

shows how these novels influenced later Chinese fiction. Appendices on source materials for certain novels with complex textual histories, as well as a valuable bibliography, extensive notes, glossary and index, round out the book.

Hegel writes with vigor and clarity, rarely hedging or equivocating. An example of his style is his verdict concerning Emperor Yang of the Sui dynasty, the antihero of *Merry Adventures of Emperor Yang*: "Yang stands convicted of the willful, selfish disregard of role and responsibility, of arrogance in the face of Heaven, of cruelty to his subjects, and of futile self-delusion." Although this partly echoes the judgment of Confucian historians and the reaction of most Chinese to the emperor's excesses, one hardly can criticize Hegel for beating around the bush.

Probably the principal attraction of this book (which with a handsome dust jacket showing a fine woodcut illustrating one of the novels, plus half a dozen other woodcuts, is aesthetically very pleasing) lies in the clarity of the author's style. Hegel has the ability to inform both the general and specialist reader while retaining their interest. He does not seem to grope for interpretations; instead they appear to have been formed with care. As a result, one often encounters fresh insights, particularly either as offshoots of others' ideas or as refutations of them. Although not necessarily the first to suggest that Li Jü's *The Prayer Mat of Flesh* is a satire of "genius-beauty" popular romances, Hegel's expert treatment settles the issue. Li's purpose is not only to expose harmful sexual behavior and the decadence that contributed to the demise of the Ming dynasty, but also to make fun of didactic popular romances crowding the marketplace in the 1660's. This is further evidence for dating the earliest extant edition of what some have called China's most pornographic novel to 1693 instead of 1633. The section on *The Prayer Mat of Flesh*, the volume's highlight, is the best critical discussion of this key work available in English.

This book makes a real contribution to our knowledge of Chinese fiction as the novel neared maturity. The author has sifted through a great amount of primary and secondary source material to produce the most readable and important book on premodern Chinese fiction since C. T. Hsia's *The Classic Chinese Novel* (1968). *The Novel in Seventeenth Century China* establishes Hegel as the leading scholar-critic of his generation.

Richard Hessney

JACQUES DARRAS

Joseph Conrad and the West: Signs of Empire

Translated from the French by Anne Luyat and Jacques Darras. Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble, 1982. Pp. 158. ISBN 0-389-20071-9

This is a study of the "intimate duplicity," the "fission" running through Conrad's "stories" (p. 1), from "Youth" and "Heart of Darkness," through *Lord Jim* and *Nostromo*, to *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes*. Conrad is said to articulate "a fork—diabolic tongues running after their problematic unity" (p. 7), in linguistic monuments which are obliterated as they are erected. Subsequent to an examination of "Heart of Darkness"—this takes up approximately half of his book—Professor Darras comes to argue that, from *Lord Jim* to *Under Western Eyes*, Conrad "tries to show us that the Western viewpoint is haunted by a negative and deathlike presence which his irony has the role of revealing in all its excessive manifestations." What Conrad makes us see is "the lack of harmony between a force and its vectors" (p. 144) in literature as in politics.

"The good critic is he who relates the adventures of his soul among masterpieces," Conrad approvingly cites Anatole France in *A Personal Record* (Dent collected Edition, pp. 95-96). He goes on in the same essay to add that "as long as distinguished minds are ready to treat it in the spirit of high adventure, literary criticism shall appeal to us with all the charm and wisdom of a well-told tale of personal experience" (p. 96). Professor Darras's study shows such a distinguished mind at work. Erudite, allusive, and imaginative, *Joseph Conrad and the West* delights as it informs. Like Conrad's own works, this study has a "poetry" of its own.

The most salient feature of Professor Darras's book is its sincere linguistic playfulness. Again and again, he calls our attention to words, their etymology, their associations, their sound, their multiple meanings. These are but a few examples: "*Seignelay, saigne-les*" (p. 5); "weary/wary" (p. 20); "methodical (or Methodist, perhaps?)" (p. 26); "Fault, why not fatality?" (p. 33); "exotic, exautic" (p. 33); "vanished/varnished" (p. 58); "to visit/visitation" (p. 59); "Knights/nights" (p. 61); "icono-

clast—in the literal sense of the word” (p. 68); “lugging . . . either a piece of *luggage* or a *slug*” (p. 82); “Swede/suede” (p. 89); “in Indian file (the file which could free them from their fetters)” (p. 90); “worst/worsted” (p. 92); “Letter/litter” (p. 99); “agent/*argent*” (p. 103); “logic (and logistics)” (p. 110); “a watercolour for a waterfall” (p. 114); “note the monetary value of the word stamps” (p. 116); “the lighthouse (which lights the bay where the lighter foundered)” (p. 116); “eye/I” (p. 122); and “mediator . . . media” (p. 136). Always, and with good reason, Professor Darras counsels the reader to listen carefully. He writes of Verloc’s name, for example: it “brings together two opposing forces—opening (overture) and closing (lock)—if one is ready to lend an attentive ear” (p. 100). The sound will provide a key to *The Secret Agent*. At times, Professor Darras’s performance is nothing short of ingenious, as in his treatment of “Deal and Gravesend” in “Heart of Darkness”—if these places “are separated on the map by a good fifty miles, it is significant that these two words, by their etymology, are really much closer: they are related like the white wood of the pine tree (deal) and its logical destination as a coffin or a tomb (graves, end) are related. As a slang term, deal can also refer to shady business dealings, a reference which brings the English commercial system directly into the African context . . .” (p. 78). Professor Darras will draw out a variation on this arabesque in his reading of *Under Western Eyes*, to offer this picture of the material security of a Swiss couple in the middle of “a whole raft of painted deals”: “The seaworthiness—or lakeworthiness—of their secure craft is indeed based on deal(s) . . .” (p. 131). And when Professor Darras writes of books and Cervantes—“to speak of Rosinante, an old worn-out hack who appeared in unsold books on the shelf” (p. 37)—the double-entendre becomes sheer fun.

Professor Darras’s method often helps to clarify our understanding of important details in Conrad’s text. Most instructive, for example, is his analysis of the name “Townson,” “a man Tower,” in “Heart of Darkness”: “Man-Tower is Tower-man, a signalman in railroad terms, or a man whose head is upside-down!” (p. 46). Justifiably, then, does he criticize commentators who refer to Towson’s *An Inquiry into Some Points of Seamanship* for not “going any further than its title.” But Professor Darras surprises his reader when, in the same sentence, he also faults these critics for “reasoning by analogy” (p. 44), since he himself so often argues

by an analogical extension of a Conradian trope (e.g., pp. 45, 54, 62, 102, 123).

On occasion—rarely so, much to his credit—Professor Darras’s analogical argument seems imprecisely contextualized. He remarks of the title of *Under Western Eyes*, for instance: “we . . . applaud the syntactic *tour de force* which leaves the title bare of agent and complement” (p. 122). In fact, the fiction itself makes up that deficiency in a sentence referring us to the syntax of “Eastern logic” unrolled “under . . . Western eyes” (Dent Collected Edition, p. 318). Such a logic might argue for a further dialectical extension of Professor Darras’s observation that “Conrad’s conception of irony, which flatly contradicts Hegel’s idea of basic inequality, is based on resemblances, on the lucid belief that many diverse phenomena are not really too different after all” (p. 142). May inequalities or opposites not be seen as inverted analogues of each other in Conrad? As the protagonist of Michel Tournier’s *Le Roi des aulnes* (1970) asks himself, can there exist an absolute gray resisting all inversion? Perhaps “vortex” rather than “fissure” is the more appropriate ruling image for a picturing of Conrad. As any worthwhile and serious book will do, *Joseph Conrad and the West* stimulates further reading and thought.

Camille R. La Bossière