This book is meant to be an intelligent reader's contribution to our knowledge of Joseph Conrad, the artist. It has no further pretension. In writing it I have never had the aim to out-rival critics such as F. R. Leavis, Albert Guerard, Douglas Hewitt, Robert Penn Warren and H. M. Daleski, whose critical equipment has enabled them to analyze with such success the main components of Conrad's art. 

Pace Hewitt, whose preface displays some uneasiness about the present spate of highly detailed criticism on Conrad's works, I have always directed my attention toward even the minutest details in Conrad's oeuvre. I would agree, however, with Hewitt's strictures of the symbolic and archetypal approach as practised by critics like Claire Rosenfield, believing that such efforts tend to reduce the works to skeletons whose structure reveals more about the critic's preconceptions than about the living organisms which he attempts to interpret. Such preconceptions, whether they reflect a preoccupation with the symbolism in Conrad's art, or a predominantly philosophical, sociological or politological bias (Avrom Fleishman's work is an instance of the latter), impede a proper understanding of the works of a great artist.

The conviction, however, that such kinds of detailed research reduce the significance of Conrad for the present as well as for later generations, obviously should not lead to the belief that no further detailed research should be done. After all, those who fasten on certain real (or imagined) structural elements of the works from an extra-literary bias are not the only ones in danger of oversimplifying. The same danger exists for those who try to take a sweeping view of Conrad's panorama while attempting to trace patterns more properly literary, and for those who try to evaluate Conrad's art basing themselves on set notions as to the nature of his merits and demerits as a creative writer. Here, too, one discovers a (perhaps unavoidable) tendency to reduce the works to organisms exemplifying the truth of contentions which, though proved by some of them, are not proved by all. Not even Guerard and Daleski have been able to avoid this snare.

The present book, then, though inspired by a liking for _Nostromo_ pure and 'simple', has partly become an attempt to vindicate such detailed approaches as do not lose sight of broad outline and deeper artistic and moral purpose but which yet reflect an awareness of even the minor constituents of Conrad's artistic constructs. Such approaches, it seems to me, might help to prevent a
recurrence of the analytical and factual errors which both the adherents of the
detailed preconceptual methods and those making general approaches along
more specifically literary lines are prone to.
This book, of course, must speak for itself. It alone can provide sufficient
justification for the writing of a critical study devoted solely to one novel
(even though that novel is Nostromo), and leaving out of consideration, it
might seem, a great many constituents of this novel for the purposes of a de-
tailed critique of its minor characters. If one writes about 'character' only, it
might be thought, attention should be given in the first place to the major
characters.
My very aim in writing this book, however, has been to show that the major
characters of Nostromo cannot be fully understood without detailed analysis
of the minor characters. I am in some hopes that my critical notes on the at-
ttempts of others to interpret the book will demonstrate that I have been right.
I myself have gained the conviction that my attempts to shed further light on
the significance of the minor characters may indeed be useful for those want-
ing to avoid critical inconsistencies and inaccuracies. I think, in fact, that this
study may help to point to some radical misconceptions.
I have chosen to add a select bibliography, partly because, though a vast
amount of criticism on Conrad's works has been written, not much of it proved
relevant to my concern, which was, as stated, with the relevance of the minor
characters to an understanding of Nostromo. I have therefore selected those
works which, though general in character, have the kind of critical or biograph-
ic excellence (I am thinking of Jocelyn Baines' biography) which warrants
their inclusion in any bibliography, and which, at the same time, have at least
some relevance to the present investigation. To these I have added studies
that show prejudices giving rise to deplorable misunderstandings.
I should remark here that the circumstances under which literary and linguistic
theses are written in the Netherlands are, in spite of the facilities afforded to
university teachers in this country, far from ideal. If I have not therefore had
continuous and exhaustive recourse to the vast critical apparatus on Conrad, it
is partly because such a procedure did not suit my critical method (which was
selective rather than inclusive), partly because neither the time nor the funds at
the command of a Dutch university teacher for the writing of a thesis allow
him to do much more in this field than I have done.
I fully realize how many thanks are due to Professor D. R. M. Wilkinson, of the
University of Groningen, who has corrected The Stone Horse with the greatest
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