Kwansei Gakuin University
Humanities Review
Vol. 11, 2006
Nishinomiya, Japan

Grafting a Polish Exile onto British Sailing Ships: The Rhetoric of Darwinism in Joseph Conrad's Autobiographical Narrative

ITO Masanori*

I. Introduction

In the collection of autobiographical essays entitled *A Personal Record* (1912), Joseph Conrad, as narrator and implied author, emphasizes his personal bonds with England. In relating the episode of his master's examination in 1886, the ex-sailor describes how he responded to the examiner who, writing Conrad's Polish name on the certificate, asked him how a person of his nationality—an "inland people"—became a British sailor:

> I told him, smiling, that no doubt I could have found a ship much nearer my native place, but I had thought to myself that if I was to be a seaman then I would be a British seaman and no other. It was a matter of deliberate choice. (*PR* 119)

The passage conveys his unreserved attachment to Britain, to the extent that it implies some personal cause behind it. After years of political persecution by the Russian government, Conrad's father, Apollo Korzeniowski, died in 1869 in Austrian Poland. It was then inconceivable for the young Conrad to return to his homeland, the Ukraine; the country had long been subjected and annexed to Russia, and for a son of the anti-Russian activist, returning would most likely have meant twenty years' military conscription.[1] When efforts to obtain Austrian or French nationality proved unsuccessful, Conrad, following his uncle's instructions, acquired both British nationality and master's qualifications for the British merchant service in 1886. It was

* Assistant Professor, Doctor of Philosophy in Literature, Kwansei Gakuin University.

1 For details, see Baines 43, and Knowles and Moore 239-40.

after such struggles that he started to profess the sense of belonging to England. In a letter to his countryman living in Wales, he writes: "When speaking, writing or thinking in English the word Home always means for me the hospitable shores of Great Britain" ("To Spiridion Kliszczewski" 12).

On the other hand, Conrad's account in his autobiography goes so far as to create inconsistencies with his actual life. Conrad in fact started his sea career in France, and had no specific intention of leaving there until he found it impossible to continue as a French seaman: it turned out that he needed to have completed military service in his native country in order to join the French merchant navy. Therefore, his move to England and engagement on its merchant ships were, as Jocelyn Baines puts it, "largely circumstances outside Conrad's control and unconnected with any long-term design" (58).[2]

Indeed, critics discussing Conrad's two autobiographies, *The Mirror of the Sea* (1906) and *A Personal Record*, have seldom failed to point out the contrast between his statement and his actual life. Norman Sherry, for example, argues that "in *The Mirror of the Sea*, although Conrad keeps close to the facts of his experience, his method of relating them is the method of the writer of fiction, and to this extent he can never be accurately described as a writer of autobiography" (284).[3] Yet, Sherry's statement seems based on the premise that "a writer of autobiography" can be free of any "method of the writer of fiction" in conveying "the facts" of personal experience. Avrom Fleishman, on the other hand, calls Conrad's autobiographies "self-referential narratives", in which the author transforms "immediate experience" into the "story of experience" (663). In other words, as Jakob Lothe puts it, his autobiographies certainly contain "diverse and original narrative techniques", which generate "the rhetorical persuasiveness" (160) that fortifies the author's presented self-images, and gives a solid form to the otherwise diffusive life.

Therefore, the problem of Conrad's fabricated bonds with England must not be

2 For further details, see Knowles and Moore 240, and Baines 44. At the end of his French period, Conrad fell into a serious financial crisis and attempted suicide. This has also been thought to have caused his move to England.

3 For others, J. M. Kertzer points out the impersonality and inaccuracy of *A Personal Record*, and then proposes treating them "as an extension of Conrad's novel writing" (252-53). Ian Watt discloses how Conrad's memoirs in fact "concealed a good deal"—i.e. his irascibility, prodigal expenditure, ill health and inertia, and failure in examinations (16). Zdzisław Najder, listing various contradictions in *The Mirror of the Sea*, argues that the work "emanates a vision of its author and his life: not reconstructed, but re-imagined, re-created; a life emotionally and intellectually coherent and meaningful" (*Perspective* 99). Najder also acknowledges that Conrad "created, for the benefit of his readers as well as himself, a self-portrait" (*Chronicle* 114).

considered apart from the problem of the narrative method in his autobiography. In this article, I will focus on the rhetoric employed in Conrad's autobiographical narrative — the rhetoric within which, borrowing Edward Said's words, "Conrad was hiding himself" (3-4). This theme has so far been underestimated, but by simultaneously casting light on Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory, I would like to illuminate how this rhetoric shares a central idea of Darwinism. In the process, I will also explicate how Conrad's decision to leave the sea and start a writing career is related to the acquiring of this specific rhetoric, and how because of this his fictional narrative in general betrays the features of early modernism. My overall object would be to elucidate the essence of Conrad's linguistic art from a so far unexplored direction.

II. The Lineage of Sailing Ships and Darwin's Theory of Grafting

After his move to England, Conrad's national identity was far from stable and coherent. By changing his name and obtaining British citizenship, he might as well have abandoned his innate ties with Poland; if not, it at least gave Polish intellectuals sufficient cause to place him outside a shared fidelity. In 1899, the prominent novelist Eliza Orzeszkowa in a Polish weekly fiercely accused him of betrayal, and this in turn drew out Conrad's excuse (in a letter to another countryman) that he had not ceased to be a Pole, and that he just changed his name "so that foreign mouths should not distort" its actual sound ("To Józef Korzeniowski" 322-23).[4] In the meantime, Conrad apparently did not think that he could ever be an Englishman. Carola M. Kaplan suggests that Conrad in fact regarded himself as an outsider. The way he distinguishes himself from "a national writer like Kipling", and the way he declares his writing is for "them", British people, convinces her that "particularly in the early part of his career, Conrad saw himself as a subaltern within the shadow of the dominant English culture" (135).[5]

Such absence of definite national identity might have necessitated his effort to forge a "new" past better connected with his acquired surroundings. Anyhow, Conrad's self-

4 For further details of the dispute, see Najder, Introduction 22-23, and Baines 352-53. Orzeszkowa's accusation was in response to the article, "Emigration of the Talents", written by Wincenty Lutosławski. The article gave the reason for Conrad's writing in English as fortune hunting, and consequently occasioned various denunciations. See for the translation of Lutosławski's original article and Orzeszkowa's response to it, Najder ed., *Familial Eyes* 178-92. About how he felt guilty about his "betrayal", see Najder, *Perspective* 12, and Baines 353-54.

5 Conrad's attitudes concerning this problem were complex. On the one hand he felt confident in his anomaly, and on the other he felt persecuted and misunderstood, and recognized his distance from the English audience. See Kaplan 149.

portrait in the autobiography often involves the invention of a lineage. In a passage immediately before the one quoted above, the author, having learned "a few interesting details of the transport service" from the examiner, abruptly sees his spiritual ancestry in this old seaman:

> Clearly the transport service had been the making of this examiner, who so unexpectedly had given me an insight into his existence, awakening in me the sense of the continuity of that sea-life into which I had stepped from outside; giving a touch of human intimacy to the machinery of official relations. I felt adopted. His experience was for me, too, as though he had been an ancestor. (*PR* 118)

The past is newly acquired through the improvising imagination. In spite of the mechanical relationship between him and the examiner, and in spite of the lack of innate connection with British shipping history, Conrad wrenches out the possibility of being incorporated into the extensive lineage of British mariners just by extemporaneously imagining himself as "adopted".[6]

Such reinvention of a lost past might seem only another example of his fabricated self-image; but once viewed against the peculiar epistemological background of the period, it starts to reveal specific features of the Darwinian era. I am not referring to the vague association of the word "ancestor" with contemporary evolutionism, but to the rhetorical strategy of the text with which such self-portraiture is materialized. Gillian Beer in *Darwin's Plots* recognizes that evolutionary theory, for a hundred years after the publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, "proved crucial to the novel . . . not only at the level of theme but at the level of organisation". She goes on:

> At first evolutionism tended to offer a new authority to orderings of narrative which emphasised cause and effect, then, descent and kin. Later again, its eschewing of fore-ordained design (its dysteleology) allowed chance to figure as the only sure determinant. (6)

If autobiography can contain narrative with which the author constructs a "fiction" of his or her life (as I have presented it), Conrad's *A Personal Record* is exactly a case in which the narrative simultaneously emphasizes Beer's latter two elements: descent and kin, and chance as the only determinant. Indeed, what legitimates the author's life in a foreign country is this fancied kinship which is the product of his chance thought, not of

6 Examination of his letters reveals how Conrad's feelings were permeated with nostalgia for the country's lost influence and values: "England was the only barrier to the pressure of infernal doctrines born in continental back-slums. Now, there is nothing!" ("To Spiridion Kliszczewski" 16); "in the old days England had in her keeping the conscience of Europe" ("To Roger Casement" 96). For the discussion, see Knowles and Moore 100.

"fore-ordained design".[7]

Upon further investigation, one could notice that Conrad's autobiographical narrative is indeed shaped and sustained by the central idea of Darwin's theory. In *The Origin of Species*, Darwin attempts to prove that the frequent sterility observed in examples of hybrids is only "incidental", and not a quality "endowed" to prevent the confounded blending of species. In order to attest it multidirectionally, Darwin refers to how different species of plant are grafted together without being "absolutely governed by systematic affinity", providing the example that "[t]he pear can be grafted far more readily on the quince, which is ranked as a distinct genus, than on the apple, which is a member of the same genus" (211-12). Such a view of grafting exactly represents the nucleus of Darwinism. Darwin's discovery of natural selection effectively challenged the traditional belief in the Biblical world view, what Arthur O. Lovejoy called the "Great Chain of Being"—the linear, static hierarchy designed by God (186-200). After Darwin, the planned harmony of the world gave way to the sheer randomness of natural selection, in which, as Darwin originally defines it, "if variations useful to any organic being do occur, assuredly individuals thus characterised will have the best chance of being preserved in the struggle for life" (*Origin* 104). Such emphasis on chance factors stirred what Beer calls the "uneasiness" which vaguely overshadowed the intellectual matrix of the Victorian period (*Darwin's Plots* 38). Darwin's theory of grafting precisely reflects this disquieting aspect of natural selection; without any precedent design, only chance determines the success and failure of grafting. And this is what Conrad's autobiographical narrative embraces: despite the lack of any direct reference to Darwinism, his self-portraiture is established upon such an attempt to "graft" the Polish exile onto the lineage of Britain.

This would appear more understandable when one considers the context of late nineteenth-century maritime affairs for foreign sailors. In the 1880's, the climate among some ship owners and officers gradually became antagonistic to the employment of English sailors. On 13 Feb. 1885, in the nautical magazine *Fairplay*, a correspondent (apparently a veteran captain) points out that "[o]n every occasion of sailing from ports with an English crew more than half have been absent or in such a state of intoxication", while Norwegian, Swede and German sailors "were always at their posts, sober, clean, and respectful" (A Captain 327). Such an opinion immediately induces conservative, often extremely prejudiced, reactions; soon after, another captain writes back that while his ship was icebound in a port for seven weeks "there was not a single case of

7 As Watt puts it, "Conrad usually wrote as though he had become a sailor by lifelong design and an author wholly by accident" (19). Pointing out that Conrad pretended not to have written before *Almayer's Folly*, while he actually had, Najder argues that Conrad "did not want his decision to become a writer to cast a shadow upon" the years spent at sea, and thus he "presented his start on *Almayer's Folly* as a casual and nonbinding incident" (*Chronicle* 114).

drunkenness" with British seamen (Toledo 394). Several rallies follow, and the counterargument develops into a radical sort of xenophobia. A letter entitled "English Ships Manned by Foreigners" complains that foreign sailors presently occupy "50 to 60 per cent" of the whole crew of the British mercantile marine, and that "[d]aily their numbers are increasing, to the extinction of the British subject".[8] The letter is so tinged with racism as to affirm that foreigners are "inferior to the pampered British sailor", and to hint at the possibility that many ship accidents have been caused by their command and operations (Salt 16). One must not miss behind apprehension for "the extinction of the British subject" a Darwinian (or more correctly Spencerian) concept of the "survival of the fittest",[9] which rather threatens the "survival" of the British race than guarantees its preservation. To admit the deterioration of domestic sailors and to acknowledge foreigners' "fitness" for the traditional British merchant service means to no longer believe in a designed steadiness in the continuation of the British race. What nettles the correspondent's racism is indeed the awareness that the prosperity of his race might not be pre-guaranteed by natural law. The "uneasiness" thus provoked in turn fuels xenophobia: in the development of such counterarguments, various meetings were organized aiming to expel foreign sailors from the domestic merchant service.[10]

For a Polish exile who has to earn a living amid such an antagonistic atmosphere, therefore, the Darwinian rhetoric of grafting has an immense significance; it provides his narrative with the force that legitimates a foreigner's life in England. By improvising a personal lineage in the autobiographical narrative, Conrad grasps the possibility of being "grafted" onto England without inborn affinity or closeness to it.

III. Disconnection from the Future

On closer investigation, however, it turns out that Conrad's self-portrait involves another improvisation that paradoxically disturbs the consistency of the narrative. The Polish ex-sailor, while grafting himself onto the lineage of England, simultaneously denies entire his attachment to it. I will argue that this contradiction is produced by the

8 A bill presented to Parliament in 1853, repealing the manning clause in ships that had restricted the number of foreign crew on a British ship to less than a quarter, probably gave impetus to such radical opinions. About the bill, see Hope 288.

9 Earlier editions of *The Origin of Species* actually did not contain the term "the survival of the fittest". It was coined by Herbert Spencer, and introduced by Darwin into the fifth edition of the book. See Beer, Introduction xxii.

10 The leading article of *Fairplay* on 6 Mar. 1886 mentions how a shipowner named *Mr. Donkin* in such a meeting "urged shipowners to give the preference to British sailors" ("Foreign Sailors in British Ships" 142). The name interestingly reminds one of the indolent racist sailor in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*.

very nature of the Darwinian rhetoric as it resonates with the shifting conditions in mercantile shipping.

In *A Personal Record*, recalling the old examiner's prediction that he would soon "go into steam", the author notes that actually he "never went into steam", and he will become "the only seaman of the dark ages who had never gone into steam" (*PR* 117). The fact is, however, that Conrad did actually *go into steam*. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the rise of colonial investment and technological progress in shipbuilding dramatically changed the situation of marine transportation.[11] In 1880, the British Empire was still possessed of 5,498,000 net tons of sailing vessels as against 2,949,000 net tons of steamships; but only ten years later, sailing ships had declined to 4,274,000 net tons as against steamships' 5,414,000 net tons.[12] It was clear that sailing ships were doomed to disappear from the British mercantile service. Tonnage and regularity was the first priority within the growing trade market, while incidents such as the opening of the Suez Canal promoted this replacement of sail by steam (Hope 298; Chatterton 272). In such circumstances, it was quite natural that a sailor would try to find posts on steam vessels, especially when working conditions on sailing ships became more and more difficult. Although the increased efficiency and size of vessels meant a reduction in the total number of ships, and therefore a reduction in posts, Conrad, after several unsuccessful attempts, at last found positions on two steamships, the *Vidar* and the *Adowa*.[13]

As Zdzisław Najder puts it, Conrad tends to idolize the life on sailing ships by contrasting it with the ugliness of steamships, and produces the impression that he deliberately chose to work on the former (*Chronicle* 162). Considering the romantic imagery readily roused by those out-of-date relics of marine transportation, the incongruity between the actual life and the textual description might be defined as another example of Conrad's fictional self-portraiture. However, the problem appears more complicated when, in *The Mirror of the Sea*, he emphasizes the gap between the age of sail and that of steamships. After confirming that "the seaman of the last generation" will feel sympathy towards the ancient sailing ships "manned by men who are his direct professional ancestors", the author refers to the sailors of future

11 Despite the domestic prosperity of the 1850s and 60s, when manufacturing in England was far ahead of the rest of the world, the following thirty years saw a steady growth in American and German industry. At that time, the former boasted of unlimited natural resources, and the latter of a scientific and technical upsurge. When the situation was realized, national interest inclined towards colonies and led to the golden age of imperialism from 1880 to 1900. See Trevelyan 570-72.

12 For further details, see Hope 307.

13 The latter did not actually departed on a voyage, and Conrad closed his sea career with this fruitless position.

generations:

> No; the seamen of three hundred years hence will probably be neither touched nor moved to derision, affection, or admiration. They will glance at the photogravures of our nearly defunct sailing-ships with a cold, inquisitive, and indifferent eye. Our ships of yesterday will stand to their ships as no lineal ancestors, but as mere predecessors whose course will have been run and the race extinct. Whatever craft he handles with skill, the seaman of the future shall be not our descendant, but only our successor. (*MS* 72-73)

While the text sees the past as showing unbroken continuity, it offers an entirely different prospect for the future: the passage emphasizes the impending disruption in the history of shipping caused by the displacement of sail. Apparently inconsistent with Conrad's narrative of grafting, the text contradicts such a lineal linkage to the British merchant navy established through it. The rhetorical inflection of his autobiography is thus twofold: on the one hand, it realizes the author's yearned-for sense of belonging to the past lineage of English sail, and, on the other, it negates any uninterrupted continuity into the future.

The complexity of Conrad's autobiographical narrative further increases when one sees the path to which, generally speaking, the development of evolution theory guided contemporary texts concerning maritime affairs. For example, an essay published in *Fairplay* in 1886 shows how an evolutionist perspective can be combined with racism, so as to project a form of progressivism. While acknowledging the drinking habit thriving among British seamen, "A Skipper" writes:

> There is no finer specimen of manhood than a good British sailor. He is fertile in resource, patient in hardship, undaunted in danger. It is impossible to believe that the race which has shed such lustre over the history of our country can have permanently deteriorated. Let us hope that it is passing through some stage leading to future development. (274)

With the vocabulary of evolutionism, the passage presents the British sailor—a "specimen" or a "race"—as in a stage more advanced than other, supposedly foreign, sailors, and as holding a fair possibility of developing into the future. While Conrad's narrative at once declares the continuity and discontinuity of the lineage, this passage is premised on seamless progress from past to present, present to future.

Here one must be careful not to confuse Darwinism with what used to be the common understanding of it. Darwinism was not essentially a belief in progressivism.[14] Unlike

14 In Peter J. Bowler's view, it is still uncertain "whether Darwin himself realized . . . that natural selection is not inherently progressive and offers no predictable goal toward which evolution is aimed" (*Darwinism* 6).

preceding evolutionary thought, which had considered, or had at least left room to consider, God's design as the principal factor of evolution, Darwin's idea of natural selection highlighted its materialistic nature. According to the theory, evolution is triggered by the accumulation of purposeless changes and the incidental survival of individuals. Thus, as Stephen Jay Gould puts it, Darwinism implies that "organic change led only to increasing adaptation between organisms and their own environment and not to an abstract ideal of progress defined by structural complexity or increasing heterogeneity—never say higher or lower" (37).

Even Darwin's texts do not fully internalize the materialistic inhumanity of his own theory. At the close of *The Voyage of the* Beagle, comparing his voyage on a modern sailing ship with Captain Cook's on a worse-equipped one, Darwin wonders at the changes effected during those sixty years—at how "the vast improvements in ships and naval resources" have been made, and how "a hemisphere [the American and Australian continents] has been added to the civilized world" (512). Here, Darwin employs a retrospective viewpoint similar to Conrad's, in which he acknowledges the continuity between Cook's and his voyage on sailing ships. However, unlike Conrad, Darwin sees the past-and-present relationship from a progressive viewpoint, praising the "the vast improvement" achieved by civilization since Cook. The tone of progressivism grows more intense when Darwin describes how "[t]he map of the world ceases to be a blank" (515)—an awareness shared by Marlow in Conrad's "Heart of Darkness". Darwin proceeds to a blind optimism about the future of mankind and England:

> From seeing the present state, it is impossible not to look forward with high expectations to the future progress of nearly an entire hemisphere. The march of improvement, consequent on the introduction of Christianity throughout the South Sea, probably stands by itself in the records of history. (516)

The narrative, in praising imperialism, presents an optimistic future view in which Western civilization and religion acts as the vanguard of "improvement" (unlike in "Heart of Darkness" where the imperialist prospect for the future is finally put severely in doubt).

It is interesting that Darwin, immediately before this passage, discloses his surprise and aversion at the sight of "a real barbarian" and states, "I do not believe it is possible to describe or paint the difference between savage and civilized man" (514-15). In fact, what annoys the English naturalist is the possibility that the progressive state of the civilized is only an accidental outcome of natural selection, and that there is no predestined line which definitely divides the civilized from the uncivilized. Clearly, this in turn produces an ardent tone in conveying his belief in civilization's power to effect progress. Darwin, as it were, counters in his voyage narrative the very "uneasiness" his theory provoked in the late nineteenth-century world—an uneasiness that the lineal progress of Western civilization is far from guaranteed. One can then detect the same

uneasiness behind the text of "A Skipper": what spurs his unhesitating eulogy is indeed the possibility that the British race "can have permanently deteriorated" and promises no "future development".

Beer suggests that Darwin's evolutionary theory implicitly negated the Biblical myth of the existence of "fixed and perfect species" from Genesis. According to her, "[a]scent was . . . a flight from the primitive and the barbaric which could never quite be left behind" (*Darwin's Plots* 118-19). That is why "many of Darwin's first readers favoured the counter-form of evolutionary myth: that of growth, ascent, and development towards complexity" (119-20). Such a preference is conspicuous in the texts by "A Skipper" and Darwin himself. Both consolidate the prospect of future progress as a result of civilization's and Christianity's triumph, as if to shake off the curse cast on human world by Darwin's very discovery.

In the meantime, Conrad's autobiographical narrative intentionally negates any progressive continuity between the present and the future, either individually (as Conrad conceals his steamship experiences) or racially (as the seamen of sailing vessels are declared extinct). In it, the description—similarly concerned with the sea, sailors, and ships—leads only to consolidating his connection with the glorious past of England, not with its promising future. Such an ambivalence is there at the core of Darwinism. By using a Darwinian rhetoric, Conrad is able to "graft" himself onto British lineage despite his foreign origin; but the same rhetoric urges him to internalize the uncertainty of its future in his narrative. Whereas Conrad declares in *The Mirror of the Sea* that "all sailors belong to one family" (148), Conrad's "grafting" narrative disavows the permanence of the "family" itself. Such is the sense of disconnection betrayed in his autobiographical narrative, and precisely because of this Conrad's autobiographical narrative is—even more than that of Darwin—Darwinian.

IV. Grafting by Means of the English Language

In *A Personal Record*, Conrad frequently refers to the composition of *Almayer's Folly*—his first novel, started when he was 31. The autobiography also covers his life as an English novelist, as well as his life at sea. However, as the text does not give an accessible overview, it has indeed been one of the unresolved concerns among his biographers to bridge the gulf between his two careers. Baines, for example, refers to Conrad's budding literary ability in his earlier letter writing, observing that "[i]t is in fact far more surprising that Conrad should have become a British Master Mariner than that he should have sat down one day in the autumn of 1889 to write a novel" (103). While Conrad's earlier genius is undeniable, this description rather betrays the struggle on the biographer's part to forge a persuasive link. On the other hand, as Ian Watt suggests, a long period of unemployment, insufficient pay, and the intellectual disparity between

him and the other officers might have urged Conrad to find a second vocation (18-19).[15] Yet again, writing in a language that was neither his native nor even his second language seems the last choice to be made by an exiled sailor.[16] The answer to the problem, I believe, lies in *A Personal Record*, which, as Jacques Berthoud accurately puts it, is "an exploration of the relationship between Conrad's two professions", and is "the product of a man's prolonged meditation on the significance of his past" (7). While Berthoud focuses on various key terms (such as "fidelity") in his attempt to identify the missing link, I would rather pay attention to the textual structure of Conrad's autobiography, and to the rhetorical force to be felt in the presentation of his two vocations. The discussion henceforth will reveal another dimension of his autobiographical narrative, in which he latently embeds his original Polish pedigree into his self-portraiture, and at the same time seeks for a continuation of his lineage into future generations.

In the Author's Note to *A Personal Record*, Conrad emphasizes how his initiation into novel writing was propelled by his "aptitude" for English:

> The truth of the matter is that my faculty to write in English is as natural as any other aptitude with which I might have been born. . . . English was for me neither a matter of choice nor adoption. The merest idea of choice had never entered my head. And as to adoption—well, yes, there was adoption; but it was I who was adopted by the genius of the language. . . . (v)

One should not fail to observe that the description tacitly contains a rhetoric similar to that in his self-portraiture from the master examination's passage. For Conrad, accentuating his proficiency in English, as well as forging a bond with the British shipping tradition, is a way of being literally "adopted" into its culture. The following proclamation, "if I had not written in English I would not have written at all" (vi), further confirms the point.[17] The more he succeeds in establishing an exclusive relationship with the language, the more he grasps the opportunity to be incorporated

15 According to Ronald Hope, the development of the steam train caused a fall in seamen's wages after 1850 (288). Conrad's monthly pay was £8 as mate of the *Torrens*, and £14 as captain of the *Otago* (Watt 18). Considering that a sailor in those days was very likely to suffer long periods of unemployment, and that the average annual income in England shortly after 1900 was between £56 and £90, the annual earnings of nearly £300 made by Conrad in 1899 (Knowles and Moore 114) appears highly attractive.

16 That Conrad was more proficient in French is well known. See Baines 153.

17 Elsewhere, Conrad often emphasizes that he did not waver between English and other languages. "When I wrote the first words of *A. F.* [*Almayer's Folly*], I had been already for years and years *thinking* in English. . . . You may take it from me that if I had not known English I wouldn't have written a line for print in my life" ("To Hugh Walpole" 227). Conrad's Congo notebooks are in English, not in Polish or French (Baines 153).

into the British "family". Nor does he fail to emphasize that the relationship was formed entirely by chance. In *A Personal Record*, he describes how *Almayer's Folly* was started only when he took "a pen rolling about somewhere" during a leisurely time on shore (*PR* 90). Here lie the adjoining points of Conrad's two vocations: inside the autobiographical text, his writing career is presented with the same rhetorical strategy as that used in the presentation of his sea career—that is, the rhetoric of lineage and chance. His autobiography is, as it were, the rhetorical effort to "graft" himself onto the lineage of England, either through the incidental relationship with its shipping tradition, or through the incidental relationship with its language.

However, in spite of the similarity between both rhetorical strategies, the latter achieves an effect unavailable in the former. In *A Personal Record*, Conrad stresses that his earlier experiences of English were deeply related to English literature. Referring to his reading of Anthony Trollope, Dickens, Walter Scott, and Thackeray, he recollects that his first contact with English literature was via a translation of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* by his father. It was during the years of exile, and young Conrad happened to be told by his father to read aloud from the manuscript:

> What emboldened me to clamber into his chair I am sure I don't know, but a couple of hours afterward he discovered me kneeling in it with my elbows on the table and my head held in both hands over the MS. of loose pages. I was greatly confused, expecting to get into trouble. He stood in the doorway looking at me with some surprise, but the only thing he said after a moment of silence was:
>
> "Read the page aloud." (*PR* 71-72)

One again encounters the rhetoric of lineage and chance: his emphasis is on the innate correlation between the English literary tradition and himself, and on the contingency of the event. Yet, the autobiographical narrative here introduces a different sort of lineage. By linking the author's initiation into English literature with a memory of his father, it simultaneously relocates English in his Polish origins. Moreover, the narrative brings in a different future perspective. At the close of the text, referring to his period as a French pilot boat's apprenticeship, Conrad describes the occasion when he was for the first time talked to in English:

> it was then that, for the very first time in my life, I heard myself addressed in English—the speech of my secret choice, of my future, of long friendships, of the deepest affections, of hours of toil and hours of ease, and of solitary hours too, of books read, of thoughts pursued, of remembered emotions—of my very dreams! And if (after being thus fashioned by it in that part of me which cannot decay) I dare not claim it aloud as my own, then, at any rate the speech of my children. (*PR* 136)

The description conveys Conrad's other initiation into the English language; but one must not miss how it contains a future view quite dissimilar to the pessimistic one that

shows the disconnection of the steamship age from the author's life. In fact, it conveys the expectation that what he has acquired in his life will pass on to the next generation, and that his ability in English will pass to his children with more perfection. In these passages, he is not only "grafted" onto the pedigree of a foreign country; through its language, he is also "re-grafted" onto the lost origin of his genuine family, and he can also transfer his acquired characteristics to his descendants.[18] Such uninterrupted continuation of his lineage from the past to the present, and from the present to the future is the latent plot materialized by the rhetorical force of his autobiographical narrative.

In this sense, writing autobiography doubly fulfills his purpose. In it, Conrad can affirm his proficiency in English by writing in the same language; the linguistic text itself functions as the twofold display of his command in the language. English is for Conrad something like a mystic spell that pieces together the otherwise fragmentary family tapestry. This would explain why he always—even when visiting Poland for the first time after his naturalization—carried around the manuscript of *Almayer's Folly* "as if it were a talisman or a treasure" (*PR* 13). Conrad's awareness of the language's magic power is also hinted at in the passage when the old examiner writes his name on a "pass-slip" for master's qualifications:

> Writing my long name (it has twelve letters) with laborious care on the slip of blue paper, he remarked:
>
> "You are of Polish extraction."
>
> "Born there, sir."
>
> He laid down the pen and leaned back to look at me as it were for the first time. (*PR* 118)

By having his Polish name written down,[19] he is not only certified as a master, but marked as having a foreign existence "for the first time". For Conrad, it would appear to be a critical revelation of the power of the "pen", which ruthlessly draws him back to

18 The term "acquired character" was introduced and developed by the French evolutionist, J. B. Lamarck. This pre-Darwinian evolutionist believed in "the inheritance of acquired characters"—animals' ability to cope with environmental changes by adopting new habits, and so acquiring characteristics that they are not born with. As he admitted each organism's ability to shape its own evolution, Lamarckists often inclined to an anti-Darwinian teleological view. See Bowler, *Darwinism* 45. Spencer, supporting Lamarckism, "believed that progress was inevitable within a free-enterprise society", and "saw how biological evolution could be made to underpin a more generally progressive view of history" (Bowler, *Darwinism* 21). See for the post-Darwinian controversy between Darwinism and Lamarckism, Bowler, *Evolution* 236-47.

19 Hans van Marle proves that Conrad actually wrote his Polish family name, "Korzeniowski", in the application documents for all his three successful examinations (99).

his genuine, but deserted, origin.[20] Therefore, the most important task of his autobiography is to prove his proficiency in English—to prove that he has his own "pen". It is no wonder that he responds over-sensitively to such criticism as that he is a man "without country and language". His indignant answer is: "I wonder in what language the Nigger, Youth or the Mirror *could* have been written?" ("To John Galsworthy" 110).

Critics have so far demonstrated the "evasiveness" of Conrad's autobiographical narrative and have given analyses based on it.[21] Yet, rather than being "evasive", the narrative of his autobiography actively tries to confirm the Polish exile's life in England. Through the emphasis on his linguistic ability, different stages of his existence—as the son of a Polish activist, as a British merchant sailor, and as a British novelist—are not merely united together, but granted the possibility of being passed on to future generations. This might be the precise reason why the Polish sailor in his thirties started to write in English. At any rate, Conrad's biography could be described as the author's unfaltering attempt to construct a coherent whole for his life and his "family".

Still, one must not miss how the more Conrad depends on English for rhetorical effect, the more he has to confront a deficiency in it characteristic of the Darwinian age. In other words, the language that materializes his wished-for union with England cannot be otherwise than Darwinian, and to internalize such a language means accepting a commensurate cost. As Darwin's grafting theory implies, there is an uncertainty of acquired positions, and the language by no means guarantees the static, permanent condition of existence, or the presupposition of any transcendental intention in the formation of the world. This explains the formation of the method which employs Marlow as a narrator, one that Peter Brooks describes as holding at its centre "a generalization of the darkness" rather than "any defining illumination" (257). In "Youth", for example, the narrative, which explicitly contraposes "the men of the East" and "the tired men from the West", or "brown nations" and "the conquering race" (131-32), rather shakes than consolidates the authenticity of Marlow's exaltation of racial superiority.[22] In "Heart of Darkness", to take another example, Kurtz's words, which

20 Michael Greaney suggests that Conrad distrusted, even hated, the act of writing. According to him, Conrad preferred "word of mouth", and so he "prefers on the whole to let it appear that his writings originate in informal conversation or oral tradition" (3). I would rather suggest that the very moment in which the spoken words are written down meant a lot to Conrad. It is the act of fixing otherwise fluid and fleeting language that fascinates him.

21 For example, Lynda Prescott recently suggested that this "evasiveness" is fostered by "his sense of uncertainty about reputation [as a writer] and nationality" (179).

22 Christopher CoGwilt shows how the narrative of "Youth", through its excessive repetition and overloading of naive associations, empties various place names such as "England" or "the East" of their cultural and political connotations (17). By stressing "Marlow's naive naming", as the critic puts it, "Conrad brings out an ambivalence inherent in the colonial discourses of Orientalism" (18).

Marlow has expected to tell of the illuminating quality of Western civilization in the "dark" centre of Africa, finally fails to hold an unequivocal meaning at its very heart.[23] And again in *Lord Jim*, Marlow, immediately after affirming how Jim is "one of us", becomes pessimistic about the ability of language to convey a story: "try as I may for the success of this yarn I am missing innumerable shades—they were so fine, so difficult to render in colourless words" (94).[24] Further discussion will not be entered into here; but these examples all show how Marlow's language simultaneously tries to legitimate a person's position in an English lineage, and fails to maintain sufficient control of this act. I would only hastily add that the former two novels are based on Conrad's concrete experiences, and even the latter has been regarded as "one of its creator's most revealing autobiographical fictions" (Knowles and Moore 213).[25]

In spite of frequent and epoch-making discussions concerning Conrad's early modernist narrative, analysis of his autobiographies has been overlooked. As I have noted, however, they offer a fresh and significant perspective for understanding the nucleus of his narrative method. After all, English was for him his only effective means to "graft" himself onto the lineage of the peerless empire; his autobiographies attest it not only in its subject but in its narrative structure. At the same time, though, Darwinian dysteleology subsisting in such language hinders the maintenance of any steadiness and legitimacy around the discourse of British culture. The pessimism deriving from it accounts for Conrad's narrative method in his fictional writings. To put it differently, what drives the Conradian early modernist narrative is the sense of dispossession ineffaceable from the consciousness of a Polish exile. The works of the novelist who, despite his foreign origin, pursued writing in English might simultaneously prove the traces of his painful and laborious sailing after an "origin" and a "family".

WORKS CITED

Baines, Jocelyn. *Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography*. London: Weidenfeld, 1960.
Batchelor, John. *The Life of Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography*. Oxford and

23 Many critics have focused on the emptiness of Kurtz's last words, "The horror! The horror!" According to Brooks, "[m]ore than a masterful, summary, victorious articulation, 'The horror!' appears as minimal language, language on the verge of reversion to savagery, on the verge of a fall from language" (250).

24 According to Hillis J. Miller, the excessiveness of possible interpretations and the unavailability of an unequivocal conclusion "constitutes and sustains the meaning of the text, that evasive center which is everywhere and nowhere in the play of its language" (39).

25 John Batchelor considers *Lord Jim* "a triple self-portrait". According to him, Jim stands for Conrad's "younger self's youthfulness, uncertainty, guilt, ambition and idealism", Marlow "the Englishman that Conrad would have liked to have been", and Stein "a projection of the aspects of his social identity that he acknowledged (reluctantly) to be seen in him by his English friends" (110).

Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1994.

Beer, Gillian. *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. 2nd ed. 1983. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000.

——. Introduction. Darwin, *Origin* vii-xxviii.

Berthoud, Jacques. *Joseph Conrad: The Major Phase*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978.

Bowler, Peter J. *Darwinism*. New York: Twayne, 1993.

——. *Evolution: The History of an Idea*. 1983. Berkeley: U of California P, 2003.

Brooks, Peter. *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1984.

Captain, A. "Treatment of Seamen". *Fairplay* 13 Feb. 1885: 327-28.

Carabine, Keith, ed. *Joseph Conrad: Critical Assessments*. 4 vols. Mountfield: Helm Information, 1992.

Chatterton, E. Keble. *Sailing Ships and Their Story*. London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1909.

CoGwilt, Christopher. *The Invention of the West: Joseph Conrad and the Double-Mapping of Europe and Empire*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995.

Conrad, Joseph. Author's Note. Conrad, *A Personal Record* iii-x.

——. *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*. 6 vols. Ed. Fredrick K. Karl and Laurence Davies. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983-2002.

——. *Lord Jim*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983.

——. *The Mirror of the Sea and A Personal Record*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988.

——. *The Mirror of the Sea: Memories and Impressions*. Conrad, *The Mirror of the Sea and A Personal Record*.

——. *A Personal Record: Some Reminiscences*. Conrad, *The Mirror of the Sea and A Personal Record*.

——. "To Hugh Walpole". 7 June 1918. Conrad, *Letters*, vol. 6, 227-28.

——. "To John Galsworthy". 23 Aug. 1908. Conrad, *Letters*, vol. 4, 110-11.

——. "To Józef Korzeniowski". 14 Feb. 1901. Conrad, *Letters*, vol. 2, 322-23.

——. "To Roger Casement". 21 Dec. 1903. Conrad, *Letters*, vol. 3, 95-97.

——. "To Spiridion Kliszczewski". 13 Oct. 1885. Conrad, *Letters*, vol. 1, 12-13.

——. "To Spiridion Kliszczewski". 19 Dec. 1885. Conrad, *Letters*, vol. 1, 15-16.

——. "Youth". *Heart of Darkness and Other Tales*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990. 93-132.

Darwin, Charles. *The Origin of Species*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996.

——. *The Voyage of the* Beagle. *Charles Darwin: The Origin of Species and the Voyage of the* Beagle. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003. 1-517.

Fleishman, Avrom. "The Mirror of the Sea: 'Fragments of a Great Confession'". 1979. Carabine, *Assessments*, vol. 2, 663-71.

"Foreign Sailors in British Ships". *Fairplay* 6 Mar. 1886: 395-96.

Gould, Stephen Jay. *Ever Since Darwin: Reflections in Natural History*. 1977. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980.

Greaney, Michael. *Conrad, Language, and Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002.

Hope, Ronald. *A New History of British Shipping*. London: John Murray, 1990.

Kaplan, Carola M. "Conrad the Pole: Definitively not 'One of Us'". *Conrad and Poland*. Ed. Alex S. Kurczaba. New York: Columbia UP, 1996. 135-51.

Kertzer, J. M. "Conrad's Personal Record". 1974-75. Carabine, *Assessments*, vol. 3, 252-64.

Knowles, Owen, and Gene Moore, eds. *Oxford Reader's Companion to Conrad*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000.

Lothe, Jakob. "Conradian Narrative". *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*. Ed. J. H. Stape. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996. 160-78.

Lovejoy, Arthur O. *The Great Chain of Being: A Study in the History of an Idea*. 1936. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1964.

Marle, Hans van. "Plucked and Passed on Tower Hill: Conrad's Examination Ordeals". *Conradiana* 8 (1976): 99-109.

Miller, J. Hillis. *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1982.

Najder, Zdzisław. *Conrad in Perspective: Essays on Art and Fidelity*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997.

——, ed. *Conrad under Familial Eyes*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983.

——. Introduction. *Conrad's Polish Background: Letters to and from Polish Friends*. Ed. Najder. London: Oxford UP, 1964. 1-31.

——. *Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle*. New York: Rutgers UP, 1983.

Prescott, Lynda. "Autobiography as Evasion". *Journal of Modern Literature* 28.1 (2004): 177-88.

Said, Edward. *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1966.

Salt. "English Sailors Manned by Foreigners". *Fairplay* 13 Nov. 1885: 16.

Sherry, Norman. *Conrad's Eastern World*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1966.

Skipper, A. "Poor Jack". *Fairplay* 23 Jul. 1886: 274.

Toledo. "Treatment of Seamen". *Fairplay* 6 Mar. 1885: 393-94.

Trevelyan, G. M. *English Social History: A Survey of Six Centuries*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1942.

Watt, Ian. *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1979.