Biography of Joseph Conrad

Joseph Conrad was born in Berdichev, Poland in 1857. His original name was Jozef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski. He is best known for his novels *Lord Jim* (1900), *Nostromo* (1904), and *The Secret Agent* (1907) and the short story *Heart of Darkness* (1902). Typical for his works is deep pessimism: he writes stories of men in extreme situations as in *Heart of Darkness* about a man who finds himself drawn to a savage whom he only should despise.

He first became familiar with English language at the age of eight when his father translated works of Shakespeare. Joseph went to school in Cracow and Switzerland but what he really wanted to do was to go to the sea. In 1874, he went to Marseille to get a job on a ship. The following years he spent sailing around the world, where he was involved in gunrunning. He gambled a lot, had huge debts and even attempted suicide by shooting himself in the chest. In 1878, he landed for the first time in England and spent the next 16 years in the British merchant navy. In 1886, he became a British citizen. The experiences from his life as a sailor greatly influenced his writing.

However, since childhood he had always wanted to go to Africa. In 1889, he traveled to the Congo and became a captain of a Congo river steamboat.

What he saw, did, and felt in the Congo are largely recorded in "Heart of Darkness," his most famous, finest, and most enigmatic story, the title of which signifies not only the heart of Africa, the dark continent, but also the heart of evil—everything that is corrupt, nihilistic, malign—and perhaps the heart of man. The story is central to Conrad's work and vision, and it is difficult not to think of his Congo experiences as traumatic…[Sentence Omitted] He suffered psychological, spiritual, even metaphysical shock in the Congo, and his physical health was also damaged; for the rest of his life, he was racked by recurrent fever and gout.”

Conrad returned to England in 1891 and worked as a sailor for the last time in 1894. His first book *Almayer's Folly* was published in 1895 and the next year *An Outcast of the Islands*. Conrad's best novels are considered to be *Lord Jim* (1900), *Nostromo* (1904), *The Secret Agent* (1907), and *Under Western Eyes* (1911).

Conrad got married in 1895 with Jessie George and had two sons with her. He lived in poor conditions, his health was failing and he often got in trouble with his temperament. Finally, in 1910 he started to get some recognition for his work and his financial situation improved. In April 1924 he refused an offer of knighthood from Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald. The same year Conrad died.

In the Words of Joseph Conrad…

• All ambitions are lawful except those which climb upward on the miseries or credulities of mankind.

• He who wants to persuade should put his trust not in the right argument, but in the right word. The power of sound has always been greater than the power of sense.

• How does one kill fear, I wonder? How do you shoot a specter through the heart, slash off its spectral head, take it by its spectral throat?

• I had ambition not only to go farther than any man had ever been before, but as far as it was possible for a man to go.

• In order to move others deeply we must deliberately allow ourselves to be carried away beyond the bounds of our normal sensibility.

• Perhaps life is just that... a dream and a fear.

• The belief in a supernatural source of evil is not necessary; men alone are quite capable of every wickedness.

• The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much.

• The scrupulous and the just, the noble, humane, and devoted natures; the unselfish and the intelligent may begin a movement - but it passes away from them. They are not the leaders of a revolution. They are its victims.

• They talk of a man betraying his country, his friends, his sweetheart. There must be a moral bond first. All a man can betray is his conscience.

• To have his path made clear for him is the aspiration of every human being in our beclouded and tempestuous existence.

• Who knows what true loneliness is - not the conventional word but the naked terror? To the lonely themselves it wears a mask. The most miserable outcast hugs some memory or some illusion.