

REVIEW

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The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad

Suspense. Edited by Gene M. Moore
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JUST OVER forty years ago, in the old British Museum Manuscript Room, while delicately turning the 329 large quarto leaves of the typescript of *Suspense*, corrected in the author's hand and neatly bound in red morocco by T. J. Wise, I thought how easy it must have been for Richard Curle to get the "unfinished" text readied for publication by J. M. Dent & Sons in 1925. The recent appearance in the "Variorum" of Gene M. Moore's critical edition of the posthumous Napoleonic novel shows how naïve I was. First of all, the BL Ashley 2958 typescript (TS1), corrected by Conrad in black ink and blue or red pencil, was no more than the (incomplete) bound collection of the batches of first drafts sold to Wise as they were written from 17 November 1921 to 9 July 1923. Wise's by no means "only Manuscript" lacks further revisions and the whole of Part III, Chapter 3, on which Conrad was working when he passed away.

The Cambridge edition derives mainly from the more authoritative 340 typescript leaves, which comprise both "first copy" and "first draft" pages, representing the last version of each chapter newly revised and corrected by Conrad himself (TS2r). They were bequeathed by John D. Gordan to the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library. Moore adopted this composite but complete set as his copy-text, along with an accurate collation of the few surviving pages of manuscript and other "scraps" of text (Parts III/1 and III/2). These were typed by Conrad's secretary, Miss Lilian M. Hallowes; corrected by him; and re-typed by her when pages were so heavily revised as to make them hard to read. They were then subjected to further rounds of authorial revision, cancellation,

and correction. Some of these intermediary fragments were plausibly rescued by Jessie Conrad from the writer's waste-paper basket: an activity (hers) that proved instrumental in preserving so many letters to him (Conrad), who was in the habit of throwing away once read and acknowledged.

It took two leading Conrad authorities almost two decades of expert scholarship to produce what has now to be recognized as the author's last "finished" novel. One wishes that the late Hans van Marle, the early co-editor to whom this volume is dedicated, had lived to behold the excellent results achieved by Gene M. Moore in providing the text in a form more accurate and trustworthy than the ones so far printed on both sides of the Atlantic. These include the long-forgotten *Hutchinson's Magazine* version, unrecorded by authoritative bibliographers but rediscovered by Van Marle and Moore. The latter reminds us that, apart from Dent's first edition of 21,000 copies, and barring its inclusion in collected editions, *Suspense* has never been republished in English as a separate volume (232).

Evidence of Conrad's interest in his juvenile "Sea of the Sirens" as the background of a Napoleonic novel crops up in letters to friends and publishers as early as in June 1902 to William Blackwood, and in September 1904 to Edward Garnett, to whom he enclosed the now lost "sketch of a Mediterranean subject." These and all subsequent letters are duly examined in the "Origins" section of the introduction, which comments upon constantly changing perspectives both on the locale and time-frame of the novel over its overlong gestation. A period during which this novel had been lodged in Conrad's mind for a long time, while other Napoleonic subjects that fascinated him were tackled, from "The Duel" (the finest of interludes) and "The Warrior's Soul" to *A Personal Record* and the last long work published in his lifetime, *The Rover*.

The "Chronology" and "Introduction" detail offers of the novel over the years to Harper & Brothers (in March 1904) or J. M. Dent & Sons (March 1919), as well as proposals to sell manuscript leaves and/or typed up chapters for ready cash to Wise, the "Romantic forger," or to John Quinn, the wealthy New York tax lawyer and collector to whom Conrad also promised to dedicate his book.

The second part of Moore's fine and engaging introduction surveys the novel's remarkable genesis and growth from a tale about the British Navy's struggle with the French for Capri in 1808. Soon after the publication of *Nostromo*, Conrad took his family on a pleasure trip to Capri (1905), where he took advantage of the local doctor, Giorgio

Cerio, for a loan, and of Don Ignazio Cerio's library for historical documentation. A couple of years later, while wintering with his family in Montpellier, where he did research in the public library, the writer's interest had already shifted to an Elban setting. In April 1913, Conrad wrote to his French translator H.-D. Davray, the "action will take place around the island of Elba in the shadow of the Emperor – for He will not appear, or only for a moment" (CL5: 207).

The "Mediterranean novel" remained centred there until the early 1920s, when, after consulting books about Napoleon's first exile, Conrad began dictating a work provisionally entitled "The Island of Rest," a traditional nickname for Elba. Finally, after the publication of *The Rover*, Conrad resumed work on what he first mentioned as "The Suspense" – a briefly used title that could mean "the interval" or "the pause between events," and arguably more appropriate – in December 1922, rearranging its chapters, and setting the action in occupied Genoa in February 1815, just before Napoleon's escape from exile on Elba, when, as the text goes, an "uneasy suspense is the prevailing sentiment all round the basin of the Mediterranean" and the "fate of nations still hangs in the balance" (76.40-77.2).

The final section of Moore's absorbing introduction outlines the novel's reception by Conrad's friends and first reviewers. Early judgements vary in tone from a "masterpiece" to a "badly written" work lacking plot and action and a clear proof of Conrad's decline. Hugh Walpole's praise of the novel's "miracle of atmosphere," and his awareness that "the suspense in which we are left on the last page is just the sort of effect that Conrad created in every one of his works" is equalled, if not surpassed, by Edward Garnett's hailing *Suspense* as "the most mature" of all Conrad's writings. Gerald Gould accused him of hero-worship, while Clement K. Shorter depicted Conrad's first literary friend as having lost "all critical balance in regard of him." Leonard Woolf expressed his disappointment, feeling that most of the later Conrads are "splendid shells, magnificent façades, admirable forms, but there is no life in them." An opinion this, that reminds one of E. M. Forster's viewpoint – about the "secret casket" containing "a vapour rather than a jewel" – that gave F. R. Leavis his *point de départ* when Conrad's first and influential academic critic voiced his well-known post-war judgements in *The Great Tradition*.

The 192 pages of the critical text of *Suspense* are followed by illustrations of several original drafts, both holograph and typewritten, and by a map of Genoa, derived from *Murray's Handbook for Travellers in*

Northern Italy of 1860. This edition is likely to have been perused well by Conrad, in order to refresh glimpses of the “Superb Town” he may have had during his mythologized gun-running youth, and no doubt during his December 1897 landfall in Italy’s largest harbour while serving as an able-bodied seaman in the *Europa*.

Interestingly, on her way to Constantinople the ship also called at nearby Livorno. According to the *Gazzetta Livornese* of 19 December 1879, it was expected to get there on Christmas Day; instead it arrived three days later, affording Conrad no chance of seeing the town. On leaving the Tuscan port on the 29th, Conrad was able to cast his first and only glance at Elba. His acquaintance with Genoa was renewed at the outbreak of the First World War, during his adventurous return trip from Cracow to England, via Vienna, Milan, and the Ligurian capital. Here the Conrad family had to await three days before boarding the S. S. *Vondel*, from which the writer had his last view of what in the novel’s first line are described as “the fronts of marble palaces piled up on the slope of an arid mountain” (3.2-3). The same image, this, appearing in two snaps given to me long ago by Borys Conrad, who took them from the Dutch steamer. They show the quay and gangway of the ship belonging to the Compagnia di Navigazione Nederland, soon identified by Hans van Marle, keen scrutinizer of timetables and sea routes, ledgers and accounts of crews.

“The Text: An Essay” constitutes the real core of the section meant for the textual scholar and the Conrad specialist, to whom, in an accessible style, Moore thoroughly illustrates all the extant “Preprint Documents,” the only surviving manuscript and typescripts. This is followed by “The Growth of the Novel,” the story of the novel’s writing in various phases over a number of years. The novel’s “Serialization” – both in *Hutchinson Magazine* as *Suspense!* (with an added exclamation mark), and the *Saturday Review of Literature*, subtitled *A Napoleonic Novel* and erratically Americanized – brought about different sets of house-styled “corrections.” The history of the first English and American “Book Editions” is exhaustively detailed, along with mention of the popular Tauchnitz “Copyright Edition” sold exclusively on the Continent and virtually identical with E1.

Gene Moore focuses on editorial issues and general policies for his adoption of copy-text and emendations. A wealth of other features, typical of this high-standard Cambridge Edition, now under the expert general editorship of J. H. Stape and Allan H. Simmons, include a detailed textual Apparatus in three parts, highlighting variation and

emendations and explaining the choice of rules the editor adopted with accidentals. Absence or changes in punctuation, odd compositors' errors, and even end-of-line word-division in compounds ambiguously hyphenated in the copy-text are also dealt with. In the "Glossary of Foreign Words and Phrases" I would suggest to specify that the correct Italian form corresponding to "Yes" is *Sì* with a grave accent (an acute one in Spanish). Conrad, here and in *Nostramo*, never uses it: but *si* without an accent is simply a reflexive or impersonal particle, as in *farsi male* (to hurt oneself), *si è fatto male* (he hurt himself).

Other typical features enhancing this prestigious Cambridge series are essential explanatory notes on facts and concepts suitably elucidated. Deliberately leaving aside such matters as literary or geographical names not worth noting, as belonging to our shared cultural knowledge, the editor concentrates on contextual or historical information otherwise not perfectly clear to a contemporary audience. Thus, he gives space to Lord and Lady Bentinck, to Count Bubna and Louise Durazzo, or to the real-life models for Helion de Monteverso (spelt with the appropriate *de* instead of a plebeian "of") and for his young wife, one of the novel's central characters, largely based upon the early life of Adèle d'Osmond, comtesse de Boigne.

There is no need to linger in this learned journal over the "plot" of *Suspense* (Knowles and Moore did it better in their *Oxford Reader's Companion to Conrad*) nor over the love interest (probably incestuous) between this young lady and Cosmo Latham, the young English gentleman who gets involved in the mysterious proceedings of Attilio. This Genoese sailor and ardent "Carbonaro" has some traits in common with both Garibaldi and *Nostramo*: like them he went to South America; and as in the *Tale of the Seaboard* he experiences a silent night journey in the gulf, with the danger of being captured if he is still there at daybreak. Attilio's surname (179.21) – wrongly printed as "Pieschi" in Miss Hallows's typescripts, in Curle's first English (183) and later collected editions, such as the revised Doubleday, Dent's Uniform, Medallion, "Sun-Dial" and Heinemann (256) – has finally been restored to the "Fieschi" pedigree of a noble Genoese family, historically involved in conspiracies against the Doria, another foremost family of this seafaring Republic. Curious variants of Miss Hallows' misprints are duly noted, such as "xebec," "chebec," "chebek." The last is the form Moore adopts (170.25), as opposed to "zebec" (E1 295) or "xebec" of the English and American collected editions (267). In Italian translations, the term varies between "zebeck," "chébec," and, finally, "sciabecco."

Today one may not be familiar with the long frustrated aspirations of Italian patriots for a unified country, or with Genoese republicanism threatened by despised Piedmontese and Austrian troops, or may be puzzled to learn that the capital city of the Kingdom of Sardinia was Turin, from whence the King and Queen had just arrived in town. Conrad succeeded in representing a particular historical situation in which espionage rings were set up in favour of or against Napoleon. The occupying forces and monarchs of the Restoration were keeping a keen eye on conspirators, double agents, secret correspondence to Elba, assassination plots on that island. In all these intrigues were also involved *giardinieri* or *ortolani* (as Conrad miscalls them). These were female members of the *Carboneria*, the secret political association sponsored by, among others, Freemasonry and the Bible Society, both interested in the outcome of conspiracies concerning Napoleon's feared departure from Elba, the future of Europe, and the fate of partitioned Italy. (As will be remembered, after Garibaldi's landing in Sicily, Giorgio Viola got his contraband Bible from an Englishman in Palermo.)

The editor's glosses and historical explanations are intentionally based on the same nineteenth-century sources that would have been known to Conrad, particularly those he referred to in letters or present in the catalogue of his library auctioned off by Hodgson. Not to mention books for which his request slips are still preserved in libraries, or those borrowed from friends: Norman Douglas lamented Conrad was prone to appropriating valuable Napoleonic books he had lent him.

Further helps to clarify the text are comments on Conrad's solecisms, mistakes in Italian and French, as well as occasional Gallicisms. These include awkward formulations such as "small officials" (46.16) instead of "petty," and "made a few steps" (65.2) instead of "took," to which one might add "I am a man of affairs" (91.37) instead of "businessman." Similar unidiomatic phrases also occur in *Nostramo* ("men of affairs"), in the 'Second Note' to *The Arrow of Gold* ("man of affairs") or in *The Sisters* ("I understand affairs").

Useful appendices devoted to textual matters comprise Curle's "Introduction" to the first English edition, whose text reached America too late for inclusion in Doubleday's *de luxe* limited issue (A1), meant to protect copyright, and two trade editions, a regular one, followed by a reissue with Curle's "Introduction." The notebook Conrad used to take hints and suggestions about Napoleon on Elba, during his visit to the British Museum Reading Room in June 1920, is also reproduced in full (Appendix B). It records details of Napoleon's Elba period and

descriptions of the island, meant to be incorporated in the novel, but discarded from its final Genoese setting. I would suggest that what Conrad took down as “Vaterrajo” (297) should be [Castello di] Volterraio, the impregnable fortress perched on a rocky hill from which one commands the whole north-eastern side of Elba.

Conrad “adopted” generous quotations from the *Memoirs of the Comtesse de Boigne*, the English translation of which was in his library when it was auctioned. “Borrowings” were so evident that even Edward Garnett had to admit that the descriptions given by the *comtesse* – for instance, those of her first meeting with her future “upstart” husband, or with the Emperor – were often too closely followed by the novelist. Garnett’s allusion to “the memoirs of a French Lady” in his 1925 review for the *Weekly Westminster* was taken up in February 1926 by Miss Mildred Atkinson in a letter to the *TLS*, reprinted in March in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, in which she made revealing plot and wording comparisons between *Suspense* and the *Memoirs*.

In 1935, the question was further examined by Miriam Hatheway Wood in her *MLN* “A Source of Conrad’s *Suspense*.” In his *Conrad: The Making of a Novelist*, Gordan regretted that Miss Wood made no mention of Atkinson’s previous suggestions, forgetting that she had already indicated this important source in a note in *Nation & Athenaeum*. Other mentions of the *Memoirs* were made by D. C. Cross in *Notes & Queries* of December 1963. The question was finally and thoroughly tackled by Hans van Marle and Gene Moore in a well-known series of essays published during the last decades. A final and decisive word on this issue is now offered by Moore’s printing of relevant extracts from the *Memoirs*, preceded by page-line references to *Suspense* of extended verbal and phrasal borrowings of which Conrad made ample use. Even though Conrad was not averse to drawing inspiration from his reading, and at the same time to concealing his main sources, such as Brooke or Wallace in *Lord Jim* or Masterman and Eastwick in *Nostramo*, it must be conceded he had no opportunities of acknowledging his heavy debts to the *comtesse* in an “Author’s Note” surely meant to adorn his Napoleonic novel.

Presenting Conrad’s “Mediterranean novel” in an elegant format more correct and authoritative than all previous ones, this magnificent Cambridge edition will enable general readers and scholars alike fully to appreciate the last creative effort of a Master