

Under his reading lamp, *Lolita* is a portrait of human, humane love. (Humbert, the pervert and true lover!—Trilling, who first voiced this opinion, was under the influence of De Rougemont's study of Tristan at the time). But we are not forced to defend Humbert's claim that he loves Lolita, or to deny it; the novel is a comical tragedy, and neither approval nor condemnation matter.

Not quite the study of the master theme of imaginative independence that it claims to be, this sometimes self-contradictory book tends to promote the notion that Nabokov's work is inaccessible, that his theories about art are not those of any sane reader, and that the proper attitude toward his achievement is hateful respect. A more concentrated attempt to sketch the novelist about whom we know precious little or to separate the author from his work—for this is not a psychoanalytic study—would have prevented objections that much recent criticism, based on close reading of the full oeuvre, finds indeed insignificant.

Stephen K. Land

*PARADOX AND POLARITY IN THE FICTION OF JOSEPH CONRAD*

New York and London: St. Martin's Press and Macmillan, 1984. Pp. 311

Reviewed by Camille R. La Bossière

*Paradox and Polarity in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad* examines the syntax governing the plots and character relationships in all of the novels and most of the short stories, in search of a single principle or law underlying the Conradian vision of the world and its artistic expression. Dr. Land discovers such a "fundamental constant" in the vaguely Schopenhauerian paradox that "purposive action is self-nullifying" (p. 2). Taking the works after the apprenticeship of *Almayer's Folly*, *An Outcast of the Islands*, and the short stories of 1896 in their order of composition, he finds the development of this paradox in four stages: "The early [dreamily idealistic] heroes of the period from Wait [*The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*] to Whalley [*The End of the Tether*] embody the paradox that purposive action is self-defeating. Their successors in the second phase, the 'political' heroes, Nostromo, Verloc [*The Secret Agent*] and Razumov [*Under Western Eyes*], study the case of the man who, for largely selfish reasons, attempts to avoid purposive action by steering a neutral but ultimately untenable course between the conflicts which occupy his fellow men. The heroes of the third phase [*Chance*, the short stories of 1910-11, *Victory*, the short stories of 1912-14, and *The Shadow-Line*], amongst whom Heyst is preeminent, are men who withdraw from the world, not for reasons of self-aggrandisement or self-preservation, but in a spirit of idealistic, philosophical detachment and rejection" (p. 122). The withdrawal of these "eremites" proves a vain stratagem; and *The Arrow of Gold*, *The Rescue*, and *The Rover*, works of the final phase, continue the conceptual architecture of the third, but with this significant development: here, Conrad gives a stronger place to his heroines.

Quite logically, in view of its method, Dr. Land's study is well designed to contribute to an understanding of the works of Conrad's final decade. The notion, for example, that "the development of the rescue motif . . . has its roots in the heroines of the political stories" (p. 177) is certainly instructive, while the argument that *Chance* represents one of Conrad's "most carefully crafted structural symmetries" (p. 190) proposes a useful corrective to the conventional achievement-and-decline reading of the oeuvre. Dr. Land's attention to paradox and polarity, "the mirror effect" in the tales (p. 20), also illuminates the genesis of allegory in *Victory* and sheds new light on Conrad's difficulties in completing *The Rescue*. The thesis that the hero-heroine relationship in *The Rescue* required a plot of the kind Conrad was not equipped to construct in his early years is as refreshing as it is pragmatic.

There is yet another virtue in this study's method: its pedagogical soundness. At no time is the reader made uncertain of the direction taken. The book's introduction makes plain, in point form, what its business will be, and that business is faithfully transacted, with a review to recall the salient points made. There is no playing here, no ambiguity, but the serious work

of plain and systematic instruction. If the articulation of *Paradox and Polarity in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad* occasionally suffers from a want of nimbleness—the first chapter, for example, hardly opens before a four-page summary of Wagner's *Ring* is introduced—the thesis it articulates leaves little room for misapprehension.

Paradoxically, though, as Dr. Land remarks of a number of Conrad's protagonists, strengths can be weaknesses. If repetition is the mother of learning, she can also generate a certain ennui. The Lingard of *An Outcast of the Islands*, for instance, is described as "the prototypical Conradian nemesis" (p. 37); Donkin, in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* is "the prototypical Conradian malcontent" (p. 55); *Heart of Darkness* presents "the prototypical Conradian situation" (p. 64); Karain is "the typical Conradian hero" (p. 65); Charles Gould embodies "the typical Conradian hero" (p. 111) in *Nostromo*, a work revealing "a network of typical Conradian ironies" (p. 137); *The Secret Agent* has "a plot of the familiar Conradian type" (p. 149), "the usual Conradian fictional pattern" (p. 153), "the usual Conradian pattern" (p. 155), a syntax it shares with *Under Western Eyes*, constructed according to "the usual Conradian fictional pattern" (p. 165); and Heyst, in *Victory*, illustrates "the archetypical Conradian hero" (p. 196). The association of "pale and stereotypical" (p. 293) in Dr. Land's retrospective assessment of the early Conrad heroines suggests the enfeeblement which can come with a vigorous questing after a fundamental constant in the form of a type.

This is not to suggest, however, that *Paradox and Polarity* shows no signs of the spirit of adventure. In *Lord Jim*, the context of paradox is said to be "merely geographical and not significantly philosophical" (p. 86). This is certainly provocative, in view of Stein's extended pronouncements on cosmology at the literal center of the novel. The description of MacWhirr as a hero "incapable of any great reach of imaginative self-deception," "who is never guilty of moral failure" (p. 130), is similarly daring. As Conrad makes plain in *Typhoon*, MacWhirr's duty was to avoid the storm (Dent Collected Edition, p. 20); the captain of the *Nan-Shan* is to be numbered among those whose "uninteresting lives . . . so entirely given to the actuality of the bare existence [,] have their mysterious side" (Dent Collected Edition, p. 4). Paradoxically, like his first mate deficient in self-possession, the man of logic and facts is also the man of imagination.

Beryl Schlossman

### JOYCE'S CATHOLIC COMEDY OF LANGUAGE

Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985. Pp. 243.

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Reviewed by James L. McDonald

This book is for the deep readers of the world. First written "as a *doctorat de troisième cycle* at the *Université de Paris VIII* under the direction of Julia Kristeva" (p. vii), now revised and published with the "enthusiastic support" of David Hayman (p. vii), *Joyce's Catholic Comedy of Language* persistently exhibits the critical stance of one who, in Saul Bellow's words, "falls wildly on any particle of philosophy or religion and blows it up bigger than the Graf Zeppelin" ("Deep Readers of the World, Beware!" *New York Times Book Review*, 15 Feb. 1959, p. 1).

Beryl Schlossman is truly a deep reader. In analyzing Joyce's fiction, she applies her interpretations of (to name a few) Thomas d'Aquin, Augustine, Dante, Freud, Jacques Lacan; and she proclaims her discoveries of deep meanings: "filiation," "Tetragrammaton," "the Trinitarian knot," "the triadic configuration of the Borromean knot" (p. 16)—just a few Concorde airliners, bigger than the Graf Zeppelin.

Deep reading necessitates a pretentious critical vocabulary and an overbearing, prolix style. Plain English simply is not good enough to express solemnities, thundering profundities. Accordingly, one learns of "trajectories": "Joycean," "Trinitarian," "Judeo-Christian," "the scriptural trajectory of Dante" (p. 61). One is confronted with the "terrain of sexuality." Stephen Dedalus's *non serviam* is a "denegation." Symbolism becomes "symbolicity." Above all, there is *jouissance*: "symbolic," "potential," "musical," "divine," "transsubstantiation."