Sails to Australia in <i>Loch Etive</i> .	Dostoyevsky, <i>Brothers Karamazov</i> .
1881	Second mate of <i>Palestine</i> .	Death of Dostoyevsky and Carlyle.
1882	Storm-damaged <i>Palestine</i> repaired.	Birth of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf.
1883	Shipwrecked when <i>Palestine</i> sinks.	Marx dies. Mussolini born.
1885	Sails to Calcutta in <i>Tilkhurst</i> .	Birth of D.H. Lawrence.
1886	Takes British nationality; qualifies as captain.	Cunninghame Graham becomes MP.

*The Writer and his Setting*

- |      |   |   |
|------|---|---|
| 1887 | Sails to Java in <i>Highland Forest</i> .   | 'Bloody Sunday': Graham arrested.           |
| 1888 | Master of ship <i>Otago</i> .   | Birth of T.S. Eliot.                        |
| 1889 | Settles in London, writing <i>Almayer's Folly</i> .                                   | Hitler born.                                |
| 1890 | Works in Belgian Congo.   | Ibsen, <i>Hedda Gabler</i> .                |
| 1891 | Officer of <i>Torrens</i> (until 1893).   | Hardy, <i>Tess of the d'Urbervilles</i> .   |
| 1894 | <i>Almayer's Folly</i> accepted by Unwin.   | Stevenson dies.                             |
| 1895 | <i>Almayer's Folly</i> published. Meets Jessie George.                                | Crane, <i>The Red Badge of Courage</i> .    |
| 1896 | <i>An Outcast of the Islands</i> . Marries Jessie George.                             | William Morris dies; Scott Fitzgerald born. |
| 1897 | <i>The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'</i> . Corresponds with Cunninghame Graham.           | Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.           |
| 1898 | <i>Tales of Unrest</i> . Collaboration with Ford Madox Hueffer. Birth of son (Borys). | War between Spain and United States.        |
| 1899 | 'Heart of Darkness' serialised. Serialisation of <i>Lord Jim</i> begins.              | Boer War (until 1902).                      |
| 1900 | <i>Lord Jim</i> (book). J.B. Pinker becomes Conrad's agent.                           | Wilde, Crane and Nietzsche die.             |
| 1901 | <i>The Inheritors</i> (co-author Hueffer)   | Death of Queen Victoria.                    |
| 1902 | <i>Youth</i> volume.  | Gorky, <i>The Lower Depths</i> .            |

*Chronological table*

1903	<i>Typhoon</i> volume. <i>Romance</i> (co-author Hueffer).	Panama secedes from Colombia. James, <i>The Ambassadors</i> .
1904	<i>Nostromo</i> (serial and book).	Russo-Japanese War (until 1905).
1905	<i>One Day More</i> (play) fails.	Wells, <i>Kipps</i> .
1906	<i>The Mirror of the Sea</i> (with Hueffer). Birth of second son (John).	Ibsen dies. Samuel Beckett born.
1907	<i>The Secret Agent</i> .	Birth of W.H. Auden.
1908	<i>A Set of Six</i> (tales).	Bennett, <i>Old Wives' Tale</i> .
1909	Quarrels with Hueffer.	Death of Swinburne.
1910	‘The Secret Sharer’. Conrad has breakdown after completing <i>Under Western Eyes</i> .	Freud becomes internationally famous around this time.
1911	<i>Under Western Eyes</i> published.	William Golding born.
1912	<i>A Personal Record</i> . <i>Twixt Land and Sea</i> (tales). <i>Chance</i> serialised.	First Balkan War. Sinking of <i>Titanic</i> .
1913	Meets Bertrand Russell.	Second Balkan War.
1914–18		First World War.
1914	Book of <i>Chance</i> has large sales.	
1915	<i>Within the Tides</i> (tales); <i>Victory</i> .	Lawrence, <i>The Rainbow</i> .
1916	<i>The Shadow-Line</i> serialised.	Henry James dies.
1917	<i>The Shadow-Line</i> (book).	Russian Revolution.

*The Writer and his Setting*

- |      |  |   |
|------|--|---|
| 1918 | Borystis Conrad wounded in war.  | Armistice. Polish Republic restored.                    |
| 1919 | <i>The Arrow of Gold.</i>  | Treaty of Versailles.                                   |
| 1920 | <i>The Rescue</i> published, twenty-four years after its commencement. | Poles rout Russian invaders. League of Nations created. |
| 1921 | <i>Notes on Life and Letters.</i>                                      | Irish Free State created.                               |
| 1922 | <i>The Secret Agent</i> (play) fails.                                  | Eliot, <i>The Waste Land</i> ; Joyce, <i>Ulysses</i> .  |
| 1923 | Visits United States to acclamation. <i>The Rover</i> .                | Yeats wins Nobel Prize.                                 |
| 1924 | Declines knighthood. Dies of heart attack; buried at Canterbury.       | Ramsay MacDonald becomes Prime Minister.                |
| 1925 | <i>Tales of Hearsay; Suspense.</i>                                     | Eliot, <i>Poems 1909–25</i> .                           |
| 1926 | <i>Last Essays.</i>  | Kafka, <i>The Castle</i> .                              |
| 1927 | <i>Joseph Conrad: Life &amp; Letters.</i>                              | Woolf, <i>To the Lighthouse</i> .                       |

# 1 Biographical background

## *The double man*

Since August 1924, Conrad's body has been dissolving beneath the granite chippings in a public cemetery at Canterbury. 'As to the soul', he once remarked, 'You and I, cher ami, are too honest to talk of what we know nothing about.' His imagination, however, can be said to be more alive than ever before, as more and more readers have come to enjoy and respect his works; and one of the main reasons for this continuing vitality is that he was a double man.

'Homo duplex has in my case more than one meaning', he wrote to a Polish friend. 'Homo duplex': the double man. The phrase will serve as a theme for this book. As an approach to Conrad's complexity, it is helpful to imagine that if any god presides over Conrad's best work, it is the god Janus. Janus is the two-headed god: he looks in opposite ways at the same time; he presides over paradox; and he is the patron of janiform texts.

Let us imagine that we could travel back in time to call on Conrad in 1903, when he was writing *Nostromo*. We would see a middle-aged man of less than average height; square-shouldered, short-necked, almost stocky in build; dark hair neatly brushed back, a dark beard tidily trimmed; high cheek-bones, with penetrating eyes somewhat hooded at the corners by drooping lids. Expecting visitors, he has taken care to dress in formal gentlemanly style: a smart suit, waistcoat, stiffly starched collar and cuffs, a monocle. His manner would be elaborately courteous, yet at the same time reserved and watchful; outwardly composed, yet sensitive, touchy: a tactless political or literary reference could draw a cold stare of rage or a snarl of exasperation. He could be capable, too, if we won his trust, of impetuous, passionate agreement, seizing our hands in his to make his point, speaking rapidly in a fluent English with a marked Polish accent (so that 'these' and 'those' became 'deeza' and 'dohza'), misplacing stresses and substituting French phrases when the English did not come rapidly enough; but happy to reminisce about his many years of voyaging.

Already some meanings of his phrase 'homo duplex' would suggest themselves. Conrad was a patriotic Pole who became a British citizen. He was 'a Polish nobleman cased in British tar'. He