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CONRAD'S MARSEILLES

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Abstract: This article discusses the Marseilles period of Conrad's life, which is still shrouded in mystery. By consulting the Marseilles municipal archives and examining information culled from the local press for the years 1874–1878, the author attempts to determine what events in the life of Marseilles during that particular period may have found an echo in Conrad's works, and in what way these events could have influenced the personality of the young writer. The author sketches a vivid picture of everyday life in the Marseilles of the 1870s and recalls the principal events in the city's artistic life, suggesting that Conrad's first real experience of the opera and the theatre (and no doubt also of the fine arts) was gained in Marseilles. An analysis of all the available documents makes it possible to formulate the following conclusions:

1) The duel between M. George and Blunt, as described in *The Arrow of Gold*, had its origins in real life: this was the duel between two journalists — C. Hugues and J. Daime — which was then the talk of the town.

2) In drawing the character of Rita de Lastaola in *The Arrow of Gold*, Conrad most probably made use of several complementary models from real life: apart from Paula de Samoggy (mentioned by J. Allen), the model for Rita may well have been Mme Didier — the mistress of the well-known Marseilles painter G. Ricard, who himself was quite probably the real-life model for the character of Henry Allègre.

3) During the time when Conrad was in Marseilles the political situation in Spain had completely stabilized and it is hardly likely that Conrad himself could have taken part in any gun-running for the Spanish Carlists. Monsieur George's escapade may therefore be treated purely and simply as a reminiscence of the stories told by Provençal sailors who had earlier taken part in the smuggling expeditions of 1874–1875.

The final section of the article draws attention to possible Marseilles sources for *Falk*, *Heart of Darkness* and *An Outpost of Progress*. Virtually the entire storyline of *Falk* may be found in the Marseilles press, while the two African stories can be seen as a hypothetical refutation of the tales told by the "colonizer of the Congo" Henry Stanley, who in January 1878 was given a hero's welcome in Marseilles.

Keywords: Alfonso XII, Carlists, Don Carlos, *La table de Cracovie*, Marseilles, *The Arrow of Gold*, *The Mirror of the Sea*, the theatrical life of Marseilles, *Tremolino*

Reading the various biographies of Conrad, one has the impression that everything, or almost everything, has been done to piece together a complete record of his life. A closer reading of these stimulating books, however, leads one to suspect that some things may have been overlooked. There are still some unsolved mysteries

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concerning Joseph Conrad's biography — and not least the years he spent in Marseilles (1874–1878). As Zdzisław Najder observed in 1957:

> The mysteriousness of these months, which does not allow us to make a fuller reconstruction of Korzeniowski's emotional experiences, is irritating to say the least.[1]

To this day Conrad's biographers are divided on the matter of whether the young Konrad Korzeniowski did or did not take part in a duel,[2] or whether he was or was not involved in gun-running for the Spanish Carlists.[3] Nor can scholars agree on who exactly Conrad fell in love with at the age of twenty.[4]

The aim of the present article is not to solve these mysteries or to seek out evidence about Conrad's exact movements and the people he talked to, but rather to determine what events in Marseilles and what aspects of life in this city have left their traces in Conrad's work or have had an influence on the development of his personality. Let us not forget that Conrad arrived in Marseilles as a seventeen-year-old boy and left it as a twenty-one-year-old man. It was here that he probably fell in love for the first time and it was here that he gained his first experience of seafaring. Biographers have tended to concentrate on the young man's life at sea. His three voyages on board ships belonging to C. Déléstang have been examined in great detail,[5] as has the mystery of the *Tremolino* and that of the beautiful Rita de Lastaola in *The Arrow of Gold*. Very little attention, however, has been paid to the broader questions of life in Marseilles and the customs of its inhabitants — factors that could not have failed to make a significant impact on Conrad's personality.

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[1] Zdzisław Najder. "Conrad w Marsylii". [In:] *Wspomnienia i studia o Conradzie*. Ed. Barbara Kocówna. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1963, p. 426.

[2] Jean-Aubry accepts the hypothesis of Korzeniowski's duel with Blunt as a proven fact: Georges Jean-Aubry. *Joseph Conrad – Life & Letters*. London: Heinemann, 1927, vol. 1, p. 47; Z. Najder — on the basis of an analysis of Conrad's statements and T. Bobrowski's letter of 24th March 1879 to S. Buszczyński — suggests that Conrad might have attempted to commit suicide in 1878. Cf. Zdzisław Najder. *Joseph Conrad – A Life*. Transl. Halina Najder. Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2007, pp. 63–67.

[3] Recalling the basic facts of Spanish history in the 1870s, J. Baines argues that — among other things — in 1877 there was a truce between the Carlists and government forces and that a general amnesty for Carlists had been announced in the spring of that year. In view of this, Baines suggests that Conrad may have been delivering arms to the Basques. Cf. Jocelyn Baines. *Joseph Conrad. A Critical Biography*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1960, "The French Experience"; The traditional version — i.e. that Conrad was gun-running for the Carlists — is supported by (among others) H. Davies. Cf. H. Davies. "La dette de Conrad envers Marseille". *Marseille. Revue Municipale*, 1972 (VIII–IX), № 90, pp. 17–23.

[4] Jerry Allen discusses the matter of Conrad's love affair at length. Cf. Jerry Allen. *The Sea Years of Joseph Conrad*. London: Methuen, 1967. Zdzisław Najder for his part casts doubt on most of her hypotheses.

[5] Almost all Conrad's biographers — and in particular J. Baines — maintain that while he lived in Marseilles Conrad made three voyages on vessels belonging to Déléstang. Zdzisław Najder speaks of two voyages, treating the first one as a private affair.

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Konrad Korzeniowski left Cracow on 14th October 1874. Travelling via Vienna, Zurich, Geneva and Lyons, he arrived in Marseilles on 1st November. This was to be his home town for four years until his departure on 24th April 1878. In actual fact he spent less than 23 months in Marseilles, as for much of the time he was at sea, on board Déléstang's ships. The periods he spent on dry land were as follows:

1874	1½ months	(1st Nov. – 11th Dec.)
1875	1 month	(23rd May – 23rd June)
1876	over 6 months	(25th Dec. 1875 – 8th July 1876)
1877–1878	over 14 months	(15th Feb. 1877 – 24th Jan. 1878)

If, therefore, our intention is to examine the influence that Marseilles life had on Conrad, we must pay particular attention to the years 1876–1878, during which he spent over 20 months on land. For the moment, however, let us return to the young Konrad Korzeniowski's first contact with the great port city of Marseilles, to which he had come from the distant provinces of Poland.

What did Marseilles look like in 1874? The inhabitants of Marseilles are fond of stressing the city's ancient origins as a Greek colony, contrasting its history with that of 'barbarian' Paris (not without a measure of disdain) and recalling the beautiful names that writers have generously bestowed on it over the centuries. In ancient times Tacitus called Marseilles "the Athens of the Gauls." In 1860 the Marseilles writer J. Méry called the city "the daughter of the Phoenicians, the sister of Rome and the rival of Carthage" — the city which had "opened its gates to Julius Caesar and victoriously defended itself against Charles V."[6] Two years later H. Verne wrote that "Marseilles, being a neighbour of Italy and Spain and — thanks to the tales of travellers and sailors — also on familiar terms with Egypt, Asia and Greece, ought to become a centre of the fine arts".[7] In the 1870s Marseilles was still very much a "Gateway to the East" and had lost none of the semi-Levantine ambience that had once made such an impression on Alphonse de Lamartine, who in his *Adieu à la France et à Marseille en particulier* of 1832 called the city "the daughter of the Orient, the Athens of commerce."

What would have made the greatest impression on a young Polish newcomer to Marseilles? Above all its size. In the 1870s the city's population was about 330 000, whereas that of Cracow — Poland's former capital — was about six times smaller. For almost twenty years this seaside metropolis of Provence had been living through its golden age. The time of splendour that had begun with the visit of Napoleon III in 1852 had by no means faded away. A magnificent cathedral had been built at the entrance to the New Port. There was now a Stock Exchange. No expense had been spared to make the grand Avenue du Prado even grander. The New Port had been

[6] Joseph Méry. *Marseille et les marseillais*. Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1884.

[7] Henri Verne. *Promenades dans Marseille*. Marseille: Camoin frères, 1862, p. 24.

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greatly expanded. These were just a few indications of the city's rapidly growing prosperity. All this, however, was only part of the truth about this extraordinary place. The Marseilles of the 1870s was still very much a provincial city, as is amply shown by the fact that every morning and evening it was invaded by herds of goats! According to H. Bertin — whose chronicles of life in Marseilles during the 1870s are an invaluable resource — in this way the practically-minded inhabitants of the city ensured that they had a constant supply of fresh milk. In 1878 Bertin published a booklet entitled *Les heures marseillaises*. This publication — which is something of a curiosity — will, I think, allow us to acquaint ourselves with the Marseilles in which the young Konrad Korzeniowski lived. The summary that follows describes a typical 'day' in the life of the city during the 1870s:

— The city is awakened from its first sleep at about five o'clock, though the official wake-up call comes at six o'clock, when the bells of the church of Notre Dame de la Garde (the city's patron saint) begin to ring. Six o'clock is also the time when the first newspaper vendors make their appearance with "Le Sémaphore", "La Jeune République", "Le Citoyen" and "La Gazette du Midi". The first hotel carriages make their way to the railway station to meet guests from Paris arriving by train. The cafés open their doors.

— Seven o'clock is the time when people have breakfast and go off to work. It is also opening time for shops and bookshops.

— Eight o'clock is the time when postmen can be seen in the streets, wearing their green capes and caps with red badges, while civil servants hurry to their offices and second-hand booksellers begin to lay out their treasures. This is also the time when newspaper editorial offices begin work.

— Nine o'clock is the time when work begins at the Town Hall. At the window of the Mont-de-Piété there is already a long queue of poor people hoping to receive some financial assistance. There are also a lot of people at the poste restante counter.

— Ten o'clock is the time when Beauvau Street (the port centre of Marseilles) comes to life. Outside the offices of various shipping agencies there are numerous captains of Greek, Austrian, Italian, British and Swedish ships.

— Eleven o'clock is vermouth time. The cafés fill up with people and the Stock Exchange comes to life.

— Twelve o'clock is the lunch break. Life in the city slowly comes to a halt. In the streets of the city centre a stream of people makes its way to restaurants and eating places.

— One o'clock and the cafés are full to bursting. While drinking their coffee, the inhabitants of Marseilles indulge in their favourite pastime, which is playing dominoes. As Bertin writes:

> A foreigner who goes into any café between one and two o'clock will be deafened by a peculiar kind of general hubbub. At each table there are people playing dominoes, surrounded by a gallery of supporters whose task is to be with the players during each game, to weigh up the chances of each move and to foresee and explain the victories or defeats of the competitors. […] The inhabitants of Marseilles love the game of dominoes so much that I am convinced they would never — not for anything in the world — forsake the momentary fever of excitement which they experience while watching and handling those little pieces of bone during the coffee hour.[8]

— Two o'clock is the time when people go back to their work. [and so on]

[8] Horace Bertin. *Les heures marseillaises*. Marseille: Laveirarié, 1878, p. 79.

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This short chronicle of a typical day in the Marseilles of 1878 might well serve as an anecdotal commentary to *The Arrow of Gold*. In those days Marseilles was certainly one of the biggest ports in the world. About 20,000 ships sailed into its harbour in 1866 alone. The city was immortalised in literature by the novelist Alexandre Dumas (and in particular his *Count of Monte Cristo*) and in the fine arts by the painter Alphonse Moutte, who left an invaluable collection of numerous sketches and paintings depicting life in Marseilles during the 1870s.

The young newcomer from Poland was welcomed to Marseilles by Baptistin Solary, who was a friend of Wiktor Chodźko. Solary introduced Korzeniowski to the shipowner C. Déléstang and acted as his guide to the city and the port. It was he, no doubt, who took him on his first visit to the Café Bodoul — a name that often crops up in connection with Conrad's biography, and with the famous Carlist gun-running escapade in particular. Although the latter is 'common knowledge', the same cannot be said of the mysteries of this café, and so we will end this part of our investigation with an anecdote on the subject.

The Café Bodoul was in the Rue Saint-Ferréol, which is in the city centre. The premises now house a shop and only the "Bodoul" sign remains. It was not an exclusive café and was nowhere near as fashionable as the famous Café Turc. A fairly modest establishment, it was the meeting place of royalists. It was founded in 1789 and — according to local police records — was the scene of numerous disputes which ended in duels, the most famous of which involved a certain Floquin — who, having insulted an officer by snatching a newspaper from him, later killed him in a duel. No doubt Conrad went there during the first days of his stay in Marseilles, if only out of curiosity — accompanied perhaps by Solary — in order to see one of the city's most famous attractions — *La table de Cracovie* (the Cracow table). A Cracow table in distant Marseilles? What could this be? This must have intrigued any newcomer from Cracow.

In 1869 Horace Bertin published an anecdotal history of the cafés of Marseilles in which we read that the Cracow table in the Café Bodoul was so called because "those habitués of the café who sat at this table had a particular fondness for telling stories and anecdotes." Bertin adds that many prominent members of the artistic world would sit at this table whenever they visited Marseilles. Castil-Blaze in particular found the experience highly enjoyable. Every evening he would tell the most improbable stories and the silliest of tales.[9]

For an explanation of the mystery of the actual name of the Cracow table we must go to the memoirs of J. Cauvière, who for many years was the editor of the "Gazette du Midi," which was then the main newspaper in Marseilles. In the 1880s he published several volumes of reminiscences entitled *Le Caducée. Souvenirs marseillais, provençaux et autres*. According to Cauvière, the *table de Cracovie* was a throwback to the late eighteenth-century Parisian custom of gathering in the forecourt of the Palais-Royal — where every day a cannon was fired at noon to enable Parisians to set their clocks and watches — in order to hear the latest news from around the world.

[9] Horace Bertin. *Histoire anecdotique des cafés de Marseille*. Marseille: Bellue, 1869, pp. 32–33.

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The 'purveyors of news' would stand under a chestnut tree which grew there. This was the time when Poland was being successively partitioned, and so the country was often 'in the news'. As a great deal of this news (which came from Cracow via Vienna) later turned out to be false, a play on the words *craque* (a fib / a tall story) and *Cracovie* (Cracow) soon arose and before long the chestnut tree itself was given the name *l'arbre de Cracovie* (The Cracow Tree). Indeed, one of the Parisians gathered there would regularly deny the veracity of any piece of news that was brought to him. And so — according to Cauvière — to accommodate the great love of anecdotes that is so typical of the inhabitants of Provence, the Café Bodoul established its *table de Cracovie*, around which the local *cracovistes* told their rather confabulated, spicy and as often as not improvised stories.[10] The *cracovistes* of Marseilles included in their number the city's most prominent men of art and literature, the most famous of whom was G. Bénédit, who wrote a poem entitled *Le jeu de dominos* that was specially 'commissioned' by his friends at the Café Bodoul. While we cannot say that the young Conrad ever sat at this table, this Polish 'connection' in faraway Marseilles could not have escaped his attention.

2

In his biography of Conrad Jean-Aubry writes of the young Korzeniowski's friendship with Dominic Cervoni, the first officer on the *Saint-Antoine*. They would meet at the Café de la Colonne Trajane, which was run by the beautiful Léonore (known as the 'Roman girl'), who was fond of Dominic. Jean-Aubry also notes that Conrad sometimes took Dominic to the opera (i.e. the Grand Théâtre) and remarks that the writer's fond reminiscences of operas by Rossini, Verdi and Meyerbeer in later life must surely date back to the days he spent in Marseilles.[11] In a letter to J. Galsworthy dated 18th June 1910 Conrad speaks warmly of the operas of Meyerbeer. He also mentions operas in letters to E. Garnett and in his volume entitled *Some Reminiscences*. A direct trace of Conrad's visits to the opera can be found in *The Arrow of Gold:* during the main character's first meeting with Mills and Blunt at a café, the painter Prax suddenly bursts in wearing

> "[…] a sort of mediaeval costume very much like what Faust wears in the third act. I have no doubt it was meant for a purely operatic Faust. A light mantle floated from his shoulders. He strode theatrically up to our table […]."[12]

Where could Conrad have seen operas? Certainly not in Cracow. He could only have seen them in Marseilles, which at that time was one of the world's most vibrant

[10] Justin Cauvière. *Le Caducée. Souvenirs marseillais, provençaux et autres*. Marseille: Marius Olive, 1886, vol. IX, p. 261.

[11] Georges Jean-Aubry. *Vie de Conrad*. Paris: Gallimard, 1947, pp. 63–64.

[12] Joseph Conrad. *The Arrow of Gold. A Story Between Two Notes*. New York: Doubleday, 1924, p. 13.

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centres of opera, hosting world-famous singers in its magnificent opera house — the Grand Théâtre. Like all southern Europeans, the inhabitants of Marseilles loved opera. Adolphe Nourrit was a great success here in the 1830s, as was Anton Rubinstein in the 1870s. As J. Méry remarked, in Marseilles "all the workers know *Moses*, *La favorite*, *Norm*a and *William Tell* by heart."[13] In Saint-Jean, which is the oldest district of Marseilles, for long decades it was customary to sing arias from *William Tell*, *Zampa*, *Robert le diable* and *La Juive* after evening supper.[14] In the 1870s the City's favourite composers were Rossini, Meyerbeer, Bellini, Donizetti, Weber and Verdi.

The theatre was also very much alive in Marseilles during this period. Plays were performed not only at the Grand Théâtre, but also at the Théâtre du Gymnase, the Théâtre-Valette, the Théâtre-Chave, the Théâtre de l'Alcazar and others. It was opera, however, that dictated the city's artistic temperature. On 15th November 1874 — a fortnight after Conrad's arrival — Gounod's *Faust* was performed, with Bacquié in the role of Mephisto. At the Grand Théâtre during that season *Faust* alternated with Donizetti's *La favorite*, Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots*, Rossini's *Moses in Egypt* and Verdi's *La Traviata*. During the seasons of 1875–76 and 1877–78, when Conrad was able to spend more time on dry land, he had a choice of *Les Huguenots*, *La favorite*, *La Juive*, *William Tell*, *Faust*, *Robert le diable*, *L'Africaine* and *Aida*, as well as three comic operas: *Carmen*, *Fra Diavolo* and *Piccolino*.

From 1876 the star of the Marseilles opera ensemble was a world-famous Polish tenor — Władysław Mierzwiński (1848–1909). After studying music in Italy he bagan his operatic career with the role of Raul in *Les Huguenots*. He sang in Paris until 1875, after which he sang for one season in Lyons and for two seasons in Marseilles. After that came the great opera stages of London, La Scala, Madrid, New York, Vienna and St. Petersburg. Mierzwiński also gave several performances in Warsaw, Lwów and Cracow. In Marseilles his roles included Robert in *Robert le diable*, Faust, Rudolf in *William Tell* and Vasco da Gama in *L'Africaine*. At the Grand Théâtre his fellow soloists were the baritone Dumestre, the tenor Eyrand, the excellent mezzosoprano Leavington and the equally excellent sopranos de Strucklé and Priola. Pride of place, however, undoubtedly went to Mierzwiński, whose earnings were correspondingly higher.[15]

It is more than likely that Conrad heard Mierzwiński in Marseilles. In the 1877–1878 season alone — when Conrad was in the city all the time — there were 12 performances of *Faust*, 10 of *Aida*, 8 of *La Juive*, 9 of *L'Africaine*, 6 of *Les Huguenots* and 5 of *Carmen*. What seems certain is that it was in the musically recep-

[13] Méry, *ed. cit.*, p. 41.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 75.

[15] Thanks to documents preserved in the Marseilles municipal archives, we know which roles were sung by which singers at the Grand Théâtre — and also how much each singer was paid. The average salary of a ballet dancer was 500 francs. An opera soloist earned between 2000 and 3000 francs. Mierzwiński alone received a regular salary of between 5000 and 6000 francs a month.

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tive atmosphere of Marseilles that he first experienced what it was to see the performance of a great opera and hear singing of the highest calibre.[16]

3

Hardly any of the characters of Conrad's novels belong to the world of the fine arts. There was simply no place for them in the company of seafarers. In *The Arrow of Gold*, however, there is the sculptor Prax and we hear a lot about the life and work of Henry Allègre. Moreover, the personality of Rita de Lastaola — the central character of the novel — has been formed in the world of art. Let us therefore take a look at this particular sphere of life in Marseilles.

In the nineteenth century Marseilles did not produce any artists of worldwide renown, unlike the nearby towns of Aix-en-Provence, which produced Cézanne and Zola, or Arles and Saint-Rémy, which attracted van Gogh in the 1880s. In France, however, the work of Marseilles painters was held in high regard, to mention but the seascapes of J.B. Olive and V. Coste or the masterly portraits of G. Ricard. At the beginning of the 1870s a "Cercle Artistique" was founded in Marseilles in order to organize art exhibitions and to generally stimulate the city's artistic life. In 1874 the Artistic Circle's one art salon exhibited the work of landscape painters from Provence (including Chauvier, Vignier, Fressinet and Rave) together with paintings by T. Jourdan, E. Légier and H. Baza. In 1876 the Circle exhibited paintings by, among others, Delacroix, Corot, Courbet and Bonanata; in 1878 there was an exhibition of drawings and sketches by Van Dyck and Rembrandt.

While we cannot know whether Conrad visited any of these exhibitions, we can be sure that he saw the work of lesser masters — Richter, Légier, Ponson, Bompart, César de Cock and A. Moutte — in the windows of two private art galleries that were opened in 1877 in the Rue Saint-Ferréol, just by the Café Bodoul. We may therefore presume that — to a certain extent — Conrad was acquainted with the world of fine art in Marseilles.

4

Reading *Some Reminiscences*, *The Arrow of Gold* and *The Mirror of the Sea*, we are drawn into the controversy surrounding Conrad's so-called Carlist escapade —

[16] Conrad may also have heard soloists from the Parisian opera world. In November 1877 the celebrated tenor Duchesne sang in Flotow's *Martha*. In January 1878 Flaure — another tenor from Paris — sang in *Faust* and *Hamlet*. In September 1877 Conrad also had the opportunity to see a performance of *The Marriage of Figaro* by Beaumarchais given by the actors of the Parisian Odéon at the Théâtre du Gymnase. In February 1878 he might have seen the famous Coquelin the elder playing in Molière's comedies at the Théâtre-Valette.

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a somewhat complex affair and probably the most mysterious episode in the author's life.

Several biographers have dicussed this romantic adventure. J. Allen claims to have found the model on which Conrad based the fictional Doña Rita, the erstwhile shepherdess from the Basque country who is the romantic friend of the painter H. Allègre. In real life — according to Allen — she was none other than the beautiful Hungarian actress Paula de Samoggy, whom the pretender to the Spanish throne Don Carlos is said to have met in Vienna in 1876. Don Carlos took Paula with him to Paris, where she acted as his ambassador. Allen claims that for several months Conrad had a romantic relationship with her in Marseilles, which explains why he undertook the risky business of supplying arms to the Carlists fighting against King Alfonso XII.

While basically supporting Allen's views, J. Baines suggests that the arms were delivered not to the Carlists (as we read in *The Arrow of Gold*), but to the Basques. Zdzisław Najder for his part accepts the view that the young Korzeniowski was gun-running for the Carlists, but rejects all talk of Paula de Samoggy being the model for Rita de Lastaola. He also argues that the Carlist ecapade was followed not by a duel, but by a botched suicide attempt on the part of the author in 1878.

The hypotheses put forward by these scholars alone would seem to undermine the veracity of Conrad's claim — made at the age of 63 in his preface (*Author's Note* — 1920) to *The Arrow of Gold* — that:

> […] What the story of the *Tremolino* in its anecdotic character has in common with the story of "The Arrow of Gold" is the quality of initiation (through an ordeal which required some resolution to face) into the life of passion. In the few pages at the end of "The Mirror of the Sea" and in the whole volume of "The Arrow of Gold", that and no other is the subject offered to the public. The pages and the book form together a complete record; and the only assurance I can give my readers is, that as it stands here with all its imperfections it is given to them complete.
>
> I venture this explicit statement because, amidst much sympathetic appreciation, I have detected here and there a note, as it were, of suspicion. Suspicion of facts concealed, of explanations held back, of inadequate motives. But what is lacking in the facts is simply what I did not know, and what is not explained is what I did not understand myself, and what seems inadequate is the fault of my imperfect insight. And all that I could not help. In the case of this book I was unable to supplement these deficiencies by the exercise of my inventive faculty. It was never very strong; and on this occasion its use would have seemed exceptionally dishonest. It is from that ethical motive and not from timidity that I elected to keep strictly within the limits of unadorned sincerity and to try to enlist the sympathies of my readers without assuming lofty omniscience or descending to the subterfuge of exaggerated emotions.[17]

How can we reconcile these claims with the views of Conrad's biographers? After searching the archives and making a careful analysis of *The Arrow of Gold* and *The Mirror of the Sea* Zdzisław Najder comes to the following conclusion:

> The striking discrepancies that occur in *The Arrow of Gold* and *The Mirror of the Sea* between accounts of the same facts and of the same persons should alone suffice as a warning not

[17] Conrad. *The Arrow of Gold. A Story Between Two Notes*, *ed. cit.*, pp. viii–ix.

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> to treat these books as historical records, especially in view of the fact that Conrad vouches for their authenticity. […] It is better not to believe a word of it.[18]

It would seem to me that in this case the best option would be to make a fair interpretation of the words that Conrad uses in his preface. Although biographers such as Jean-Aubry and Najder identify Conrad with the character of Monsieur George in *The Arrow of Gold* and *The Mirror of the Sea*, we find no trace of any such declaration in the author's preface. What Conrad emphasizes is the authenticity of the events that are described in these books — not that he himself is one of the protagonists. All he says is that these stories grew out of his reminiscences of life in Marseilles, which is not the same as saying that he is Monsieur George.

Given that the events described in *The Arrow of Gold* and *The Mirror of the Sea* actually took place in Marseilles, we must now determine whether the young Korzeniowski could have taken part in them — and, if so, whether or not he did. In her richly documented study J. Allen presents the figure of Paula de Samoggy, who is as mysterious as the Rita de Lastaola of *The Arrow of Gold*. The only problem is that these are two very different women. One is a Hungarian actress and the lover of Don Carlos, while the other is a Basque shepherdess and the romantic friend of H. Allègre. The only explanation for this discrepancy, it seems, would be that in drawing the character of Doña Rita, Conrad used at least two models. One of these may indeed have been Paula de Samoggy. The other may be found indirectly through the character of H. Allègre, whose fictional biography coincides with that of the painter Louis-Gustave Ricard (and with which Conrad was undoubtedly already familiar during his time in Marseilles). Like Allègre, Ricard was an extremely wealthy portrait painter. He was born in Marseilles in 1823 and died in Paris (where he had a studio in the Rue Duperré) in 1873. Ricard was a close friend of Charles Beaudelaire. Although he never achieved universal fame, he had a limited circle of admirers and the mere fact of having been chosen to sit for a portrait by him was enough to gain entry to the salons of the intellectual elite.

Two of Ricard's works are worthy of note: the portrait of Blunt (which happens to be the name of one of the main characters of *The Arrow of Gold*) and that of his inseparable companion Madame Didier. The description of the latter portrait by A. Gouiraud is very reminiscent of the "Byzantine Empress" of Conrad's novel:

> In an atmosphere of melancholy illuminated by the gold of her blond hair, through the mysteriousness of her tender, captivating eyes, which are sweetly provocative to the highest degree, we see a woman who is more than beautiful and whose radiance is fascinating — an incomparable woman whose skin gleams with a pearly lustre around her eyelashes. Who was she? Where was she from? A Slav, a countess? Certainly a great lady. A spy, some would say. Did it matter? The painter was madly in love with her. And today, when both lovers are dead,

[18] Najder. "Conrad w Marsylii", *ed. cit.*, pp. 414–415. Najder says this after recalling that in Bobrowski's letter to Buszczyński of 24th March 1879 we read that the deckhands in Marseilles used to call the young Korzeniowski "Mr. George." This, however, does not prove that Conrad identified himself with a fictional character bearing his own real-life maritime nickname.

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> love lives on in those eyes, which are so noble and so affectionate. Life remains in the penetrating power of her disarming gaze.[19]

The romantic story of the love that Madame Didier and Louis-Gustave Ricard had for each other may well have served as a complementary model for that of Doña Rita and Henry Allègre in *The Arrow of Gold*. In the Marseilles of the 1870s the name of this painter was on everyone's lips. Two exhibitions of his work were held: in 1873 (just after his death) and in 1877 (at the art salon of the Cercle Artistique).

Let us now move on to the matter of the young Korzeniowski's duel. On the basis of a letter from Conrad's uncle T. Bobrowski to S. Buszczyński, Zdzisław Najder has put forward the hypothesis that there never was any duel. If that is so, then why is there a duel in *The Arrow of Gold*? The answer would seem to be that this duel is a literary transposition of a famous duel that was fought between two Marseilles journalists: Clovis Hugues (who was a friend of Conrad's) and Joseph Daime. The latter, who wrote for the Bonapartist "L'Aigle," had insulted the wife of the former, who wrote for "La Jeune République." The duel took place in Montrebon on 3rd December 1877 and ended in Daime's death. Hugues was abandoned by his seconds and was forced to take refuge in Genoa, from where he sent articles on the subject of the duel to the newspapers in Marseilles. He also sent petitions to the government asking to be declared innocent. He was acquitted after a much publicized trial in February 1878, during which the seconds and the doctor who had been present at the duel testified in his favour.

Detailed reports of the duel — which was fought with sabres — were carried in the "Petit Marseillais" of 14th December 1877 and in the "Jeune République" of 30th December 1877. Daime wounded Hugues in the right hand. Despite his wound, however, Hugues killed Daime at their third encounter. Monsieur George's duel with Blunt in Conrad's *The Arrow of Gold* took a strikingly similar course:

> Monsieur George fired on the word and, whether luck or skill, managed to hit Captain Blunt in the upper part of the arm which was holding the pistol. That gentleman's arm dropped powerless by his side. But he did not drop his weapon. There was nothing equivocal about his determination. With the greatest deliberation he reached with his left hand for his pistol and taking careful aim shot Monsieur George through the left side of his breast.[20]

It would therefore seem that — writing his novel forty years after hearing and reading about the duel between Hugues and Daime — Conrad used the event as an ending for *The Arrow of Gold*. Once again, what we are probably dealing with here is not something in which Conrad was directly involved, but rather something that he had remembered from the social chronicles of Marseilles in the late 1870s.

We now come to the matter of the young Korzeniowski's involvement in gunrunning for the Carlists. Although most biographers — on the evidence of *The Arrow of Gold* — accept this as a proven fact, the matter has not been fully explained. Nor

[19] André Gouiraud. *Les peintres provençaux*. Paris: Ollendorff, 1901, p. 87.

[20] Conrad, *The Arrow of Gold. A Story Between Two Notes*, *ed. cit.*, p. 346 (Second Note).

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can it be explained here. What we can do, however, is draw attention to certain aspects of the matter.

To begin with, there is no hard evidence to show that the young Korzeniowski did indeed have any links with the Carlists. It is hardly likely that the idea of gun-running for them could have come from his employer, the shipowner Déléstang, or his employer's friends. If anything, the gun-running escapade would seem to have been a sheer accident of history — embellished, no doubt, at the *table de Cracovie* of the Café Bodoul. Indeed, given that the great majority of people in Marseilles were then republicans, the chances that a newcomer like Conrad might espouse the royalist cause of the Carlists were rather slim. As likely as not he was neither a republican nor a royalist. If Conrad really did take part in a gun-running expedition, it was as a sailor and probably nothing more than that.

In the 1870s Marseilles would seem to have mirrored the politics of France as a whole. The main political struggle was between legitimists and republicans. The legitimist cause was supported by "La Gazette du Midi" (which in 1877 had a circulation of 5,000) and "Le Citoyen" (with a circulation of 6,000), while the republican cause was supported by "Le Sémaphore" (with a circulation of 7,000) and the evening newspaper "Le Petit Marseillais" (with a circulation of 30,000). Bonapartists were in a definite minority, as their newspaper — "Le Journal de Marseille" — had a circulation of only 2,000. The Carlists of Marseilles, who supported the claims of Don Carlos to the Spanish throne, would seem to have come exclusively from the ranks of the legitimists, with whom the young Korzeniowski had links for a short period of time.[21]

During the few years that Conrad spent in Marseilles the local press carried detailed reports of the fighting in nearby Spain. A perusal of the popular "Le Petit Marseillais" alone would have sufficed to gain a fairly good understanding of the situation. News from the front reached Marseilles every day. Sometimes we read of the victories of the royal forces of Alfonso XII, while at other times we read of the victories of the Carlists. Now and then there is some information about the attitude of the French government to the events in Spain. A fortnight before Conrad's arrival in Marseilles the "Petit Marseillais" carried an editorial — bearing the suggestive title *Les doléances espagnoles* (Spanish grievances) — which was devoted to a Spanish diplomatic note that had been sent to the French government to protest against French political support for the Carlists and in particular to demand a halt to "the contraband of war", i.e. arms shipments to the rebels. In the editorial we read:

> The Spanish coasts are much more suited to smuggling than the Pyrenean border. Shipowners from Liverpool, Hamburg and other important ports know this perfectly well. They also know that Spanish cruisers, which could hinder the supply of arms to the Carlists much more

[21] It is interesting to note that in 1834 the French government created a Foreign Legion battalion made up of Polish political exiles. This Polish battalion was sent first to Algeria, then — in 1835 — to Spain, where its mission was to support the Regent María Cristina in her struggle against the forces of the pretender Don Carlos. The battalion distinguished itself during the battle of Bilbao in 1837. It would have been ironic, to say the least, if — forty years later — the young Korzeniowski had been involved in gun-running for the Carlists.

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> effectively than French customs officers, act with such circumspection that they return to port at the least sign of bad weather. Foreign shipowners take advantage of these favourable circumstances in order to pursue their trade in arms with the Carlists — a trade that without a doubt is no less lucrative than that in cotton.[22]

Reading between the lines of this editorial, we can easily find information about the practices of the local shipowners of Marseilles. On 1st November 1874 — the day of Conrad's arrival — the same newspaper brought news of arms deliveries for the Carlists in Vera. In 1875, however, the political situation in Spain underwent significant change. At the beginning of January the Bourbon monarchy was restored, with Alfonso XII as King. France promptly recognized the new royal government of Spain and on 7th January Alfonso XII himself arrived in Marseilles (from Paris) in order to be taken to Spain by the Spanish navy. The political situation in Spain gradually became more stable. In the spring of 1877 Alfonso XII proclaimed a general amnesty for Carlists and army deserters. A sign of the return of good-neighbourly relations between France and Spain was the news (which readers of "Le Petit Marseillais" saw on 20th April 1877) that Spain had offered to build a bullring in Paris for the World Exhibition of 1878. Correspondents' reports from Spain were now devoted almost exclusively to such mundane matters as the agricultural exhibition held in Madrid in May 1877 or the carnival in Barcelona. Only here and there do we find any mention of the Carlists — and then only to hear of their gradual demise. On 24th May 1877 the "Petit Marseillais" reported that the French government had expelled Don Carlos from France on receiving a diplomatic note from the Spanish ambassador demanding his expulsion. The Pretender left Paris for his brother's residence in Graz. On 3rd July 1877 the newspaper brought news of the arrest of three prominent Carlists: General Lagunero, the deputy Muñoz and the former head of the Carlist government Ruiz Zorilla. That year's December issues of "Le Petit Marseillais" carried articles about the marriage plans of Alfonso XII and on 28th January 1878 came reports of the Spanish royal wedding, together with news of the opening of a railway connection between Marseilles and Barcelona.

Given the realities of the situation in Spain — as chronicled above in the popular Marseilles newspaper "Le Petit Marseillais" — we must now ask ourselves when the young Korzeniowski could have taken part in the Carlist gun-running escapade decribed in *The Arrow of Gold* and *The Mirror of the Sea*. Conrad's biographers have always held that this could only have happened between 15th February 1877 and 24th April 1878, i.e. during his last stay in Marseilles. However — as we have seen — from the beginning of 1877 there was no more fighting in Spain. In May of the same year Don Carlos was expelled from France and shortly afterwards his closest aides were arrested. The French and Spanish governments were now on the best of terms and from January 1878 there was a normal railway connection between Barcelona and Marseilles.

Our doubts multiply when we search the Marseilles police archives for this period. In the *Archives départementales* there is a file (№ M6-3450) on the local Carlists.

[22] "Le Petit Marseillais", 14th October 1874.

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Going through the extremely interesting documents which it contains, we find the following information:

— 21st August 1874: The police superintendent (*commissaire de police*) informs the city *préfet* that collections of money are being organized in legitimist circles to buy arms for the Carlist forces.

— 6th December 1874: The police superintendent informs the city *préfet* that the Carlist Committee is headed by Count Castellane and that the committee has twenty members.

— 22nd December 1874: The police superintendent informs the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the arrival in Marseilles of 65 armed Carlists from Seville.

— 27th November / 2nd December / 12th December 1874: The Spanish Consul repeatedly demands that sanctions be taken against members of the Carlist Committee and high-ranking Carlists living in Marseilles (Santés in particular).

— 27th April / 3rd June 1875: The Spanish Consul demands that the *préfet* take sanctions against traders (Zavoé, Coqarère and Doré) supplying arms to the Carlists. In May and June 1875 the police carry out thorough searches of ships sailing in the direction of Spain.

And with that the police reports come to an end. What they show is that arms were indeed being shipped to the Carlists from Marseilles … between 1874 and 1875. Neither in the press, nor in police archives do we find the slightest trace or mention of any gun-running between 1877 and 1878. In 1874, on the contrary, there was much talk of Spanish cruisers chasing French ships carrying cargoes of military contraband to Spain — for example the *Niève*, which in October 1874 was forced to take shelter in Bayonne; or the *Pionnier* and the *Congrès*, which came under fire from Spanish cruisers at the beginning of November that same year. From 1875, however, everything changes and there is hardly any talk of gun-running at all.

It is therefore hardly surprising that some scholars have expressed their doubts as to the veracity of Conrad's adamant claim — made in the 1920 *Author's Note* to *The Arrow of Gold* — that the events described in the novel actually took place. Without deciding one way or the other, all we can say is that if Conrad did indeed take part in a mission to supply arms to the Carlists during the years 1876–1878, he was certainly one of the very last people to do so and the mission itself — an echo, perhaps, of the great transactions that had taken place during the previous two years — was doomed to failure. And, of course, it may well be that the adventures recounted in *The Arrow of Gold* and *The Mirror of the Sea* are just a literary version of tales told by Marseilles sailors who had taken part in the gun-running during the years 1874–1875. A broad understanding of the words "complete record" and "unadorned sincerity" (i.e. truthfulness) as meaning that the events did take place — but that the author himself was not necessarily involved in them — may be the only way to solve this problem.

5

Conrad's arrival in Marseilles was his first step into the wide world. His reminiscences of that time in *The Arrow of Gold* and *The Mirror of the Sea* (i.e. in *Tremolino*) sparkle with the radiance of youthful Romanticism. This was, after all — as Conrad

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himself writes — a time of "initiation (through an ordeal which required some resolution to face) into the life of passion."[23] It was in Marseilles that Conrad became a sailor. And Marseilles was also where he gained his first experience of life in the adult world.

Finally, let us turn our attention to some other works by Conrad: *Falk*, *An Outpost Of Progress* and *Heart of Darkness*. The first of these — *Falk* — is not for people of a nervous disposition, as it analyses the phenomenon of cannibalism and explores the interesting (albeit very difficult) moral and ethical issues that it raises. It was almost certainly in Marseilles that Conrad first acquainted himself with this subject, as from time to time it was in the news and his sailor friends in particular were bound to talk about it, either at sea or in a Marseilles café. For seafarers at that time cannibalism at sea was a problem that was sometimes all too real, as is shown by the following news items taken from the newspaper "Le Petit Marseillais":

— On 5th January 1875, in an article entitled *Un Italien mangé par des Allemands (Italian eaten by Germans)*, we read:

> Berlin newspapers have been giving horrific accounts of a terrible tragedy that took place in the Indian Ocean and in which two Germans played a particularly gruesome role. The crew of the merchant ship *Euxin* took to the lifeboats after their ship caught fire. In one of the lifeboats there were six people — three Britons, two Germans and one Italian. After twenty-six days of torment and terrible suffering, one of the Germans, going by the name of Müller, suggested that they draw lots to choose who would be eaten by the others. The lot fell on the Italian, who was duly eaten.

— On 26th March 1876, in an article entitled *Un drame en mer (Drama at Sea)*, we read about the fate of the crew of the *Grande Bretagne*. The ship was carrying a cargo of wood when it fell victim to an Atlantic storm. After the death of the captain's two sons, all thirteen members of the crew took to the lifeboat. Soon afterwards they spotted a passing steamer, but failed to get it to stop. The crew began to eat the corpses of their dead colleagues. Ultimately ten of them survived and were taken by the *Greta* to San Francisco.

— On 7th March 1877, in an article entitled *Horribles scènes de cannibalisme en mer* (*Sickening Scenes of Cannibalism at Sea*) we read of the fate of the crew of the *Maria* from Belfort. The ship, manned by a crew of fourteen, was carrying a cargo of wood from Deboy to Britain when it was damaged during a storm. After seven days it ran aground and only the mast and part of the stern was above water. The *City of Montréal* passed by, but did not stop to rescue the shipwrecked sailors. The first death among the crew came after two weeks and was soon followed by others. Those who were still alive began to eat the corpses of their dead friends. On 9th January 1877, after thirty-three days, the two remaining survivors — an officer and a young Irish seaman — were spotted by the crew of the *Gambia*, who took them on board. Four hours later the officer died, leaving the twenty-year-old Irishman — who began to make a rapid recovery — as the sole survivor.

[23] Conrad, *The Arrow of Gold. A Story Between Two Notes*, *ed. cit.*, p. ix.

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These three press cuttings alone would provide ample material for *Falk* — Conrad's story about the tragedy of the *Borgemester Dahl*. The basic ingredients are all there: the Indian Ocean setting, the ship carrying a cargo of wood, the drawing of lots, the German sailors and … the sole surviving crew member. As we can see, Conrad may already have begun to consider the moral ramifications of cannibalism when he was a young sailor in Marseilles.

Conrad's 'African' works were written in the wake of his unsuccessful expedition to the Congo in 1890. Here we might add that Conrad may well have begun to think of undertaking such a journey while he was still a young sailor in Marseilles, where the 'discoverer' of the Congo Henry Stanley was given an enthusiastic reception on 14th January 1878. The local press carried extensive reports of the completion of yet another expedition by Stanley, who — after rescuing Livingstone — had spent the last four years searching for the sources of the Nile and the River Congo. Stanley described his journey — during which he travelled from Zanzibar to Lake Victoria, discovered Lake Edward, explored Lake Tanganyika and traced the course of the River Congo to the Atlantic — in a book entitled *Through the Dark Continent* (published in 1878 and translated into Polish in 1879). In 1890, after his next African expedition (to rescue Emin Pasha), Stanley published a richly illustrated book in two volumes entitled *In Darkest Africa*. Stanley's successes as a 'Colonizer of the Congo' may well have influenced Conrad's own decision to take part in an African 'expedition' and it may be that his later 'African' works were written in opposition, as it were, to those of Stanley. This, however, is a question that cannot be discussed here.[24]

Marseilles played a significant role in Conrad's life. In later years he paid two more visits to the city, but the memory of those happy, youthful days in sunny Provence, which he had spent in the company of the people he had got to know there — important and less important, politicians and artists, but above all sailors — was always fresh in his mind. Let us therefore conclude with a short passage from *Some Reminiscences* that is devoted to the sailors of Marseilles:

> They were hospitable souls, these sturdy Provençal seamen. Under the general designation of *le petit ami de Baptistin* I was made the guest of the Corporation of Pilots, and had the freedom of their boats night or day. And many a day and a night too did I spend cruising with these rough, kindly men, under whose auspices my intimacy with the sea began. Many a time "the little friend of Baptistin" had the hooded cloak of the Mediterranean sailor thrown over him by their honest hands while dodging at night under the lee of Chateau d'If on the watch for the lights of ships. Their sea-tanned faces, whiskered or shaved, lean or full, with the intent wrinkled sea-eyes of the pilot-breed, and here and there a thin gold hoop at the lobe of a hairy ear,

[24] In the first chapter of *Some Reminiscences* Conrad writes:

It was in 1868, when nine years old or thereabouts, that while looking at a map of Africa of the time and putting my finger on the blank space then representing the unsolved mystery of that continent, I said to myself with absolute assurance and an amazing audacity which are no longer in my character now:

"When I grow up I shall go *there*."

Cf. Joseph Conrad. *A Personal Record*. Ed. Zdzisław Najder and John Stape. Cambridge: CUP, 2008, p. 26. The "blank space" in question would seem to have been the Congo. Here we might note that were it not for the successes of 'colonizers' such as Stanley, Conrad's own African journey would have been unthinkable.

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bent over my sea-infancy. The first operation of seamanship I had an opportunity of observing was the boarding of ships at sea, at all times, in all states of the weather. They gave it to me to the full. And I have been invited to sit in more than one tall, dark house of the old town at their hospitable board, had the *bouillabaisse* ladled out into a thick plate by their high-voiced, broad-browed wives, talked to their daughters — thick-set girls, with pure profiles, glorious masses of black hair arranged with complicated art, dark eyes, and dazzlingly white teeth.[25]

Translated by R.E. Pypłacz

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[25] Conrad. *A Personal Record*, *ed. cit.*, p. 110.

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