

## 新刊紹介

Mark Valley

**J. H. Stape, ed., *Conrad's Congo:  
Joseph Conrad's Expedition to the Congo Free State, 1890***

The Folio Society Ltd, 2013. 217pp.

The Folio Society, according to its website, produces ‘carefully crafted editions of the world’s finest literature’: ‘The books we select for publication are timeless – we know they will be enjoyed and appreciated now and in the future. Because each book is considered as an individual object of value in its own right, there is a variety to our aesthetic – the only uniformity is in the quality of every single book.’ And indeed from a catalogue I browsed, I can see the attention to detail in producing books, from the illustration on the outer cover, the binding, head- and tailbands, to the slipcase and printing. The finished object draws attention to itself self-consciously as a book. Bright, striking colours too – contrasting and complimenting – are employed to maximum effect in line drawings boldly catching the eye. Again from the website: ‘The Folio Society has celebrated the particular joy to be derived from owning, holding and reading a beautiful printed edition.’ The book as a book conveys more than the information within its pages. More than the joy to be had from appreciating the author’s style, wit, irony or even narrative technique, the owning, reading and handling of the book – a Folio Society book – should be considered a joy, too. It is difficult to imagine this sensation transferring easily to an electronic tablet device. Though, some devices mimic typeface and visual texture well, there is still the worldly feeling of holding a thin, plastic machine. With a book, there are boards,

endpapers, paper covers, the turning of pages and paper density, also known as ‘grammage’. On an electronic device, you get the naked article. Folio Society books are, in a manner of speaking, fully-clothed in a style to suit the time and occasion.

The cover in green, yellow and black of *Conrad's Congo* is of a river. A boat in the distance, framed by tropical vegetation, resembles the *Roi des Belges*, on which Józef Korzeniowski ‘began a four week journey up the Congo River’ (xv). The style and perspective of the illustration is redolent of those featured in popular publications of the late nineteenth century, especially for boys. The alliterative title *Conrad's Congo* appears at the bottom right. There is no editorial credit. The inside covers, front and back, feature simple maps, reminiscent of the exploring nineteenth-century naturalist, of the up-river journey from Boma to Matadi and then to Stanley Pool. Inset in the bottom right corner is a map of the overland journey, dated June – August 1890 again in a style not contemporary. A scale shown in kilometers indicates the distance Józef Korzeniowski had to travel to reach his command. As with the front cover, nature frames the illustration, but with animal, reptile, bird and insect life. There is little detail suggestive of Marlow's description of the maps of Africa when a boy, showing the as yet unformed *terra incognita*.

There are two preambles to this book; a preface by Adam Hochschild and an introduction by J. H. Stape. The overall thesis of this book is that before Joseph Conrad became Joseph Conrad, he was Józef Korzeniowski. Somewhere in Africa, the writer we know today was born, or reborn. Through reading examples of his correspondence and fiction, we can observe in brief the transformation. In the preface, the historical period of the late nineteenth century is set with the ‘Scramble for Africa’. This land grab by the European major powers – Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, Spain and Italy – transformed the map of Africa and its physical appearance. The preface goes on to detail the procedures by which King Leopold II of Belgium acquired for himself a colonial possession. This

began a period of Belgian colonial rule characterized mainly by the bloody oppression of the Congolese by those willing to go to Africa for ‘riches’ and ‘combat’ (xvii) in the name of benevolently developing the continent and ‘weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways’ (*Heart of Darkness and Other Tales* 149). In the preface we are introduced to Albert Thys, the ‘Belgian robber baron’ who ‘interviewed Conrad’ (xviii). The geography of Africa is filled out with names: Kinshasa, Kisangani, the Kasai River and the ‘Baptist mission station where he [Conrad] may have had to endure some proselytising’ (xix). It concludes with the view that ‘Conrad struggled for many years to make sense of his Congo experience, and in some ways he never completely did’ (xix).

Like the preface, the introduction begins with a time and place. The date is January 1891, the place Brussels and Józef Korzeniowski has returned from his life-changing experiences in Africa. While it outlines the global events of the time, it does so in more subjective language. John Stape refers to ‘The blandly named Société Anonyme Belge pour le Commerce du Haut-Congo’ (xxi), ‘Leopold II, King of the Belgians, and his cronies’ and describes the ‘alienist’ (148) in *Heart of Darkness* as ‘slightly loopy’ (xxii). He describes the conditions of Conrad’s employment by the Company, the conditions there in the jungle and ‘the brutality that was commonplace’ (xxi). He also depicts the path Conrad took through life to reach this point from his home country of Russian occupied Poland. Conrad is portrayed as ‘A mid-Victorian by birth with a foot solidly in the early twentieth century’ (xxiv) suggesting his mid-century background as well as modernity. There is a great deal we do not know about Conrad, admits John Stape. The writer ‘will always remain something of a mystery’ (xxiv). And like Norman Sherry, described by Keith Carabine in the introduction to the World’s Classics edition of *Nostromo* as ‘An indefatigable sleuth’ (xxx), John Stape draws on ‘documents brought together in this volume’ to discover more about

the background of this person ‘reserved in expressing his feelings’ (3). ‘To peruse these documents [letter; ‘The Congo Diary’; ‘Up-river Book’; and others], is necessarily to engage in an adventure of one’s own’ (xxv). The Introduction ends with the proposal that Józef Korzeniowski went up the Congo River, but it was Joseph Conrad the writer we know today, who came down it.

The letters in the book illustrate various aspects of Conrad’s personality. They range in style from business to personal. There is one letter to John Quinn in which we see the author appreciative, but reserved or stand-offish. There appears to be a barrier between Conrad and his addressee, which he seems unable or unwilling to breach. Early in the book we read Conrad’s correspondence with Albert Thys. Here Conrad, or Józef Korzeniowski, is inquiring about the possibility of employment with the Company in Brussels. As is stated in the preface, Thys was responsible for constructing a railway passing the unnavigable stretch of the Congo. It was constructed it says ‘at the cost of thousands of lives’ (xviii). As John Stape points out, ‘Thys is immortalized in *Heart of Darkness*’ (3) in the scene when Marlow is interviewed for the job with the Company. Here Thys is ‘an impression of pale plumpness in a frock-coat. The great man himself. He was five feet six, I should judge’. He concludes his letters addressing Thys as Monsieur l’Administrateur’. This title, expressing respect, is used by a French character in *Nostramo*, when attempting to attract Charles Gould’s attention. The narrator observes: ‘In the comparative peace of the room the screaming “*Monsieur l’Administrateur*” of the frail, hairy Frenchman seemed to acquire a preternatural shrillness’ (199). It is hard not to associate this character, part of an investment syndicate delighted at the fortune of such a great discovery of mineral wealth, with Thys in this context and as another example of Conrad’s revenge in fictional form. Even though Thys was Belgian and the character is French.

In Conrad’s letters to Alexander Poradowski, his cousin, we read

mainly about the communication of news in the family with intentions to visit relatives, particularly Uncle Tadeusz, Conrad's guardian after the death of his parents. There is little deeply personal information in these letters about Conrad, but great expressions of affection: 'When I leave you we shall say to each other "see you soon", for I shall come back again shortly, via Brussels of course. A thousand embraces' (9). In historical terms and in this context, they inform us of his life before his great trip up the Congo River.

Conrad's correspondence with Marguerite Poradowska, 'my excellent aunt' (149) in *Heart of Darkness*, [she, according to Owen Knowles, 'offers an obvious model for Marlow's aunt at the story's beginning, she also serves – as an older woman who in 1890 was mourning the death of a recently lost husband – a strangely double function in providing suggestions for the Intended at its end' (xlii)], appears as an emotional lifeline during his stay in Africa. At first he seems content on his voyage from Bordeaux. However, by the middle of the book, and after the section detailing *The Congo Diary*, the desperation is evident: 'Decidedly I regret having come here. I even regret it bitterly' (87). This in the context, after his trek up river, his encounter with Alexandre Delcommune, and his failing health, must be considered incredible restraint on his part. Though, there is a mixture of passion: 'Everything is repellent to me': and pragmatism: 'Seeking a practical remedy to a disagreeable situation' (89).

This is the final letter included here to Marguerite Poradowska. Thereafter, we see a very different side of Conrad, one that, in keeping with the thesis of the book, shows the increased transformation from Korzeniowski the sailor to Conrad the writer. The next letter included is to T. Fisher Unwin and concerns the publication of 'An Outpost of Progress'. The beginning expresses great appreciation for the efforts Fisher Unwin was taking in finding a publication that would accept it. There follows a declaration, akin to the 'Preface to the Nigger of the "Narcissus"', in which Conrad bears witness to and supports the essence

of his artistic creativity: ‘I am not ashamed of it for all that. Bad or good I cannot be ashamed of what is produced in perfect single mindedness – I cannot be ashamed of those things that are like fragments of my innermost being produced for the public gaze’ (90). And from the ‘Preface’: ‘The artist, then, like the thinker or the scientist, seeks the truth and makes his appeal’ (xlvi). Here we have from the ‘Preface’ in more formal language, Conrad’s willingness, desire and need to be accepted and understood as an artist. The letter communicates more of the human condition of a struggling writer, but one who knows he is not alone in furthering his cause. ‘It is a story of the Congo’ (91): the economy of words neither justifies nor apologizes for his creative act. Its simplicity belies the enormity of the whole Congo episode. Conrad is willing to allow his creation to stand or fall on its own terms. There follows ‘An Outpost of Progress’ ‘based on an anecdote [...] Prosper Harou had told him [Conrad]’, in its entirety without, as John Stape explains, ‘Its division into two parts, Conrad felt, ruined the story’ (93).

In the later part of the book we see Conrad moving in different social circles, from corresponding with Roger Casement concerning the campaign against the Belgian government’s activities in Africa to a personal letter to R. B. Cunningham Graham thanking him for ‘remembering the boy [Conrad’s son] at this festive season’ (124) and referring to Cunningham Graham’s then recently published biography *Hernando de Soto*. This final reference conflates in its thematic content Conrad’s experiences in Africa with Spanish colonialism in North America during the sixteenth century. Conrad draws direct comparisons: ‘Leopold is their Pizarro, Thys their Cortez’ (125). We can see from this that his Congo experience was still very much at the forefront of his mind. There is even a reference to it in Lady Ottoline Morrell’s memoirs (an extract of which is included in *Appendix 1*) at a meeting in 1923: ‘He also spoke again of the Congo. Knowing that he had met Casement there I asked about him’ (142).

*Appendix 2* contains Roger Casement's report to the British government, on the abuses perpetrated by the Belgian colonialists during the period of the Congo Free State. As John Stape explains: after witnessing 'systematic brutalization of the native peoples [...] Casement actively agitated for reform upon returning to London' and 'Pressed [...] the House of Commons [to pass] a resolution that enjoined [Casement] to make a formal and extensive inquiry into conditions in the Belgian territory' (155). The report, dated December 11, 1903, is addressed to the Marquess of Lansdowne, who then held the office of Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. He was also a peer in the House of Lords.

After the initial address, which begins 'My Lord' (155), this extract is divided in sections according to place. These are Leopoldville; Bolobo; Lake Mantumba. There are two enclosures. The first is 'Notes on Refugee Tribes from the District of Lake Leopold II' and the second is 'Notes in the Case of Mola Ekulite, a Native of Mokili in the Mantumba District'. The tone of Casement's report is neither alarmist nor seditious. He observes, as an authority on this area, the activities of the Belgian colonists and their effects in Africa. Much of what is presented is placed in the context of his travels in the Congo. He observes with a European eye the changes to the infrastructure: 'Admirably built and admirably kept stations greet the traveler at many points' and 'A railway, excellently constructed in view of the difficulties to the encounter, now connects the ocean ports with Stanley Pool'. However, other early passages reveal an equivocal reaction: 'there are to-day widespread proofs of the great energy displayed by the Belgian officials in introducing their method of rule over one of the most savage regions of Africa' (156). He comments on the major sources of mortality in this area, mainly referring to 'sleeping sickness' but also 'attribut[ing] [...] their [the Congolese] rapid decrease in numbers to other causes as well' (157). 'Communities I had formally known as large and flourishing centres of populations are to-day entirely gone:' this and much else can be directly cross referenced with

Marlow's observations in *Heart of Darkness*.

Casement also remarks on economic activity within the Congo. While village life for the Congolese had receded or even disappeared totally, economic activity for the colonialists seemed to thrive. The report goes into various descriptions about the contributions expected from the locals and how much they received. What is most remarkable in relation to *Heart of Darkness* is the 'rods', which appear similar to Marlow's description of the 'brass wire [...] paid with a regularity worthy of a large and honorable trading company' (194). According to the report twenty rods equals one franc. In other areas, the Congolese were paid in cloth or with 'reels of sewing cotton and shirt buttons' when the brass rods ran out. Casement remarks, 'As these natives go almost entirely naked, I could believe that neither thread or shirt buttons were of much service to them' (173). Penalties metered out to the Congolese for lateness of performing services, such as gathering food or supplying fish, include floggings or even death. There are also stories of displaced people. In the first of the enclosures, cited as 1 in the contents, Casement hears of Besengele refugees from Lake Leopold II who left their homes because of the rubber tax. Here, Casement presents verbatim evidence through an interpreter: Q. 'How much pay did you get for this? A. (Entire audience) "We got no pay! We got nothing!" And then Moyo, whom I asked, again said: "Our village got cloth and a little salt, but not the people who did the work. Our Chief eats up the cloth, the workers get nothing"' (186).

In the second enclosure, cited as 4 in the contents, Casement supplies anecdotal evidence of mutilations carried out by 'State soldiers' in the districts he visits. Government soldiers tied Mola Ekulite, a native of Mokili, to a tree. The tightness of the rope cut his wrists to the bone. After being freed, the soldiers seeing that his hands were injured hacked them off using their rifle-butts. Mola sought and received help from a local Mission (197-199). Casement later explains: 'Of acts of persistent mutilation by Government soldiers of this nature I had many statements



made to me while at Lake Mantumba. Of the fact of this mutilation and the causes inducing it there can be no shadow of doubt. It was not a native custom prior to the coming of the white man; it was not the outcome of the primitive instincts of savages in their fights between village and village; it was the deliberate act of the soldiers of a European Administration, and these men themselves never made any concealment that in committing these acts they were but obeying the positive orders of their superiors' (203).

The photographs juxtapose western and African values; a steamer in front of a pier at Boma; a trading post at Matadi; a church; porters gathering before leaving presumably for their two-hundred mile trip to Leopoldville; these show the rise of 'modernity' while in the background the jungle remains. There are other photographs that relate more directly to Conrad's experiences. For example, 'The steamer *Roi des Belges* in 1889'; 'Alexandre Delcommune poses with a shot hippo beside the Sankuru River'; 'Village of the Belgian Congo'. As well as these, there are sketches of the river in the 'Up-river Book' and 'Joseph Conrad in a sketch by Sir William Rothenstein in 1916'.

*Conrad's Congo* is a Folio Society book for those who want a view of Conrad's experiences before, during and after the Congo episode, without too much academic input. John Stape's explanations place each letter and section in context. They are helpful in discovering what was happening in the background of Conrad's life. Here, we get a view of the personal and social transformations of Józef Kozeniowski the sailor to Joseph Conrad the writer.

### Works Cited

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(マーク・ヴァレリー Lecturer, Hosei University)