

INTRODUCTION

In 1925, Conrad's friend G. Jean-Aubry, inspired by the discovery of some of Edward Garnett's letters and a letter from H. G. Wells among Conrad's papers, decided 'to bring out a little pamphlet of 15 or 20 "Letters to Joseph Conrad" for private circulation'.¹ In the end, he issued a limited-edition of twenty letters in a group of twelve attractively produced pamphlets published by the First Edition Club in 1926. In addition to Garnett and Wells, the correspondents included Arnold Bennett, Stephen Crane, John Galsworthy, Constance Garnett, George Gissing, James Huneker, Henry James, Rudyard Kipling, and E. V. Lucas. Limited to two hundred and twenty sets and concentrating on well known figures, this edition was directed to a market of collectors and devotees and has continued to garner the attention of bibliophiles and investors in the literary marketplace.

This early effort at preserving and disseminating the texts of letters addressed to Conrad was in due course followed by others, and a number of such letters have been published,² although sometimes in inaccurate transcriptions. In his *Conrad Memorial Library* (1929), George T. Keating, drawing upon his extensive collection of Conradiana, printed a few letters to Conrad to illustrate and supplement the description of various aspects of Conrad's life and books. The Conrad revival, which began in the late 1940s both in England and in the United States, augmented the number of such letters in print. William Blackburn's edition of Conrad's correspondence with the Blackwood firm (1958) and Zdzisław Najder's collection of letters from Conrad's uncle and guardian Tadeusz Bobrowski (1964) marked major turning points in the documentation of Conrad's life. Shortly after, Carolyn G. Heilbrun (1961) published a number of Edward Garnett's letters to Conrad, and Richard M. Ludwig's edition of selected letters by Ford Madox Ford (1965) offered another handful of letters. Towards the end of a decade rich in Conrad studies of all kinds, Ivo Vidan made available and usefully contextualized André Gide's letters to Conrad (1967 and 1970-1).

Despite the impact of these various scholarly endeavours and the awareness they fostered of the availability of documentary sources, the wide dispersal of this material in monographs and articles as well as the

¹ G. Jean-Aubry to Edward Garnett, [14 December 1925], Texas. For explanations of the abbreviations used herein, see 'List of holders of letters' and 'Published sources of letters and cue-titles' below.

² See 'Published sources of letters' for a complete list of these.

general focus on relatively well known correspondents appears to have assured that no systematic attempt was undertaken to locate and catalogue all surviving letters to Conrad. The extent of this correspondence, consequently much underestimated, totals over 700 items, excluding a further one hundred 'fan' letters written to Conrad during his 1923 sojourn in the United States.³ Not surprisingly, this material has thus far been drawn on only infrequently by earlier as well as more recent scholars and biographers.

While widely scattered in libraries in North America and Europe, correspondence addressed to Conrad is principally held in two major repositories: the New York Public Library, in its Berg Collection and its Manuscripts Division, and the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University. Three other collections have significant holdings: the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin, which holds most of Edward Garnett's letters, the National Library of Scotland, which houses correspondence with the firm of William Blackwood, and the Lilly Library, Indiana University, which preserves letters from various correspondents.

While such a list may appear to suggest an abundance of material, only a small proportion of the total number of letters addressed to Conrad have, in fact, survived since Conrad habitually—one might almost say systematically—destroyed and discarded most of them. Thus much of the surviving correspondence is preserved in copies, most of it relating to business matters rather than personal affairs or literary issues. However, since he occasionally wrote notes to his agent J. B. Pinker on business letters, some letters from publishers or editors have thus survived. Still others in this category are preserved in copies in publisher's letterbooks or in carbons. Those from the New York lawyer John Quinn—the largest group of letters from a single individual—are preserved because Quinn kept carbons of the long, sometimes meandering epistles he dictated to his secretary. Yet others survive in drafts made by the writer or in copies taken later: the letters from André Gide, for instance, survive (so far as is known) only in transcriptions made by Jean-Aubry and Madame Gide.

But although Conrad discarded most of his incoming correspondence, some originals escaped that general fate for reasons that are potentially revealing. In addition to those from his uncle Tadeusz Bobrowski and from Edward Garnett, the latter 'put away amongst the "preciosa"' of his study,⁴

³ Frederick R. Karl estimates extant letters to Conrad as numbering some 200 ('General Editor's Introduction', *CL* I, xlv-xlv).

⁴ Letter from Conrad to Garnett, 16 November 1919, Garnett 265-6.

these letters fall into a few broad categories. Not unexpectedly, a number relate to the favourable reception of his work. Some of these, including letters from Constance Garnett, Gissing, and Wells, are about the early novels and short stories, whereas another group from fellow-writers waxes enthusiastic about *The Mirror of the Sea*. Although Conrad saved disappointingly few letters about the works of his major phase, interesting examples survive from Arnold Bennett and Bertrand Russell. And there are also notable responses to other works. A 1915 letter from Jack London about *Victory* records how he was 'swept off [his] feet' by the novel. And a cluster of letters from friends and fellow writers shows that *The Rover* met a mainly positive response.

The truly personal letters, tellingly few, obviously offer interesting material for the biographer, either clarifying uncertainties or raising new questions and suggesting areas where research has in some cases profitably led to the discovery of yet further letters by Conrad. The personal letters include a small group from Polish relatives—mostly dating from the 1880-90s, and other groups from friends—Muirhead Bone, Hugh Clifford, R. B. Cunninghame Graham, Richard Curle, and Ford Madox Ford. Letters from individuals Conrad met while he was serving in the *Torrens* offer evidence that his early circle of acquaintances in England was wider than has hitherto been thought.

The relative paucity of personal material suggestively mirrors the reticence and self-protecting elusiveness that characterize Conrad's pronouncements about himself. The three surviving letters from his 'aunt', Marguerite Poradowska, for example—two gossipy ones about relatives, the other about obtaining suitable accommodation near Geneva—hint at no particular intimacy, let alone romantic entanglement. His discarding and destruction of so many letters can be seen as a further way of covering personal tracks, possibly even of avoiding attachment, patterns evidenced in his frequent change of homes, moves that in themselves inevitably occasioned bouts of culling accumulating papers and letters. For instance, when Conrad proudly sent Edward Garnett a letter he had received from Henry James in November 1900, he asked him to return it by registered mail.⁵ James's letter has vanished, the victim of subsequent displacements or even possibly discarded some time later as their relationship altered and shifted. While these more intimate letters to Conrad no doubt constitute the most suggestive and potentially quite rich area of investigation for the literary critic or biographer, by far the largest extant group, for reasons outlined above, concern business. These, from various publishers, editors,

⁵ To Garnett, 12 November 1900, *CL* II, 303.

and agents, including J. M. Dent, F. N. Doubleday, and Eric Pinker among others, touch upon possible or imminent publication and the promotion and sale of Conrad's works and collected editions. They consequently provide valuable information about Conrad's dealings with publishers. The large number of John Quinn's letters also form part of Conrad's business life since they concern the sale of manuscripts, typescripts, and privately-printed pamphlets. And the letters from Jean-Aubry, covering the friendship from its beginnings in 1917 until shortly before Conrad's death, mostly concern business—placing translations, discussing reviews, reporting arrangements for lectures to be given on Conrad in France, Belgium, and Switzerland—on the whole indicating a cordial but not intensely intimate relationship. A handful of other letters in this general category, including those from Henry B. Irving, Basil Macdonald Hastings, and Lillah McCarthy, relate to the writing, staging, and casting of Macdonald Hastings's adaptation of *Victory* or of Conrad's dramatization of *The Secret Agent*. A further group, dating from the period 1920-4, concerns the Polish Legation in London and, more particularly, Conrad's polite but pointed refusal of Prince Eustachy Sapieha's request to accept the chairmanship of a British equivalent of Warsaw's Anglo-Polish Club.

In printing a selection from these letters, this volume aims to document various aspects of Conrad's life and career and thus to supplement the edition of his collected letters published by Cambridge University Press. It also seeks to provide a context for some of his more important friendships, sometimes in the form of letters about him, and particularly in the cluster responding to his death and posthumous career in the biographies of friends.⁶ Excluded from this selection is correspondence readily accessible in published collections: no letters from Blackwood and from Bobrowski have been included.

As a matter of course, all of the letters in Jean-Aubry's *Twenty Letters* (a silently edited version of the texts and now difficult of access outside major libraries), all the surviving correspondence addressed to Conrad by Edward Garnett, André Gide, R. B. Cunninghame Graham, Henry James, Marguerite Poradowska, and Will Rothenstein has been included, whatever a given letter's interest, and nearly all of that from Ford Madox Ford. The existence of a letter from Conrad to an individual has often justified inclusion in this collection while the selection of business correspondence has in the interests of space necessarily been more highly

⁶ For an extended discussion of the significance of these letters, see J. H. Stape, 'For the Record: Letters to and about Conrad', *Conradiana* 23 (1991), 29-40.

discriminating even when an extant letter from Conrad responds to, or inspires a given letter. Thus, while the letters from Jean-Aubry and John Quinn bulk large in terms of sheer number, they appeal to so highly specialized an audience that they have claimed little space here. Similarly, this selection does not include any of those from Jessie Conrad subsequently published in her *Joseph Conrad's Letters to his Wife* (1927). Because their survival rate is greater than that for the earlier years letters written to Conrad in the later part of his career form the majority of those offered in this collection.