

certain problematic periods of Pound's life) and incorporated insightful literary criticism as well (unlike Carpenter's *A Serious Character*⁷ or Tytell's own *The Solitary Volcano*). A. David Moody has answered the call, and, fortunately, is in the process of answering it some more – with his usual first-rate scholarship and insightful analyses.

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Notes

1. A. David Moody, "Introduction," *Thomas Stearns Eliot: Poet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994 [1979]), p. xvii.
2. Philip Grover, *Ezra Pound: The London Years 1908–1920* (New York: AMS Press, 1978).
3. Noel Stock, *The Life of Ezra Pound* (London: Penguin, 1974 [1970]).
4. John Tytell, *Ezra Pound: The Solitary Volcano* (New York: Doubleday, 2004 [1987]), p. i.
5. David C. Heymann, *Ezra Pound, the Last Rower: A Political Profile* (New York: Viking Press, 1976).
6. Harry M. Meachem, *The Caged Panther: Ezra Pound at St. Elizabeths* (New York: Twayne, 1967).
7. Humphrey Carpenter, *A Serious Character: The Life of Ezra Pound* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988).

Bringing Conrad Closer to Us

Laurence Davies, and Gene M. Moore, (ed.), *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad, Vol. 8: 1923–1924* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008); and

Laurence Davies, Owen Knowles, Gene M. Moore, and J. H. Stape (ed.), *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad, Vol. 9: Uncollected Letters and Indexes* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007)

Letters are a sensitive medium in at least two senses of the word. First, they reflect fairly directly and faithfully the writer's state of mind at the moment of composition, in a manner comparable, if only remotely, to some examples of lyric poetry. This quality makes them particularly valuable to scholars, especially when the letters are those of a major writer such as Joseph Conrad. As Frederick R. Karl points out in his general editor's introduction to Volume 1 of *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, letters "provide patterns and schemes which move beyond conscious planning," as opposed to journals, memoirs or diaries.¹ Yet the letter-writer can also choose to adopt a certain tone, depending on the nature of his or her relationship with the addressee. A trivial but amusing example of this is provided by Conrad's letters to his agent James Brand Pinker written between May 1910 and (probably) March 1912. The form of address Conrad chose when writing to Pinker in this period of time (after four months of silence) reflects his changing attitude towards the man with whom he had had a serious quarrel in January 1910. For well over a year Pinker was addressed simply as "Dear Sir." As time passed and Conrad's anger subsided,

Pinker became “Dear Mr Pinker,” only to regain his former privilege of being addressed as “My dear Pinker” by March 1912 (see *CL*9, 147–164).

But also, letters constitute a sensitive medium because, once they are published, they can be potentially offensive to people who were not originally meant to read them, or they can show their writer in a bad light. In order to avoid such consequences, editors may suppress certain letters and tamper with the text of others. This is what the editors of some previous collections of Conrad’s letters did, notably G. Jean-Aubry, whose *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters* had been the only comprehensive collection before Cambridge University Press published the first volume of *The Collected Letters* in 1983.² Karl, in his introduction to the latter, goes as far as to say that “many, possibly most, of the letters as printed in [Jean-Aubry’s] edition are unreliable” (*CL*1, xliii). It is in this context that one must see the recent publication of the final two volumes of *The Collected Letters*. Not only does the edition as a whole include nearly 5,000 extant letters, over a third of which were previously unpublished; but as it is a critical edition it also prints them in full, as Conrad originally wrote them, with only a minimum of interference to enhance readability. The Conrad scholar, or indeed anyone with a more than superficial interest in Conrad, cannot but show deep appreciation for this large and ambitious project which has taken

a quarter of a century of textual scholarship to complete. (To take the word-play a little further, one might say that the letter of course is also a sensitive medium, insofar as the material on which it is usually written is fragile and thus easily destroyed, as were Conrad’s letters to his maternal uncle Tadeusz Bobrowski in a fire in 1917.)

Reviewing Volumes 8 and 9 of *The Collected Letters* in a single piece is not an easy task because in one sense each makes a very different sort of reading. While Volume 8 includes all of Conrad’s letters from the last two years (nineteen months) of his life, Volume 9 brings together letters discovered since the publication of the previous volumes, ranging from the beginning of Conrad’s writing career almost to its very end. The penultimate volume – as do earlier ones – gives us a sense of reading a fairly detailed narrative, the main character of which is Joseph Conrad. In contrast, Volume 9 can offer only glimpses of the writer’s life, even though the extensive footnotes, which characterise the edition as a whole, do much to fill the gaps in the narrative. What makes the final volume particularly valuable is that it includes more accurate versions of some letters (this time transcribed from manuscript) which in previous volumes were taken from printed texts; it features a revised corrigenda and addenda for Volumes 1–7 and a consolidated index of recipients and names for all the nine volumes; in addition, some letters in Vol-

ume 9 shed new light on previously published ones, modifying the latter's dating or point of origin.

In the last nineteen months of his life, Conrad did little creative work. Only sporadically did he write a few pages of his last and unfinished novel *Suspense*, and that novel too is arguably of low quality, along with much of his later work. Yet Jeremy Hawthorn, in an excellent review of the final two volumes of *The Collected Letters*, is right to suggest that whether we agree with the division of Conrad's work into achievement and later decline, Conrad as a letter-writer shows no decline, his mental abilities not having diminished at all.³ Indeed, there are quite a few letters of aesthetic interest in Volume 8 as well, in the most interesting of which Conrad, among other issues, touches on how the reader complements and gives existence to his works, thus anticipating later phenomenologically based criticism (see *CL8*, 131; cf. also *CL9*, 25). But the final years of Conrad's life were also those of his rise to great popularity. His promotional visit to the United States in May 1923, organised by his main American publisher F. N. Doubleday, as well as the sale of Conrad manuscripts at an auction in November that year, were excellent publicity for his works. Nevertheless, Conrad saw the shady side of his popularity. In one of his letters he remarked wryly in connection with the auction that "[p]eople who had never heard of me before are now aware of

my name, and others quite incapable of reading a page of mine to the end have become convinced that I am a great writer" (*CL8*, 227). With popularity also came financial success and offers of honorary degrees by illustrious universities, including Oxford, Cambridge and Yale. Conrad consistently but very politely declined all of them, as well as the knighthood offered to him by the Labour Prime Minister J. Ramsay MacDonald in 1924, without any explanation as to his motives.

What impresses itself most obviously and inevitably on Volume 8 is the sense of impending death. The chronological arrangement of the letters and the benefit – or, in this case, the curse – of hindsight make it virtually impossible to read the volume without being constantly aware of what fate awaited Conrad on 3 August 1924. It is especially when he talks about plans never to be carried out that one cannot escape a feeling of sadness. In a letter of 28 April 1924, Conrad, writing about his family's intention to leave their current home and rent a new house from September onwards, remarks: "we will be in this house up to September 1st unless something utterly unexpected happens to call us away" (*CL8*, 347). We know that death did call him away three months later, and so nothing came of the plan. In this respect Volume 8 can be somewhat depressing reading, even though there are also a good many letters whose tone is cheerful or even truly humorous.

Complaints about different sorts of illnesses feature heavily in the penultimate volume. However, Conrad had suffered from various ailments almost all his life, and in this sense his death from a heart attack on that particular day, 3 August 1924, was sudden and unexpected. One of the diseases that were a recurrent nuisance to him was gout, which at times rendered him unable to hold a pen and thus prevented him from writing, unless he resorted to dictation to his secretary. In a letter of 13 December 1905, he laments: “Another week wasted out of my life. Seven days without a single line” (CL9, 107). Considering that, in general, Conrad wrote slowly, the additional delay caused by attacks of gout must have been distressing to him. But surely one of the reasons for his slow progress with creative work was simply that he took his art seriously, of which his letters provide ample evidence. That he did so from the very beginning of his writing career is something I find remarkable, bearing in mind that Conrad had been a seaman for almost twenty years before becoming a novelist. What is more, his letters reveal that between late 1895 and early 1896 he was actually considering going back to sea. By that time, his first novel, *Almayer’s Folly* (1895), had already been published, but Conrad “wanted to have something fixed to depend upon” because “[w]ith books one never knows” (CL9, 23).

Yet even while entertaining such thoughts, he did not regard writing as a

mere way of earning his living. To his early publisher, T. Fisher Unwin, he wrote in April 1896 (in reference to some essentially positive reviews of his recently published second novel, *An Outcast of the Islands*): “I am glad to think that, whatever the financial result may be, I shall not be found altogether unworthy of the faith you have shown in me” (CL9, 27). A year and a half later, he remarked: “*As to style*: I must be myself – I can’t write a boy’s book of adventure” (CL9, 57). Astonishing as it may seem in retrospect, in his lifetime Conrad was repeatedly and conventionally labelled a writer of sea or adventure stories by some undiscerning (and probably lazy) critics. Understandably, he disapproved of such simplistic categorizations of his work and protested against being compared to writers like Robert Louis Stevenson or Jack London (see CL8, 36–37, 308; CL9, 27). As late as 1923, he felt moved to remark in his usual wry manner that his former career as a seaman had “about as much bearing on [his] literary existence, on [his] quality as a writer, as the enumeration of drawing-rooms which Thackeray frequented could have had on [Thackeray’s] gift as a great novelist” (CL8, 130). Ultimately, it remains a mystery to me how the author whose best work includes such complex political novels as *Nostromo*, *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes* – none with anything but (at most) a marginal connection to the sea – could ever be pigeonholed as a writer of maritime

fiction. In this context, F. R. Leavis comes to mind, who, in *The Great Tradition* (1948), famously declared that “Conrad’s great novels, if they deal with the sea at all, deal with it only incidentally.”⁴

The editing of the final two volumes, like that of the previous ones, deserves praise. One can hardly imagine how much work must lie behind the transcription of the manuscripts or the meticulously researched and extensive information in the footnotes. It is impressive to read, for instance, how the editors managed to locate certain undated letters by year, month or even day, as if fitting together the pieces of a complicated jigsaw puzzle. Yet there are also some inaccuracies, omissions and inconsistencies in the editing of Volumes 8 and 9 that need to be mentioned at this point. Beyond the inevitable but few misprints, there are cases when in the footnotes there is either no biographical information at all on the addressee of Conrad’s letter (cf. *CL9*, 222), or the information – inconsistently – does not accompany the first but a subsequent letter written to that addressee (cf. *CL9*, 69 and 105). Inversely, while a footnote provides the necessary biographical information, an addressee may not feature in the list of Conrad’s correspondents at the beginning of the volume (cf. *CL8*, 40n5 and 403; *CL9*, 263n5). These are minor problems, however. More interesting and perplexing to me are certain editorial practices, though I hasten to add

that I do not pretend to any authority whatsoever when voicing my concerns. First of all, there is the case of a letter written by Conrad’s secretary, Miss L. M. Hallowes, to John Galsworthy (see *CL9*, 215). Its contents may have been suggested entirely by Conrad himself, yet I do not quite see why this letter formulated by Miss Hallowes and with her signature had to be included in an edition bearing the title *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*. It would probably have been better to incorporate this short letter into a footnote. Secondly, it seems to me inconsistent that, while Conrad’s letters in French are translated into English, in the footnotes extracts from letters in French written to Conrad are only provided in that language. Those who do not understand French sufficiently (or at all) – and there may very well be such readers of these volumes – will also have difficulties in locating the passages that the footnotes in the French texts refer to. It would have been more reader-friendly to insert the footnotes into the English translations or to mark in the latter as well the exact places referred to.

However, this is not the note on which to end a review of the final two volumes of such a magnificent edition. The letters raise several interesting issues, only a few of which could be touched upon here, and are likely to open up new territories for researchers to explore. But every reader of the volumes, whether scholar or not, would probably feel that what Conrad

himself said about the letters of the novelist W. H. Hudson could be applied to *The Collected Letters* as well: “I was glad to have the man brought close to me” (CL8, 233). These volumes may offer less comprehensive information on Conrad’s life than a biography can provide, yet it seems to me that the sensitive medium of the letter is the best way to bring him closer to us.

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Notes

1. Frederick R. Karl, general editor’s introduction, *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad, Vol. 1: 1861–1897*, eds. Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies (1983. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), p. xxvii. Henceforth, all parenthesised references to *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad* are marked by CL, followed by the volume and page number.

2. See G. Jean-Aubry, ed., *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters*, 2 vols. (London: Heinemann, 1927).

3. See Jeremy Hawthorn, review of *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad, Volumes 8 and 9, The Joseph Conrad Society (UK) Official Website*, 20 March 2008, 15 September 2008 <<http://www.josephconrad.society.org/13Hawthorn%20-%20Review.pdf>>. Hawthorn’s review was to be published in the Autumn 2008 issue of *The Conradian* but was available only in electronic form when I was writing my own review. For the achievement-and-decline thesis, see Thomas C. Moser, *Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957). Moser argues that Conrad’s work after 1911 shows signs of enervation and qualitative decline.

4. F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1962), p. 18.

Surviving Modernism

Marina MacKay and Lyndsey Stonebridge, *British Fiction after Modernism: The Novel at Mid-Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)

What if a literary movement is so powerful that it wipes out all other possibilities while alive and leaves an unprecedented vacuum after its dispersal? Modernism devoured everything around it, incorporation indeed always stood in the very core of its nature. Criticism on modernism has been extensive and manifold, but what came after has had difficulty leaving the shadow cast by the modernist output. Admittedly, the present volume aims to give a new literary and historical context for a generation of writers whose work has been hard to characterize. In many ways what we have at hand is a comprehensive guidebook; as co-editors Marina MacKay and Lyndsey Stonebridge sum up: “This collection aims to restore some significance to a critically awkward phase of twentieth-century writing. Focusing on the years between the late 1930s (just after modernism) and the late 1960s (just before postmodernism), its contributors suggest what it meant for writers to work in the wake of modernism’s achievements” (1–2).

Although the title of the collection is *British Fiction After Modernism*, the co-editors also attempt to rethink mid-century British fiction: “When we say