

THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF *WITHIN THE TIDES*

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Sandwiched between the successful *Chance* and *Victory*, the last collection of Joseph Conrad's stories published in his lifetime, *Within the Tides* (1915), has never attracted much critical attention. Its reception, in particular, has been largely neglected; the volume is one of the few not included in Norman Sherry's selection of representative reviews, *Conrad: The Critical Heritage*. This article will endeavor to begin filling this gap in Conrad criticism by distilling the response to the volume, from its publication in February 1915 to the present. Because of the similarity of the reception on both sides of the Atlantic, this paper will treat American and English reviews indiscriminately.¹

As so much of Conrad's short fiction, the four stories of *Within the Tides* were taken up to compensate for blocks in the composition of longer works. Unable to make rapid headway on *Chance* and then *Victory*, yet anxious "to keep himself before the public" (Karl 726) and tempted by handsome offers from magazine publishers and their promises of swift remuneration, Conrad decided to write, at odd intervals in the years 1910–1914, the four stories of *Within the Tides*. The first in sequence of composition was "The Partner," begun in the last months of 1910, after Conrad had finished proofreading *Under Western Eyes* and was about to resume work on *Chance* (Najder 422). The subsequent tales ("The Inn of the Two Witches," "The Planter of Malata," and "Because of the Dollars") were drafted between 1912 and 1914, as Conrad was bogged down in *Victory* (Knowles and Moore 198, 315, 35).

If "The Partner" was designed for the respectable audience of *Harper's*, writing for which was "always a pleasure" to Conrad (CLA 74), the remaining three narratives, on the other hand, were tailored for, and eventually appeared in, less steadily prestigious journals (Knowles and Moore 450). "The Inn of the Two Witches" was published in the "popular sixpenny" *Pall Mall Magazine* (CL5 257), a periodical of

¹ Newspapers bearing identical titles on both continents are distinguished by city or country. In case any ambiguity subsists, the date yields the answer: all American reviews are dated 1916; all British reviews, 1915.

an “uneven quality” (Rutenberg 306) that “tended to encourage the writing of pot-boilers” (Knowles and Moore 378). As for “The Planter of Malata” and “Because of the Dollars,” they appeared in the *Metropolitan Magazine*, whose audience was not of the finest. Perhaps it suffices to say that the latter exceeded one million readers (CL5 322, n. 2) at a time when, according to a contemporary manual for short-story writers, “[n]o magazine with a circulation of more than 150,000 c[ould] have a highly intelligent audience” (Baker 68). Clearly then, with the arguable exception of “The Partner,” *Within the Tides* gathered potboilers intended for a popular audience that was notorious for its dislike of complexity and its love of thrilling plots. And all stories were side efforts prompted by the desire to offset a chronic inability to make sustained headway on longer works.

Luckily, the critics were not privy to the secrets of the volume’s growth, and when they wrote about the tales for the first time in 1915, contemporary reviewers received the work “mainly well, if not enthusiastically” (Stape 200). In essence, the critical response consisted of a handful of biting remarks at one extreme, a good share of overpraise at the other, and in between, the general conclusion was that *Within the Tides* was good, yet inferior to the author’s best pieces. Benchmarking it against *Chance* and *Twixt Land and Sea* for instance, the *Daily Telegraph*’s William Courtney argued that *Within the Tides* struck “a poorer and thinner note” (3 March 1915, 4); and *The Sunday Times*’ Frederick Bettany agreed that the collection was “something of a disappointment,” that it fell “distinctly below the level of” *Twixt Land and Sea* (7 March 1915, 5). Other reviewers picked earlier stories as yardsticks, but they reached the same conclusion, namely, that *Within the Tides* did not represent the author at the height of his powers.

Unpleasant though it may have sounded, this evaluation was nevertheless qualified by a systematic reminder that the standards for assessing Conrad’s works were entirely his own, and extraordinarily high. Perhaps it was Bettany again, in the London *Bookman*, who captured this consensus of opinion most eloquently:

It is Mr. Conrad’s own fault and his privilege that we apply severe tests to any new fiction to which he puts his name. The author of “Lord Jim” has himself set up the standard by which he is to be judged, that of his past achievements, and it is exceptionally high. Considered in relation to that record, his new tales “Within the Tides” must be pronounced something less than his best. (53)

The extent of the volume’s inferiority was diversely estimated, ranging from Bettany’s charitable “something less than his best” to Henry Mencken’s “a good deal below Conrad’s best” (156). Yet throughout this spectrum of polite reservations, it was consistently emphasized that Conrad’s inferior stuff remained nevertheless vastly superior to the productions of most of his peers. *The Scotsman* wrote that “work which would entitle a less original writer to a meed of praise, may give rise to disappointment when it comes from [Conrad]” (8 March 1915, 3). And many others echoed the contention that *Within the Tides* would have been acclaimed, had it come from

someone else. Every criticism of the work then, even the most hostile, was attenuated by a preliminary encomium of Conrad's achievements and a reminder of his peerlessness. In this context, the book's inferiority was not perceived as an alarming sign of decline; it was rather relativized as a temporary and by no means serious lapse, which *The New Statesman's* Gerald Gould generously forgave with the following maxim: "Nobody can always be at the top of his inspiration" (6 March 1915, 538).

The two most widespread objects of praise were Conrad's genius for storytelling and his "superb workmanship" (*Publishers' Circular*, 17 April 1915, 344). *The Times Literary Supplement* hailed "the peculiar intonation and significance [Conrad] gives to every word of the language on which he has bestowed the service of his art" (4 March 1915, 74); and more succinctly, many critics extolled Conrad's "gift of expression" (*World* [London] 6 April 1915, 581); spoke rapturously of "the virtuosity of the telling" (*Life*, 24 February 1916, 354); enthused over Conrad's "amazing mastery of technique" (*New York Tribune*, 5 February 1916, 9); and, naturally, concluded that he was "one of the greatest of story-tellers" (*Manchester Guardian*, 4 March 1915, 5).

Several reviewers were especially appreciative of Conrad's abandonment of his customary circuitous narrative methods, an already proverbial obstacle to popularity. Of course, some still objected that the reading remained arduous, but the majority, and especially those who had recently struggled with the tortuous plot line of *Chance*, welcomed the volume's narrative straightforwardness. With palpable relief *The Birmingham Daily Post* noted that none of the volume's stories displayed "that curious complexity in the matter of technique which, of late has seemed to be growing upon Mr. Conrad" (5 March 1915, 4), and various other journals expressed their gratitude in similar ways. The critic of *The New York Tribune* in particular was so overwhelmed by the volume's readability that he recommended reading the author's canon backwards, convinced that the current accessible stuff, while "los[ing] nothing of [Conrad's] essential qualities," would serve as an ideal introduction to the author's difficult early prose (5 February 1916, 9).

Another massive object of praise was Conrad's elegant and stimulating treatment of popular themes and genres. Critics acknowledged that thematically, the tales were redolent of simplistic adventure stories or romances. Yet reviewers stressed that although Conrad had chosen his subject-matters in melodrama, romances, adventure stories, or tales of terror, he had enriched them with his technical virtuosity, a "keen psychological insight" (*Independent* [NY] April 10, 1916, 73), and his trademark "brooding and melancholy irony" (Mencken 156). In other words, it was widely pointed out that Conrad had carried these tales beyond the generic boundaries to which, thematically, they predominantly belonged. Thus, the Cleveland *Open Shelf* instructed that it was "Conrad's hall-mark of atmosphere and soul-baring psychology" that "distinguishe[d] these tales from the usual story of mystery and adventure"

("Popular Selection" 33), and *The Boston Evening Transcript's* Edwin Edgett, though perhaps insincerely,² voiced a similar judgment:

All these are stories of adventure, but there is nothing in them of the conventional tale of their kind. It is the spirit and the soul of man, as well as his bodily activities, that attract Mr. Conrad, and that in his analysis gives him his hold upon the reader. (22 January 1916, part 3, 6)

To illustrate how Conrad could enrich trite themes, several critics called attention to his artistic development of the derivative plot of "The Inn of the Two Witches" into a piece of serious literature. Drawing a comparison with the original, Wilkie Collins's "A Terribly Strange Bed," *The Glasgow News* contended that Collins's story was "merely ... a sensational tale," whereas Conrad's re-writing was "a reflection on life" (15 April 1915, 8). In the same vein, other journals stressed that the stories' themes were analogous to those of "penny dreadful[s]" or "six-penny magazine[s]" (*The Daily News and Leader*, 9 March 1915, 7; *Nation* [London] 13 March 1915, 758), but they pointed this out with the view of demonstrating that Conrad had converted these modest subjects into substantial artworks, pregnant "with poignant meaning" (*The World* [London], 6 April 1915, 581). From all sides in fact came intimations that these tales were much more than mere short stories. *The Publishers' Circular* claimed that "The Partner" was "a yarn of concentrated tragedy" (17 April 1915, 344), and the *London World* argued that thanks to his "extraordinary genius," Conrad could "invest a short tale with as great an attraction as a long book" (6 April 1915, 581). Along identical lines, the *Glasgow News* contended that the "same stories might be told by another writer and remain meaningless" (15 April 1915, 8).

Conrad had not only dignified the adventure tale or bogey story: he had also loftily avoided the sensational excesses of these genres, treating with commendable restraint themes that others might have exploited more crudely. *The Spectator* wrapped up its laudatory review precisely with this point: "In fine, no one but Mr. Conrad could have written [these stories], and none but he could have invested with pathos and impressiveness themes which in ordinary hands would have degenerated into mere horror and squalor" (6 March 1915, 339).

Another much-discussed point was whether *Within the Tides* was to be pigeon-holed as a product of romance or realism, an inevitable classification for new works. Most critics agreed that thematically at least, *Within the Tides* tended towards romance – the *Manchester Guardian* even asserting, "Mr. Conrad's world is always dangerous, there are romantic possibilities from his first word" (4 March 1915, 5). Yet at the same time, many readers could spot formal characteristics of realism. Consequently, as Conrad's friend Richard Curle had just done in his *Joseph Conrad:*

² Though his criticism of *Within the Tides* was rapturous, Edgett was no admirer of Conrad (*I Speak for Myself* 263). Edgett even admitted that some of his praiseworthy reviews may have been written in bad faith: "[o]nce in a while I did write a favorable review of one of his novels, and perhaps by chance this [i.e. a review of *Victory*] was the one time. Or possibly I was ironical in my writing of it, and he could not read between the lines" (264).

A Study (and as Hugh Walpole would do not long after in his own monograph *Joseph Conrad*), many opted for compromise. Typically recognizing elements of both schools for instance, Robert Lynd labeled Conrad “a romancer in a world of observers” (*The Daily News and Leader*, 9 March 1915, 7).³

Though less prestigious and decried as inartistic by some, romances sold better and were very much appreciated (Daly 19; Orel 19, 21), not only by the public but also by the critics (Orel 41, 45). In times of war especially, with so many readers looking to fiction for a diversion from the conflict, the appetite for romances was insatiable (19). Unsurprisingly then, there were numerous reviewers who welcomed *Within the Tides* as a well-crafted, stimulating piece of escapist literature that could temporarily take their minds off the war. Thus, writing for *Publishers' Weekly* in 1916, Lynd observed with relief and satisfaction that “[n]othing could be further removed from the war” than *Within the Tides* (19 February 1916, 642).

Perhaps less systematically, Conrad was also praised for other qualities, for which he had been celebrated before. These included, among others, the depth of his tragic vision (*The Spectator*, 6 March 1915, 339), his painting of atmosphere (*Athenaeum*, 6 March 1915, 211), and the “skill” of his “character portrayal” (*Independent [NY]*, 10 April 1916, 73). There were also the inevitable biographically-oriented reviews, many of which drew their information from *A Personal Record* or Curle’s recent study. Such pieces took care to furnish the usual remarks on Conrad’s amazing choice and subsequent mastery of a foreign tongue, a feat that earned him once again the irritating label of literary “phenomenon” (*T.P.’s Weekly*, 13 March 1915, 251). Equally depressing as the clichés about the author’s choice of medium of expression were his associations with the sea, more prominent in American than in British reviews.⁴ And no less vexatious was the insistence on Conrad’s alleged Slavonism and the gratitude shown to him for enriching English letters with “literature Slavonic in temper, inspiration, and method” (R.A. Scott-James, *Land and Water*, 17 April 1915, 40). Finally, forays into the author’s past also led several journals to retrace and analyze Conrad’s elusive popularity – until *Chance*. Such discussions invariably ascribed public indifference to the fact that Conrad was an un-classifiable and demanding author who wrote “preeminently for writers” (*Sun [NY]*, 23 January 1916, 6), and whose works were consequently “awaited with the greatest expectancy by the literary, as opposed to the library, public” (*Daily News and Leader*, 9 March 1915, 7).

³ Subsequent works dealing with Conrad’s ambivalent position as a writer “floating uncertainly somewhere in between Proust and Robert Louis Stevenson” (Jameson 206) are too numerous to list. For a monograph exclusively devoted to this subject, see Ruth Stauffer’s *Joseph Conrad: His Romantic-Realism*. Boston: The Four Seas, 1922.

⁴ The systematic insistence on the image of Conrad as a marine writer, together with the fact that the American criticism did not quite reach the virulence of some of the British, are the two points on which the American reception might be said to have differed – somewhat – from that of its transatlantic counterpart.

There were also a handful of critics who were more interested in talking about Conrad in general than *Within the Tides* in particular. A “great man for centenaries, introductions, literary souvenir-hunting” (Gross 220), the “literary panjandrum” (219) Clement Shorter could not miss this occasion to mainly dispense general praises on the author and pull out yet another literary souvenir, one that evidenced Shorter’s sure hand for discerning talent: a complimentary letter addressed to Conrad when the latter “did not stand where he does now” (*Sphere*, 10 April 1915, 50). Mencken too, characteristically, seized the pretext of reviewing *Within the Tides* to express admiration for Conrad’s early works, in this case, unsurprisingly, “Youth” (156).⁵ Mencken was not the most exalted nostalgic, however: recalling a unique visit to Conrad in the weeks preceding the outbreak of the war, the critic of the New York *Sun* delivered the most encomiastic review of them all.⁶

The Sun’s article may well have been the most obsequious of all the reviews, but there were many pieces that similarly eulogized Conrad while engaging with the texts very superficially. Surveying the response to *Within the Tides*, Zdzisław Najder reflected that the critics had “judged Conrad more on the strength of his acquired reputation than on perceptive reading of his current work” (472). Najder’s observation was based on a limited number of reviews, but his accurate judgment can in fact be extended to the whole of the reception. For Conrad’s reputation at the time was such as to obstruct perceptive criticism and, also, to encourage an already existing disposition to overpraising. The effects of the latter can be seen in the critics’ overabundant use of

⁵ For years, instead of addressing the thorny issue of Conrad’s decline, which had arguably set in by the time *Within the Tides* was published (Watts, *Literary* 123), Mencken “[s]ummon[ed] the reader to look at Conrad’s early stories” and “Youth” in particular, a tale which, “for several years,” Mencken pointed to “as the greatest short story in the language” (Walt 13, 17, 11). Mencken’s partner at *The Smart Set*, George Nathan, also spoke rapturously of Conrad’s early work, declaring in 1916 that “[i]f Joseph Conrad’s *Youth* were yet unpublished, and if Conrad offered it to us to-morrow, we’d mortgage our salaries to buy it, and stop the presses to get it into the next number” (“Why are Manuscripts Rejected?” 281).

⁶ *The Sun*’s reviewer was in all likelihood Louise Collier Willcox, who accompanied her friend Ellen Glasgow and Warrington Dawson to Conrad’s abode in the summer of 1914 (Randall 84–86; Goodman 130). The three of them, and Glasgow and Willcox for the first and last time, visited Conrad in June and were shown some of his manuscripts, a series of events that tallies with those recorded by *The Sun*’s journalist. A prolific writer and “respected editor and critic” (Goodman 130), Willcox wrote for the *Sun* among other newspapers (Lawrence 402). The telltales of her style, namely hyperbole, frequent comparisons with the greatest authors (especially classical), overquoting, and a conspicuous fondness for mysticism (the latter suggested by the titles of her books and confirmed by their contents), are all present in *The Sun*’s article. There, the writer repeatedly labels Conrad a “genius,” compares “Because of the Dollars” to Sappho’s “Second Fragment,” and mystically justifies overquoting on the grounds that a long passage is necessary to convey “the secrets of Conrad’s magic power, the soul behind the soul, the spirit within the spirit” (6) etc.

The Sun’s reviewer also claims that Conrad “was actually compiling” *Within the Tides* at the time of the visit. This poetic coincidence does not tally with the facts, however, given that Conrad’s energies were then entirely mobilized by *Victory* and that the actual compilation of *Within the Tides* did not take place until several months later.

superlative labels like *masterpiece*, “that much prostituted term” *genius* (Clifford 3), and all sorts of fulsome comments that would astound the modern reader.

At the other extreme there was also, however, some biting criticism. The gist of it was confined to a cluster of reviews that went beyond criticizing one unsuccessful story or element; these pieces attacked the author’s tastes in general, finding fault with his temperament and criticizing the mood of the whole book. Three rather familiar charges were leveled at Conrad, the first two of which were often treated together. The first was the tales’ excessive and gratuitous violence (mostly in connection with “Because of the Dollars”); the second was Conrad’s gloomy predisposition to tragedy and, especially, tragic endings; and the third was his detachment from English social life. These strictures emanated from the following papers: *The Evening Standard*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Standard*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Saturday Review*, and the *London Bookman*.

It was *The Evening Standard* that opened the hostilities. Offended by the stories’ excessive ghastliness, gratuitous gloom, and wanton violence, it pronounced “all” the tales “very miserable” (1 March 1915, 7). The squeamish Bettany agreed, diagnosing these excesses as symptoms of the author’s “mannerism” and “perhaps perversity” (*Sunday Times*, 7 March 1915, 5). Courtney in *The Daily Telegraph* pushed the diagnosis a bit further: he argued that Conrad had cast a tragic and mysterious gloom over his insignificant narratives so as to lend to them an air of complexity. Courtney found the characters’ behavior implausible and dismissed them as “hollow masks” and “puppets,” and he used the expression “false realism” to describe what he saw as Conrad’s protective inclination to tragedy (3 March 1915, 4). He concentrated this criticism on “The Planter of Malata,” according to him “an example of false realism – a realism which is so afraid of a happy ending that it obstinately assumes a face of gloom and betrays reality through a perverse desire to make our flesh creep.” Courtney’s stricture was the harshest, and after reading it, Conrad wrote that he had been “scolded ... bitterly” and was “going home with [a] flea in [his] ear” (CL5 451).⁷

The other charge, unconcern for English social issues, was voiced by *The Standard* and the *Saturday Review*. *The Standard* was not overly critical; it simply regretted that Conrad’s utter alienation from English traditions deterred him from tackling issues of everyday English life in his works (5 March 1915, 3). *The Saturday Review*, however, was more vehement. It ascribed Conrad’s aloofness to an irresponsible desire to set his stories in foreign lands so as “to simplify the calculations imposed by environment” (20 March 1915, 312). And it punctuated this broadside with a scathing indictment of Conrad as an essentially un-English artist: “[n]othing that he has written is likely to make a deep and permanent impression on English life, though it is probable that he will long be read and valued highly by those who care for pure literature” (312–313). To these charges was to be added, from *The Manchester*

⁷ In the “Author’s Note” to *Within the Tides*, Conrad called the other accusations “comment[s];” only Courtney’s did he term a “distinctly critical charge” (vii, ix).

Guardian's mainly laudatory review, the remark that in *Within the Tides*, "the whole [was] greater than the parts" (4 March 1915, 5).

Those were the objections hurled at Conrad by reviewers who saw wanton gloom where others had perceived tragic insight, demonized the escapism that so many had welcomed, and were skeptical about his contribution to English literature. Released early, these adverse judgments were a minority, but they came from searching, not superficial studies and, what is more, they were for the most part to be found in weighty organs of opinion.⁸ As such, they did not pass unnoticed, and this can be verified by the fact that after reading them, Conrad hastily concluded that the reception was "mixed" (CL5 457). And five years later, in the "Author's Note," he systematically replied to every accusation and repeated that the volume had received "a good deal of varied criticism" (*Within the Tides* ix).

Individually, the tales aroused different reactions. The prize for best story went to "The Planter of Malata," with "The Partner" a close runner-up. The preeminence of "The Planter of Malata" was not achieved by consensus; the narrative elicited only extreme comments. It was seen as either good or bad, and even, for Lynd, as both simultaneously: he deemed it "at once the most interesting and the most nearly a failure" (*Daily News and Leader*, 9 March 1915, 7). On the negative side, the observation of the American *Nation* that there was "something strained and laborious about [the story]," that it "represent[ed] the author at his least satisfying" (10 February 1916, 164), was echoed by more than one reviewer. More specifically, the ending of the tale was deemed unsuccessful, especially the final dialogues: *The Scotsman* for instance spoke of "failure" from the moment the female protagonist opened her mouth to speak "not like a woman of the world, but like Dr Johnson in a moment of indignation" (8 March 1915, 3).

However, at the other extreme, compliments were distributed by the shovelful. *The Annual Register* summed up the tale as an "intense" tragedy (104), and *The Observer* pronounced it "one of Conrad's masterpieces," adding that it was "a great and terrible story, which has in it the dignity of tragedy" (28 February 1915, 4). Other critics placed the narrative within a less majestic genre but kept the eulogistic tone untouched: the London *World* defined it as "a wonderful specimen of beautiful writing and thrilling romance" (6 April 1915, 581), and *The Birmingham Daily Post* lauded its psychological complexity, noting that the narrative was "set forth with the intensity of D'Annunzio" (5 March 1915, 4).

⁸ *The Sunday Times*, and *The Manchester Guardian* even more so, were "weighty organs of opinion" (McEwen 461, 472, 476). Though in difficulties in those years, *The Standard* still had a sizeable readership (479, 466, 468), and so did *The Evening Standard* (471). *The Saturday Review*, albeit in financial trouble at the time, had a prestigious recent history (Powell 379–383); and *The Bookman* was a notable organ in the book trade (Prance 43–49). As for the literary editor of the *Daily Telegraph* William Courtney, he held an important position in contemporary literary circles, an eminence noticeable even in the half-ironical remarks of Conrad and his friends. Edward Garnett described Courtney as "that donnish British critic who ruled the literary roost in the *Daily Telegraph* for many years" (Sherry 85), and in the "Author's Note" to *Within the Tides*, Conrad covertly alluded to Courtney as an "eminent critic" (x).

Critics were by no means so polarized with regard to “The Partner,” which was almost unanimously praised. Reviewers exercised their critical faculties mainly on the description of the story’s vigorous style, vying for the most suggestive description of its jerky, seemingly unmediated nature. *The Publishers’ Circular* wrote that it was “all related in a curiously pungent and forcible lingo” (17 April 1915, 344); *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia) talked about “a narrative in the rough, as it were” (29 January 1916, 13); and the *American Review of Reviews*, about a “sordid tragedy ... roughly told by a seaman” (“Newest Fiction” 377). But the most memorable formulation came from the reviewer of *The Morning Post*, who asseverated that the style was cast “in a sort of Hegelian round-about talk (very common among wharf-side philosophers)” (8 March 1915, 2). Naturally, “The Partner” had its detractors too, but their number was almost negligible. Among them was Bettany, who wrote that in trying to be “over-clever,” Conrad had devised a stylistic method that “certainly spoils some of the artist’s effects at the same time that it exasperates the reader” (*Bookman* [London] 53). Courtney was critical too: he wrote that Conrad had “done work similar to ‘The Partner’” before and “done it better” (*Daily Telegraph*, 3 March 1915, 4). Where this work was “done,” however, Courtney does not say.

“The Inn of the Two Witches” and “Because of the Dollars” were usually paired off as gruesome tales and pronounced less experimental than “The Partner” and less ambitious in scope than “The Planter of Malata.” “The Inn of the Two Witches” was mostly welcomed as a thrilling tale, but only after a caveat that categorized it as an unpretentious, derivative “Poe mystery story” (*Publishers’ Weekly*, 19 February 1916, 642) designed to make the reader’s flesh creep, nothing more. In *The Daily News and Leader*, Lynd wrote, “[i]t would be absurd to compare this hair-raising anecdote to Mr Conrad’s great stories – stories like ‘Heart of Darkness’ or ‘The Secret Sharer’ – but as a morsel of romantic horror it would be hard to beat outside Edgar Allan Poe” (9 March 1915, 7). Thus qualified, the story could be properly assessed. Discussion of its merits revolved mostly around the success of Conrad’s experiment with the tale of terror, and on whether or not he deserved to be placed on a par with the master of the genre, Poe, whose influence was deemed unmistakable. Some, not content with merely detecting a Poe family air, set about uncovering the tale’s real source, pointing to Wilkie Collins’s “A Terribly Strange Bed” and, like *The Glasgow News*, regularly downplaying the importance of the borrowing (15 April 1915, 8). Finally, as for every story, there was an irrepressible admirer: in this case, the reviewer of *The Scotsman*, who asserted that the tale was “quite comparable with the best things Mr Conrad has done” (8 March 1915, 3).

At the other end of the spectrum, some critics were less impressed by Conrad’s reworking of a hackneyed theme. The reviewer of the *Oakland Tribune* asserted that the narrative was “the sort of a story that might have been written by anyone of a half-dozen clever writers” (27 February 1916, 12), a complaint memorably echoed by the critic of *The New York Times Review of Books*, who lamented that Conrad’s “time [was] too precious to waste” on tales that “remind[ed] one of every romancer

from Poe to Stanley Weyman and back again – except Conrad” (16 January 1916, 22).

Like “The Inn of Two Witches,” “Because of the Dollars” was received after a preliminary remark that the story ought to be judged for what it was, namely “an anecdote rather than an interpretation of the world” (*Daily News and Leader*, 9 March 1915, 7). Once this was clear, the tale could be favorably reviewed as “a typical Conrad tale of the South Seas” (*Boston Evening Transcript*, 22 January 1916, part 3, 6) distinguished by an “ironic conclusion” (*Birmingham Daily Post*, 5 March 1915, 4) and an unusually violent, ghastly denouement. Whether or not this final violence was justified was a contentious point. Some reviewers claimed that, because of its ending, the narrative was an “inartistic” and “unnecessary assault on the reader’s feelings” (*Evening Standard*, 1 March 1915, 7); others saw no gratuitousness in the story. Among the latter was the critic of the *New York Sun*, who went so far as to attribute a didactic aim to the tale, claiming that “Because of the Dollars” was “the modern form of Greek tragedy, purging the soul and enlarging it by means of terror and pity” (23 January 1916, 6). Otherwise, when they were not busy debating the decency of the ending, critics usually lauded the narrative’s exciting plot and for the most part welcomed the return to the East. As for every story, there was a gushing admirer: here the role was best fulfilled by the reviewer of *The Oakland Tribune*, who believed that “Because of the Dollars” was “a story which would have given Conrad recognition, had he been dependent upon it alone for fame” (27 February 1916, 12).

To sum up, the volume’s critical reception was favorable. On the whole, *Within the Tides* was received as a lesser Conrad work, arguably flawed here and there, but still much superior to what the market generally offered. There were, at the beginning, a batch of inimical reviews accusing Conrad of being wantonly violent, gloomy, or melodramatic. But these remarks were subsequently outnumbered by a wealth of positive comments, most of which praised the author for offering exceptionally rich, well-crafted short stories, and for artistically revitalizing lowbrow genres.

What was Conrad’s own response to *Within the Tides*? Well, the extant correspondence reveals that, at first, he was against the volume’s release a few months apart from *Victory*, fearful that dual publication would expose the qualitative discrepancies between the two works (CL5 436). For whatever Conrad thought of *Victory*, he thought much less of *Within the Tides*. He wrote that “The Planter of Malata” was a failure (455); confessed his “serious doubts” about “The Partner” right from the start (Najder 422); compared the composition of “Because of the Dollars” to “prostituting his intellect” (CL5 322); and according to his wife Jessie, “The Inn of the Two Witches” was one of “those stories Conrad could never find a good word for” (Jessie Conrad 119).

Once the book was out, Conrad’s low opinion of it surfaced in remarks to perceptive friends and critics who knew he could do better. To John Galsworthy, for instance, Conrad frankly confessed that *Within the Tides* “was not so much art as a financial operation,” that the stories were “second rate efforts” undertaken when he

was stalled on larger works (CL5 455). Ironically, however, not even the financial reward for these efforts was sufficient to lift Conrad's spirits, because in the same letter he bitterly reflected that economic success had come to crown his more mediocre productions, not his early masterpieces like "Youth" or "Heart of Darkness." To more distant acquaintances, Conrad did not breathe a word about money, but he confirmed that the volume ranked low in his opinion, and he even blamed Dent for "insist[ing] on putting it out" (456).

Not all criticism was unfavorable, however, and naturally Conrad changed tack when the feedback was complimentary, or when self-criticism was not permissible. Thus, he did not gainsay his friend Robert Cunninghame Graham's companion, Elizabeth Dummett, when she conveyed her fond impressions of "Because of the Dollars;" on the contrary, Conrad confessed that he, too, had always had a particular "weakness for that story" (CL6 162).⁹ Likewise, to his friend Iris Wedgwood, before whom a frank assessment would have been insulting, because she was to be one of the volume's dedicatees, he imparted that he "cherish[ed] a particular feeling for that volume as a deliberate attempt on four different methods of telling a story" (CL5 439). This artistic rationale must have pleased him, because he used it as his main defensive argument in the "Author's Note," the last place, of course, where pronounced self-blame was inappropriate.

Conrad's artistic justification, however, cannot stand up to an examination of the volume's growth. For the stories, except perhaps for the last two, were independent side efforts, not deliberate experiments subordinated to a specific creative guideline. As a matter of fact, "The Partner" was originally meant to appear in *Twixt Land and Sea*, not *Within the Tides* (Najder 437). The latter compilation, as the independent growths of its stories evince, was a scattershot collection whose assembling owed little to consciously premeditated design and was dictated by the opportunity to profitably regroup hitherto uncollected stories. Consequently, one may safely assume that Conrad's justification was simply a smokescreen for marketing what he clearly saw as "second rate efforts" arbitrarily grouped into a volume which, in his own words, he did not regard "as of any importance in the body of [his] work" (CL5 455, 456).

He was not the only one to hold this view: *Within the Tides* seems to have proved invisible to subsequent critics. Indeed, it was virtually un-discussed until 1948, when F.R. Leavis memorably pulled it out of oblivion only to inter it again as "shockingly bad magazine stuff" (189). Thirty years later, Frederick Karl formulated an equally devastating opinion of the volume: he noted that *Within the Tides* contained "the very kind of marketplace work [Conrad] had skirted for the early part of his life," that it was "one of [Conrad's] weakest volumes, very possibly his worst" (726). Though modulating it somewhat, subsequent critics have generally agreed with Karl's judgment, invariably stressing the obvious link between the strong economic incentive

⁹ Conrad's claim may have been sincere, but if so, how unfortunate that he should have misquoted the volume's title, writing "*Between the Tides*" instead of *Within the Tides* (CL6 162).

behind the stories' compositions and the volume's intrinsic worth, which last has commonly been associated with the words *weak* and *trivial* (Watts, *Literary* 123; Watts, *Preface* 40).

Nevertheless, despite the general and long-standing agreement on the collection's weakness, some critics did find one or two things to salvage in the individual stories. "The Planter of Malata" for instance, though widely dismissed as "a sentimental melodrama or a failed romance" (315), nevertheless gained the approval of Jocelyn Baines, who claimed that it possessed "literary distinction" (472). Baines was also one of the few to think highly of "Because of the Dollars:" he contended that it was "a good, authentic story, based on personal knowledge, which vividly captures the disreputable element of life in the Eastern seas" (470). Such a view is exceptional, as virtually no one else has bothered commenting on the tale, except those critics who identified its intertextual allusions to *Victory*, allusions first mentioned by American reviewers, who had read *Victory* before *Within the Tides*.¹⁰

As for the good words that greeted "The Partner" in 1915, they have been replaced by mixed opinions. Najder was relieved to see that the tale was not included in *'Twi'xt Land and Sea* (437), and Baines wrote that it was "an obvious pot-boiler" (448). On the other hand, there has been a steady undertow of critics who have expressed their appreciation of the narrative. George Orwell wrote that it was "in essence a very fine story, though ... marred by the queer shyness or clumsiness which made it difficult for Conrad to tell a story straightforwardly in the third person" (388). And more recently, John Batchelor labeled it "an interesting and under-regarded narrative experiment" characterized by "a surprisingly high level of narrative sophistication and self-consciousness" (222, 221). What emerges from such qualified judgments is that the story positively surprises – but does not satisfy.

"The Inn of the Two Witches," generally treated with leniency by the amused critics of 1915, has been evaluated seriously and unsparingly ever since. Baines dismissed it as "a story more suitable for boys than for adults" (468), and Najder labeled it "a typical potboiler and probably the most trivial of [Conrad's] short stories" (442). At the other extreme, in Edith Birkhead's study of the tale of terror, "The Inn of the Two Witches" was received with ecstasy (195, 227). This rare enthusiasm owed to the fact that Birkhead examined it from one angle only: that of the tale of terror, a sensational category that could only be flattered to enlist the serious Conrad among its contributors. Virtually all other critics who impartially gauged it as a Conrad work were, on the other hand, merciless.

The only part of *Within the Tides* that has not been castigated by scholars is the "Author's Note:" its interesting reflections on the romanticization of personal experi-

¹⁰ For a contemporary comparison between the novel and the short story, see for instance *The Springfield Republican*, 20 February 1916, 15; for a modern examination of the intertextual relations between "Because of the Dollars" and other texts, among which *Victory*, see for instance Robert Hampson's "'Because of the Dollars' and the Already Written," *Conradiana* 34: 1–2 (2002), 95–106.

ence have usually figured in discussions on Conrad's romanticism.¹¹ But apart from this indulgence towards the preface, Leavis's view has been widely espoused. To sum up then, despite differing partialities for some stories and a general interest in the "Author's Note," most critics today agree that *Within the Tides* is one of Conrad's weakest volumes.

It might be well to conclude with an examination of the more practical side of the contemporary reception: the sales of *Within the Tides*, within the troubled literary market of 1915. Unsurprisingly, the latter, because of the war, saw fewer new books produced than in 1914 ("Current Notes" 101). Yet if the volume of publishing had decreased, the demand remained constant, both for books related to, and offering diversion from, the war (Potter 12–13). Such was, in a nutshell, the state of the market when *Within the Tides* was released by Dent in February, traditionally a slow month in terms of book sales (Eliot 36–39), and certainly not among the most lucrative months of 1915 for the book industry ("Current Notes" 103). Nevertheless, despite this infelicitous timing – for which Dent were by no means responsible,¹² despite the fierce competition from war-related books, and despite the fact that "for the most part," collections of short stories "did not sell" (Orel 18), the volume sold rather well. The first edition ran up to 3500 copies (Cagle 201), the same number as that of the first edition of the previous volume of stories, *'Twi'xt Land and Sea* (Najder 437); moreover the escapist contents of *Within the Tides* must have pleased some readers, because the book was reprinted two months later, in April. Apparently, the appetite for escapist literature did not diminish after the war, because in 1919 *Within the Tides* was reissued and, also, reprinted in Dent's *Wayfarer's Library* (Cagle 201–202), a collection advertised at its inception in 1913 as "a sincere and purposeful attempt to formulate a collection of books which shall adequately represent the romanticism and imaginativeness of our own time" (Orel 20). Meanwhile, on the other side of the Atlantic, the book had also been issued by Doubleday, in January 1916 (Cagle 204). But more importantly, a few months before the American publication, the work's appeal had somehow exceeded the boundaries of the English-speaking world, as Louis Conard published it in France, in his *Standard Collection of Latest Copyrighted*

¹¹ See for instance David Thorburn's *Conrad's Romanticism*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1974, 14, 15, 20–21, 82, 148–149; and also Ian Watt, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1979, 324.

¹² Dent advocated issuing the book in November 1914, one of the best months for books sales (Eliot 36), but Conrad's agent James Pinker insisted that the season be spring 1915 (James Dent to Pinker, 8 October 1914 [Berg]). At the time of Dent's letter, Conrad was trapped abroad because of the war; it is obviously for this reason that Pinker wanted to delay publication. However, there might have been another, more general reason, disclosed by Conrad as early as 10 November 1911: "I don't think it's to the advantage of my novels to appear before Xmas. They want longer reviews than the papers can give them at that season of the year" (CL4 504). Whatever the reason, publishing in the spring instead of the fall entailed a reduction in the amount of advertising, a loss against which Dent had warned Pinker (Dent to Pinker, 8 October 1914 [Berg]). It is therefore ironical that one of Conrad's few extant remarks about the publication of *Within the Tides* should have been, "I don't think Dent advertises *Tides* very well" (CL5 458).

Works by British and American Authors (Bibliographie de la France, part 3 ["Feuilleton"], 19 November 1915, 1243).

Conard's collection had been launched in July 1915 as a patriotic contribution to the war effort: its aim was to carry on the work of the Tauchnitz imprint, interrupted by the outbreak of the conflict (9 July 1915, 703). After successful negotiations with Conrad's agent, Conard published 3000 copies of *Within the Tides*, his first Conrad book, on 13 November in Paris (E. de Valcourt-Vermont to Pinker, 13 November 1915 [Berg]). A few months later, in early 1916, Conard would issue another Conrad book, *Victory*, in two volumes (*Catalogue* 130). Interestingly, during his visit to the front in 1916, Lord Northcliffe chanced precisely upon a copy of Conard's *Victory*, which he brought back to Conrad (Stape and Knowles 108). The presence of this copy in the trenches is unsurprising; according to the London *Times*, the troops wanted their readings to bring them "rest and distraction," and they preferred their books to be of the "least martial sort" (30 August 1915, 7; 13 April 1915, 6).

One may assume that some of the 3000 copies of Conard's *Within the Tides* suffered the same fate as his *Victory* and ended up at the front. One may even speculate, why not, that *Within the Tides*, in this or another edition, was among the Conrad "books" which, in the words of his wife Jessie, "had helped [soldiers] through many hours of pain and discomfort" (Jessie Conrad 13). If so, then it is a final consolation to imagine that *Within the Tides*, this volume politely criticized then and castigated now, may have succeeded in bringing unmitigated "distraction" and even joy to the trenches. There at least, its "intolerable ghastliness" and excessive violence were no doubt put into perspective; and its borderline melodrama and romanticism, for a short yet precious moment, properly appreciated.

ABBREVIATIONS

- CL Karl, Frederick R. and Laurence Davies, eds. *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*. 9 vols. to date. Cambridge: CUP, 1983–2008.
- Berg The Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, New York Public Library.

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