

CONRAD, JOYCE, AND THE ENGLISH READER

SÉAN MOLLOY

Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin

Conrad and Joyce are now acknowledged as two of the pre-eminent makers of modern fiction in English. Of course acknowledgments of each of them vary in enthusiasm and in depth of accorded respect from critic to critic; and in most recent accounts of Modernism in literature Joyce's position is more assured, more axiomatic, than is that of Conrad, whose reputation has begun to settle into that of a writer transitional between English fiction of the Edwardian period – “the greatest of the Edwardians, but much more than that”, Dr. Leavis calls him¹ – between that fiction and Modernism proper, of which, it is by now generally agreed, the supreme practitioners in English fiction, in their very different ways, are James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence.

I advance the above propositions tentatively, for any *schema* of Modernism, especially of Modernism in England and especially now, when it is more than usually unwise to assume and repeat any received wisdoms – any such scheme is liable to be riddled with question-begging, with blandnesses, with unwarranted tidinesses, with half-exceptions, full exceptions, exceptions that prove the rule. But my preamble points to what I want to do in the body of this paper: to bring together in various ways, and to draw apart in others, the situations, the careers, the works of Conrad and Joyce, to explore likenesses and distinctions, and to do so in terms of Conrad's and Joyce's personal and literary relationships with England, with Englishness, with English literary culture, especially in their time. It seems to me that to examine Conrad's and Joyce's apprehensions of England, etc., and to consider the reception in England of their work, as it appeared and a little after it appeared – that all of this may expose for our contemplation things of great interest.

“It is a striking fact about English Literature in the twentieth century that its most notable practitioners have seldom been Englishmen”.² I quote Harry Levin. This seems to me overstated but one could, more equitably, apply it to

¹ F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, (London, 1960), p. 226.

² Harry Levin (ed.), *The Essential James Joyce*, (London, 1960), p. 15.

the Heroic Age of Modernism, to the first quarter of the twentieth century. One may count off the really major figures: James, Eliot, Pound (three Americans); Yeats, Joyce (two Irishmen); Conrad (a Pole). "Exiles and Émigrés", as Dr. Eagleton calls them. There is also, of course, D. H. Lawrence, an Englishman, inalienably so, but an outsider from English Establishment metropolitan culture and unassimilable by it as others who began careers as outsiders *were* assimilable: Wells, Shaw, Bennett. And Lawrence became the most restless and homeless exile of all; even Pound settled down, in a sense. Some may not concur with all of these names and opinions will certainly vary as to their relative importance and centrality, but – to come to cases – Joseph Conrad and James Joyce are both within that central group of the Makers of Modernism.

Let me, to start, look at how Conrad and Joyce were *received* in their lifetimes by some figures representative of English literary culture.

As they appeared Conrad's books attracted mixed reviews in the English newspapers and periodicals, and it was not until he published *Chance*, in 1913, that he had a real popular success. But from very early in his career – from "The Nigger of the Narcissus" (1897) on – Conrad began to have important and influential supporters. Here is Arnold Bennett, writing to H. G. Wells:

I owe you a good turn for pointing out Conrad to me. ... I have just read his new book, *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, which has moved me to enthusiasm. Where did the man pick up that style, and that *synthetic* way of gathering up a general impression and flinging it at you? Not only his style, but his attitude affected me deeply. He is so consciously an artist...³

Wells and Bennett admired the artistic professionalism of Conrad, his devotion to the craft of writing, as, some sixteen years later, did Henry James, who praised Conrad in a review of *Chance* for being "absolutely alone *as a votary* of the way to do a thing that shall make it undergo the most doing".⁴ Already one may sense the adaptability of Conrad's appeal: for Wells and Bennett he is in the mystery, in the trade, a hardworking craftsman; for James, Conrad is an exemplar of artistic conscience, a perfectionist; moreover he is a lonely votary, in the Flaubertian-Jamesian line, a writer of strenuous integrity and selflessness. And we may notice something else. "Where did [Conrad] pick up that style?", asks Bennett. For ninety years many native speakers of English have felt something like Bennett's fascination and puzzlement when reading Conrad. We know well that Conrad was a foreigner, a Pole; where and how on earth did he acquire that amazing style in a language which was his third, or even fourth? And, "pick up" – does the phrase not suggest something

³ Norman Sherry (ed.), *Conrad: The Critical Heritage*, (London 1973), p. 82.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 265.

dubious?, a hint of sharp practice, a sort of larceny, a very *grand* larceny, of course?

The foreignness, the Polishness, the sheer unaccountability of Conrad, were much on the mind of Virginia Woolf – that famously scornful denigrator and caster-out of the Wells-Bennett-Galsworthy mode – when she came to write an appreciation of Conrad, after his death in 1924. Here is Mrs. Woolf:

Suddenly, without giving us time to arrange our thoughts or prepare our phrases, our guest has left us; and his withdrawal without farewell of ceremony is in keeping with his mysterious arrival, long years ago, to take up his lodging in this country. For here was always an air of mystery about him. It was partly his Polish birth, partly his memorable appearance, partly his preference for living in the depths of the country, out of ear-shot of gossips, beyond reach of hostesses, so that for news of him one had to depend upon the evidence of simple visitors with a habit of ringing doorbells who reported of their unknown host that he had the most perfect manners, the brightest eyes, and spoke English with a strong foreign accent...

Until *Nostramo* ... his characters, as the young were quick to perceive, were fundamentally simple and heroic, however subtle the mind and indirect the method of their creator. They were seafarers, used to solitude and peace. ... Nature ... forth [from them] honour, magnanimity, loyalty, the qualities proper to man; [Nature] in sheltered bays reared to womanhood beautiful girls, unfathomable and austere. ... [Nature] turned out such gnarled and tested characters as Captain Whalley [*Typhoon*] and old Singleton [*The Nigger of the Narcissus*], obscure but glorious in their obscurity, who were to Conrad the pict of our race. ... Therefore, though we shall make expeditions into the later books and back wonderful trophies, large tracts of them will remain by most of us untrodden. It is the earlier books – "Youth", *Lord Jim*, "Typhoon", "The Nigger of the Narcissus" – that we shall read in their entirety ... these books, with their air of telling us something very old and perfectly true, which had lain hidden but is now revealed, will come to mind ... (c)omplete and still, very chaste and very beautiful, they rise in the memory...⁵

What is most worthy of note here? Well, obviously Conrad was a gentleman ("the most perfect manners"), and his books, especially his early books, are redolent of the *knightly* qualities, of bravery, fidelity, gallantry, devotion to an idealized Beauty, of chastity. It's worth digressing for a moment to observe the old-fashionedness of Mrs. Woolf's taste, its – dare one say of the companion and follower of Lytton Strachey – its late-Victorian quality, a bit disconcerting in the writer who was chosen by Erich Auerbach in the last chapter of *Mimesis* ("The Brown Stocking") to exemplify experimental Modernism. Incidentally, the English critic Martin Green detects a Kipling-esque vein in Mrs. Woolf's fiction, for instance in the returned colonialist of *Mrs. Dalloway*, Peter Walsh⁶, a vein which is perhaps in keeping with Mrs. Woolf's preference for Conrad's earlier, simpler fiction of maritime adventure, the testing of men by the elements, her partial rejection of his later, morally and structurally complex works.

⁵ Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader*, Vol. 2, (London 1938), pp. 222-229.

⁶ Martin Green, *The Doom of Empire: The English Novel in the Twentieth Century*, (London, 1984), pp. xiii-xiv.

This kind of preference is the implied target of F. R. Leavis's assertion that Conrad's best work was not really recognised within or by English literary culture or English criticism, notwithstanding the "vogue" of Conrad in the early twenties. "(V)ogue" is Leavis's own word, evoking his strong dislike of fashionable, metropolitan English culture, of the aesthetes, of Bloomsbury, and in *The Great Tradition* we find Leavis in full sail, battling to rescue Conrad from the belittling praise of Mrs. Woolf, to place him in the much sterner company of the great secular moralists who also meet Leavis's demanding criteria of formal and technical excellence – the company of Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, D. H. Lawrence. Here is Leavis on Conrad:

I am not ... concurring in the emphasis generally laid on the Prose Laureate of the Merchant Service. What needs to be stressed is the great novelist.... Here ... we have a master of the English language, who chose it for its distinctive qualities and because of the moral tradition associated with it, and whose concern with art – he being like George Eliot and Jane Austen and Henry James an innovator in "form" and method – is the servant of a profoundly serious interest in life.... He drew from English literature what he needed, and learnt in that peculiar way of genius which is so different from imitation.⁷

So, to summarize, for interestingly differing reasons, Conrad seems to have pleased all sides, all contending parties in the little Civil War early twentieth century English letters: the Wells-Bennett camp, and the opposed camp of Bloomsbury; the School of Leavis, archenemies of Bloomsbury and unfriendly towards Wells-Bennet-Galsworthy.

Now, to Joyce. In his youth Joyce was a sort of non-party Socialist; he called Socialism a "generous idea". And Leopold Bloom has always seemed to me to be a sort of Homus H. G. Wellsus, Homus Scientificus and Democraticus, who, for example, in the chapter of *Ulysses* known as 'Eumaeus', fantasizes about a trip to London to admire the technology, the business, the progress. But Wells set himself against the works of Joyce, at least after *A Portrait of the Artist*, which Wells had praised for its verisimilitude as a picture of Irish Catholic upbringing, education, etc. In refusing to recommend *Work in Progress* (*Finnegan's Wake* in embryo) Wells wrote to Joyce:

Your training has been Catholic, Irish, insurrectionary; mine, such as it was, was scientific, constructive, and, I suppose, English. The frame of my mind is a world wherein ... a progress [is] not inevitable but interesting and possible. That game attracts and holds me. For it, I want language and statement as simple and clear as possible ... Your mental existence is obsessed by a monstrous system of contradictions (the Roman Catholic theology, etc.) ... it seems a fine thing for you to defy and break up. To me not in the least.... You have turned your back on common men, on their elementary needs and their restricted time and intelligence, and you have elaborated. What is the result? Vast riddles. Your last two works have been more amusing and exciting to write than they will ever be to read.⁸

⁷ Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, op. cit., pp. 17-18.

⁸ Quoted by Green, *The Doom of Empire*, op. cit., pp. 99-100.

As Martin Green remarks, this amounts to an accusation by Wells of social irresponsibility in Joyce.⁹

As is well known, Virginia and Leonard Woolf turned down *Ulysses* when it was offered to their Hogarth Press, Virginia taking quite disgustingly against both book and author in terms – its "indecenty", his "under(breeding)", that it was "the book of a self taught working man"¹⁰ – which were more or less duplicated and reduplicated in other attacks on *Ulysses* and on Joyce himself by English men of letters, all the way across the spectrum from Sir Edmund Gosse to Wyndham Lewis, who dismissed Joyce as an "Irish parvenu", and D. H. Lawrence, for whom *Ulysses* was "filthy, Frieda, yes, filthy".¹¹

These are mostly heat-of-the-moment, semi-instinctive reactions, as unformed in their way as are the scattered enthusiasms for *Ulysses* manifested, for example, by Arnold Bennett, wearing at that point his French hat, by Middleton Murry, who praised Joyce's book as the "outpourings of a half-demented man of genius", and, most bizarrely, by the Poet Laureate Robert Bridges, the man who had failed to recognize the originality of Gerard Manley Hopkins, perhaps at the end of his life a penitent.¹² But these are isolated voices. What emerges from the record is this: those same disparate and in fact mutually hostile *coteries*, those key points of English literary culture which had admitted Conrad, acted as one to reject Joyce. The contrast becomes stark when one looks again at the *Great Tradition*, from which Joyce is very firmly, magisterially, shut out:

D. H. Lawrence's [reverence for Life] makes him ... so much more significant in relation to the past and future, so much more truly creative as a technical inventor, an innovator, a master of language, than James Joyce.... [T]here is no organic principle determining, informing, and controlling into a vital whole, the elaborate analogical structure, the extraordinary variety of technical devices, the attempts at an exhaustive rendering of consciousness for which *Ulysses* is remarkable, and which got it accepted by a cosmopolitan literary world as a new start. It is rather ... a dead end, or at least a pointer to disintegration – a view strengthened by Joyce's own development.¹³

Why? The investigator is taken into many areas of literary and political history, as well as into the personalities and personal histories of Conrad and Joyce, areas mined with ambiguities. So, in trying to clarify a mass of shifting, amorphous material, one must also simplify.

When he was ten or twelve, while on holiday in Switzerland, Conrad first heard English, spoken by English engineers who were working on the S. Gotthard Pass, men, as he later wrote, who did "not believe in wasting words

⁹ Ibidem, p. 100.

¹⁰ Quoted by Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, (New York, 1959), p. 457.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 628.

¹² Ibid., p. 546.

¹³ Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, op. cit., pp. 25-26.

on the mere amenities of life". For Conrad his was a "privileged moment", leading in him to a romantic identification of the English language with men of action – prototypes of his "simple and heroic... seafarers" – with courage, self-reliance, resourcefulness. On the same holiday Conrad caught a glimpse of what he calls "an unforgettable Englishman", whose "calves exposed to the public gaze and to the tonic of high altitudes, dazzled the beholder by the splendour of their marble-like condition and their rich tone of young ivory"¹⁴; somehow these calves became for the young Conrad symbolic of a great nation. These experiences reinforced impressions of England and Englishness which Conrad had derived from his earliest reading. The associations are with manliness, adventure, and, above all, *success*. At a very deep level Conrad remained Polish all his life, a romantic Polish patriot, but in his late 'teens or early twenties the came to see Poland as "sick", by contrast with England, which he saw as "vital". In joining the Merchant Navy Conrad was attaching himself to the top maritime nation, for "the seas belonged to England", and his allegiance to England was to a particular gentlemanly, naval officers' and clubmen's England, whose very specialized lingo or *patois* he began to adopt as early as the trip up the Congo, when he wrote in his diary that he was "jolly well sick" of the whole "beastly" enterprise.¹⁵ Conrad's loyalty was not at all to the burgeoning middle-class, commercial England, whose complacency, philistinism and money-mindedness, as is recorded by his friend and collaborator Ford Maddox Ford, he despised, as he hated and feared democracy, the expansion of the franchise; although – one of several *caveats* and qualifications which I want to enter in this account of Conrad's attitudes to England – he was a close long-time friend of the socialist Cunningham Graham, co-founder with Keir Hardie of the British Labour Party. But Cunningham Graham was an aristocrat, a romantic Socialist, an explorer in South America (the original of Charles Gould, of *Nostramo*) and in this aspect appealed to the ineradicable inner self of Conrad – the dispossessed Polish landed gentleman.¹⁶ In England, in its social dimension, Conrad's life seems to me to have been an "as if" life, a kind of dream of living as gentry, as *szlachta*, a dream because he had of course no base in either land or cash; he was never rich, or even financially secure, until the last ten years of his life. But also it is important to note that this gradual insertion of himself into a gentlemanly, officer-class idiom of living – and writing – involved Conrad, willy-nilly, in some endorsement of imperial values, of Empire, for the English officer- and ruling-class one hundred years ago were imperial to their bones. This point I shall take up in reference to "Heart of Darkness".

¹⁴ Quoted by Frederick R. Karl, *Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives*, (London, 1979), pp. 98 - 99.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

¹⁶ See Ford Maddox Ford, *A Personal Remembrance*, (Boston, 1924), pp. 240-241; and Karl, *Joseph Conrad*, op. cit., p. 227.

All of this is in striking contrast to the case of Joyce, who was born into a strongly anti-imperial family and tradition, heir to a national view of history which reversed the English view, making villains of such imperial heroes as Cromwell. On the question of Home Rule, Conrad took England's part: for him Poland and Ireland were dissimilarly oppressed by Russia and England, Russia being a real oppressor, England a much-abused, hand-bitten friend of Ireland. In the memoir from which I have quoted Conrad writes of his excitement, his sense of arrival, on first visiting London, to take his Merchant Navy examinations.¹⁷ But here is Joyce, recalling *his* first visit to London:

I remember how I disliked it all and I decided that I never could have become part of English life, or even have worked there, for somewhat I felt that in that atmosphere of power, politics and money, writing was not sufficiently important.¹⁸

"(P)ower, politics and money" are for Joyce antithetical to writing; they are also behind the imperial idea and that idea denoted and connoted for him all that he most detested of bullying, brutality, military belligerence, conquest by force. For Conrad's fiction a certain kind of manliness – a manliness imaginative enough to understand – and master – fear remained the touchstone, but Joyce fictionally repudiates even manliness itself; Stephen Dedalus is a physical coward and Bloom a passive cuckold. For Joyce was very deeply pacifist¹⁹, a celebrant in his own life – in his fashion – and in his fiction through the positive example of Leopold Bloom, the negative one of Simon Dedalus, of the familial and domestic virtues. Joyce's opposition is to not merely English imperialism, but all aggressive nationalisms, especially Irish nationalism, which he wickedly satirizes in the "Cyclops" chapter of *Ulysses*, and from whose "nets" he took great pains to separate himself, by "silence, exile, cunning".

Conrad being the kind of writer he was, his personal attitudes, opinions, etc. are certainly not simply fed into his fiction. Of course, he works obliquely, indirectly, ambiguously and in crucial ways through that excellently observant and discreet fictive mediator, Marlow; and Marlow is not Conrad in disguise, he is a character in his own right as well as being Conrad's chosen instrument of narration. But Marlow is very deliberately chosen; he is imbued by his creator with the sympathies and powers to persuade the reader, to make him feel and *see*, which are Conrad's own *desiderata*, as set forth in his Preface to "The Nigger of the Narcissus". Therefore we must attend to this retired English seaman, Marlow for he instructs and shapes our responses, and where Marlow is not there – at least in the early work – Conrad's authorial presence, his modes of narration, may grow confused. This is especially so in "The

¹⁷ Karl, *Joseph Conrad*, op. cit., pp. 186-187.

¹⁸ Arthur Power, *Conversations with James Joyce*, (London, 1974), p. 64.

¹⁹ See Green, *The Doom of Empire*, op. cit., p. 74; also Ellmann, *James Joyce*, op. cit., p. 629, and Richard Ellmann (ed.), *Selected Letters of James Joyce*, (New York, 1975) p. xviii.

"Nigger of the Narcissus", which starts with third person telling – "he", "they" – but part-way through moves inexplicably into first person plural – "we", "us" – as if the narrator had stowed away, to manifest himself in mind-ocean. Moreover, he is among the crew, not an officer, among the common sailors, who have earlier in the story been described as "inarticulate" and "voiceless"²⁰, which makes one wonder how this particular narrating matelot came by – picked up – his impressively lush vocabulary, his linguistic versatility and eloquence. In "The Nigger of the Narcissus" the point of view wobbles severely, but the story's system of values is unequivocally loyal to the ship's officers, Alliston, Baker, Creighton, who are cut from the same granite as Captain McWhirr ("Typhoon") or, even, Captain Joe Mitchell (*Nostramo*). Conversely, there are in "The Nigger of the Narcissus" extraordinary verbal paroxysms of contempt for such mutinous, trade-unionistic crewmen as Donkin, who is dubbed a Cockney, but whose idiom veers about wildly, suggesting at points Anglicizations of Yiddish.

As Martin Green points out, "Heart of Darkness" is not at all the anti-imperialist text it is commonly taken for.²¹ The opening of "Heart of Darkness", on the Thames, is a quiet but fulsomely replete, as after a very good dinner, celebration of England and Englishness. It is very clubmanlike, with Marlow, "the Lawyer", "the Director" and "the Accountant" four mellow seadogs, fit heirs to Drake, Frobisher, Franklin, to the Elizabethan imperial adventure from the glorification of which, with a full-blooded pageantry of nomenclature, Marlow's narration proceeds. "Heart of Darkness" can be illuminatingly studied as a sustained exercise in the rhetoric of contempt, for the Belgians and their colonial efforts (even the manager's boy says his famous words about "Mistahz Kurtz" "in a tone of scathing contempt"), contrasted with the golden rhetoric about England and *her* Empire which frames the story. Then, in two of Conrad's "landlocked" novels – *The Secret Agent*, and *Under Western Eyes* – in the latter of which he uses as part-time narrator an unnamed English pedagogue, a rather Jamesian figure, beneath whose "Western (e)yes" a series of quintessentially "Russian" outrages, barbarisms and mysteries unfolds – in both of these mature novels a certain discreet flattery of England, of English life and institutions, "liberal" statesmen and customs, provides the perfect thesis for what is shown as England's antithesis – Russian despotism, obscuranitsm, cynicism, mysticism. This contrast is rubbed in by a warning: England, being too "liberal", is vulnerable to foreign infiltration, by anarchists, syndicalists and other semi-oriental revolutionists, ruffians and malcontents.

When *Heart of Darkness* first came out, in 1899, an American reviewer praised what he called the author's "Anglo-Saxon sanity".²² It is fair to

²⁰ Joseph Conrad, "The Nigger of the Narcissus", (London, 1950), p. 25.

²¹ Green, *The Doom of Empire*, op. cit., pp. 38 & 204.

²² Review of "Heart of Darkness", "The Nation", (New York, 11 June 1903).

surmise that such an ethnocentric solecism would not have pleased Conrad at all. For him, "Anglo-Saxon sanity" would connote not only the courage and competence of the Merchant Navy and its sailors, especially its officers, not merely that still point at the heart of darkness, the "Inquiry Into Some Points of Seamanship"; "Anglo-Saxon sanity" had for Conrad its obverse: the self-satisfied stupidity of a Captain Mitchell; the sentimental myopia and even hypocrisy of a Charles Gould; the crass proselytizing by money of the financier Holroyd (all in *Nostramo*). And, as is well established, Conrad's special, sharpest interest as a writer was in those in whom Anglo-Saxon sanity and resolve faltered, in the heroic, imaginative failures in nerve or will, in Captain Brierley or Jim (both in *Lord Jim*), or in young Leggatt ("The Secret Sharer").

In Joyce's works England and Englishness, less interestingly multivalent than in those of Conrad, figure most frequently as the butt of satire, but it is a mostly genial satire, as in the enumeration in *Ulysses* of British Beatitudes: "beer, beef, business, babies, bulldogs, battleships, buggery, and bishops".²³ For a really snarling anti-British or anti-English invective we may look at the "Cyclops" chapter in *Ulysses* in which, when Bloom speaks moderately of "their colonies and their civilisation", "the citizen" – a rabid Irish nationalist – retorts:

Their syphilisation, you mean. ... To hell with them! The curse of a goodfornothing God light sideways on the bloody thicklugged sons of whores' gets! ... Any civilisation they have they stole from us. Tonguetied sons of bastards' ghosts.²⁴

But the citizen and his cronies, who are also anti-French, anti-German, anti-everything that is not Irish, especially anti-semitic – nearly braining Joyce's hero, Bloom – they are clearly intended to be seen as vicious, malevolent, one-eyed windbags.

In *Ulysses* then all kinds of swaggering, bullying, *braggadocio* are seen as soulless and heartless; there is the drunken English soldiery in "Circe", but there is also the egregiously loud, vaunting Dubliner Blazes Boylan, lover of Molly Bloom and thus a sexual "usurper" in the house of Leopold/Odysseus as, for instance, Haines (the "T[elemachiad]") is an imperial usurper in Ireland. Later in Joyce's career, in *Finnegans Wake*, wherein history is metamorphosed into dream, even here – I quote Richard Ellmann:

...the Crimean War is reduced to a scatological joke, the Battle of Waterloo to an extravaganza in a waxworks museum, and the World War to a prizefight. ... Joyce's distaste for war, crime and brutality relate to this preference for all that is not the bully.²⁵

Without Harriet Shaw Weaver, the English Quaker spinster, to whom Joyce was always tenderly, sincerely, but politely grateful, he and his family could

²³ James Joyce, *Ulysses*, (London 1960), p. 556.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 421.

²⁵ Ellmann, *James Joyce*, op. cit., p. 629.

not have survived; she admired his writing and was for many years his benefactress. *Ulysses*-haters in the 1920s – Gosse, etc. – crassly denounced the book as intending the decay of English literature and Englishness. This is not so; what *Ulysses* and all of Joyce's work is, is anti-imperialist, anti-aggressive militarism, anti-the Bully-in-Britishness. Through Bloom mainly, but in other ways too, *Ulysses* quietly approves some of the decencies of English life and of course it is, *passim*, a tribute to English literature and the English language.

There is a little-noticed passage in *A Portrait of the Artist* which bears on my theme. In it we find Stephen Dedalus contesting courteously with the Jesuit Dean of Studies at University College, Dublin, an English convert:

He felt with a smart of dejection that the man to whom he was speaking was a countryman of Ben Jonson. He thought: the language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words *home*, *Christ*, *ale*, *master*, on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My soul holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language.²⁶

If one thinks about this, it is possible to place James Joyce (taking Stephen Dedalus, for once, as Joyce) in a certain interesting relation with Joseph Conrad: they both write in an *acquired* language. Of course – another important *caveat* – Conrad entered voluntarily into a career as a novelist in English, whose properties suited what he wanted to do; but Joyce was born into English, his first language but by no means his last – like Conrad, he was an extraordinary linguist – as a member of a linguistically as well as politically subject people. (Suppose, for one giddy moment, that Conrad had written *his* stories and novels in Russian!).

“I have not been unfaithful to my country”, wrote Conrad to a Polish correspondent, “by having proved to the English that a gentleman from the Ukraine can be as good a sailor as they, and has something to tell them in their own language”.²⁷ For Conrad this is unwontedly forceful, even aggressive, language. This is pride speaking, the self-defensive but implacable pride of the maker, a pride analogous to the artist's pride of Joyce, the maker in words of wings to fly and of labyrinths to defeat the beast. Both Conrad and Joyce were driven by artistic and linguistic pride – a particular kind of outsider's or semi-outsider's pride – to assert themselves and thus to protect themselves (attack being the best form of defence) – in *feats* of technical, formal, and especially linguistic virtuosity, in an at times flaunted, provoking mastery of English style and styles. Some complaints against the two writers often chime unexpectedly: that Joyce, or Conrad, tries too hard; that Conrad, or Joyce, is out to knock the reader off his feet; that Joyce, or Conrad, does not write

²⁶ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, (London 1960).

²⁷ Karl, *Joseph Conrad*, op. cit., pp. 53-54, n.

English with native ease, that Conrad, or Joyce, writes English like a foreigner; that there is something, it is almost implied, *fishy* about such an *alien* mastery.

Of the two Joyce was of course the more extreme case. In *Ulysses* his stylistic pyrotechnics betray some impatience with his medium, and by the time of *Finnegans Wake* no single language could satisfy him. It seems that the question which this paper has set up – why Conrad was accepted, Joyce rejected, by English literary culture – may be partly answered by reference to the reception of Modernism in and by that culture, a matter for the most part of persistent, obdurate resistance, or of a grudging half-acceptance. Conrad's need for roots led him into allegiances and loyalties which inform his work deeply, strengthening, but also lend it a hue, a colour, a spirit, an attachment to place and people, to caste, to the idea of Empire, which vitiate its modernistic thrust. Also, Conrad did not breach the prevailing gentility of English literary culture; an anonymous review in ‘The Spectator’ said of “Heart of Darkness” that it was “frank, but not offensively realistic;”²⁸ like Zola and like the Ibsen of *Ghosts* Joyce was offensively realistic. Conrad was assimilable by the literary culture of his adopted land whereas Joyce, with his combination of unsparing realism and cosmopolitanism, was much more difficult to swallow. In the rather different case of Dr. Leavis, the appeal lies in Conrad's moral seriousness, which Leavis, missing its origins in Polish idealism, affiliates to the strenuous English tradition of moral duty and endeavour-in-the-world. For Leavis, on the other hand, Joyce's playfulness places him in the company of such whimsical triflers as Laurence Sterne. To say all this is not to apportion blame or praise, so much as to understand. Today Conrad is acknowledged as a classic writer and Joyce's reputation is secure. In England Joyce now has very strong and able advocates – Lodge, Bergonzi, Kermode, Burgess – but a resistance to his work, which usually entails the recalcitrant attitude that Modernism was a failed experiment, a dead end – this resistance lingers. It has been in America, chiefly, that Joyce's supremacy has been proclaimed.

²⁸ Sherry, *Conrad: The Critical Heritage*, op. cit., p. 92.