

Contemporary, and the Importance of Being Amis" (first published in 1963 and reprinted in Lodge's *The Language of Fiction*, 1966): "His novels, stories, poems, reviews, even *obiter dicta* reported in the newspapers, have focused in a very precise way a number of attitudes which a great many middle-class intellectuals of the post-war period find useful for purposes of self-definition." In its day, the Movement clearly moved.

Robert Wilson

## CONRAD'S MYTHOLOGY

Troy, NY: Whitston, 1987, Pp. 158

Reviewed by Camille R. La Bossiere

For all the industry it shows, *Conrad's Mythology* is not generous to Conrad, his art, or his public. "Conrad remained faithful to his atheism," avers Robert Wilson, "and because the sale of his books became his major means of supporting his family, he had to make his works acceptable in Christian countries. His solution was to bury his ideas so deeply in his fiction that few knew what he was saying" (3). "Elusive" symbolic patterns disguise the corrosive Conradian thought: the artist combines settings, actions, and emotions in such a way as obliquely "to illustrate some aspect of his philosophy" (5). Wilson does not cite the letter of 11 October, 1897 to Edward Garnett, where Conrad flatly reckons "The Return" "bad art" on the grounds that its "moments" seem created "for the illustration of the idea" (*Letters from Joseph Conrad, 1895-1924*, ed. Edward Garnett [Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1928] 111). *Conrad's Mythology* diminishes its subject.

If opaque he was to his contemporary general public, Conrad is almost always transparent to Wilson, who reduces symbol to allegory. According to his reading of "Youth," for example, Captain Beard is God, Marlow-Christ, the first mate Mahon-man, and the North Sea pilot Jermyn-the prophet Jeremiah (41-42). In "Heart of Darkness," Wilson identifies Kurtz with the Christian God, Marlow with Buddha, and the Intended with the Christian Church (44-46). *Conrad's Mythology* goes on to say of *Lord Jim*: "Aboard the *Patna*, Jim is seen as a member of the Trinity, with God being the German captain, and the Holy Ghost, the second engineer" (48). The Trinitarian scheme is adjusted for "Typhoon": "The *Nan-Shan* . . . has for a captain, MacWhirr (God); a chief mate, Jukes (Christ); a chief engineer, Harry (Satan); and a discredited second mate who appears to be the Holy Ghost . . ." (53). The allegorizing continues in "The End of the Tether," where Conrad's "symbol" for "the Christian God, Captain Whalley, may have been taken from Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*" (54). Schopenhauer, the philosopher who "most influenced" Conrad (19), frequently appears in Wilson's allegorical renderings. Ironically, though, that difficult philosopher is absent from the analysis of *Victory*: it is "less obscure than other of his works, yet it still requires interpolation to identify its theme" (130). *Victory*, in fact, is the one Conradian allegory which obviously engages Schopenhauerian thought. Wilson ends his book with a list of works in which "the allegories are either nonexistent or indecipherable" (140). The list does not include any of Conrad's major works.

There are, however, a few things in *Conrad's Mythology* which might eventually prove to be of value. The suggestion (43) of an allusion to F. Max Müller's *Chips from a German Workshop* in "Youth," for example, is tantalizing, while the linking (85) of an emblematic Hindu phallus with the triangle giving Verloc his code name in *The Secret Agent* is piquant enough to stimulate.