



20 famous critics tell you how to read Joseph Conrad—

Readers everywhere have been asking how to begin reading Joseph Conrad. "What is the first book to read?" they ask. "Which stories shall I start with?"

Twenty famous critics and men of letters have now contributed to a reading guide to Joseph Conrad's books. They are:

WILLIAM MCFEE
CHRISTOPHER MORLEY
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WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT, WILSON FOLLETT, JOHN FARRAR, SIMEON STRUNSKY, WILBUR CROSS, GENE MARKEY, LEE WILSON DODD, BURTON RASCOE, ROBERT LITTELL, WILLIAM LYON PHELPS, LAURENCE STALLINGS, JOSEPH COLLINS, ISABEL PATTERSON, ROBERT C. HOLLIDAY, RICHARD LeGALLIENNE, and MARK VAN DOREN.

Their suggestions as to which of Joseph Conrad's books you should read first, and why, are in the April issue of

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The Phoenix Nest

WE have fussed about with modern authorship a bit in our time, and so, when the course in Modern Authorship from the Palmer Institute of Authorship drifted across our vision recently, we were all (as the genial old term has it) agog. The graphic chart of the Palmer Course and Service is, in the first place, exhaustive. It begins with the registration of the student and a personal letter from the President to the newly enrolled student (which puts heart in him right away), and it ramifies swiftly into a magazine and novel writing course and a screen writing course. We don't suppose it teaches how to write a whole magazine, though we have known of a few editors who did pretty nearly that. But both courses particularize seven problem assignments, boast a constructive criticism service, a permanent story sales department service, an unlimited consulting service, and end up in a blaze of twelve monthly lectures, twelve confidential monthly letters and twelve issues of the *Story World Magazine*.

Chapter VIII (we always leap in *medias res*) is prefaced by the inscription over Alma Tadema's studio door in London, "As the sun is to flowers, so is art to life"—but then (a sigh of relief) we're not taking a course in painting. Chapter VIII in due course instructs us to "perch yourself mentally upon the edge of a cloud and look down upon the millions of men that swarm the earth." We concentrated on that for half an hour.

Then we opened another volume of the course at random to another Chapter VIII and learned that here was one way of beginning a story:

Jessica married Trent on her eighteenth birthday. In six months she realized she had merely been in love with love and that she hated her husband. As the years went by, Trent grew coarse and brutal, tyrannical with the children and overbearing with his wife, whose life was a daily torment.

That was one way (which we must admit depressed us) and then there was another:

Jessica Trent sat down at the dressing table and began mechanically to rub cold cream on her pallid face. Her thoughts were centred on a grim plan. Jessica had decided to kill her husband.

Yes, that was another way of beginning, —but that depressed us even more. It was "arresting" certainly, not to mention that more arresting was to follow. But we decided to experiment with a third way.

Jessica Trent's husband sat down at his shaving-mirror and began mechanically to rub Mennen's Shaving Cream (adv.) on his pallid face. His thoughts were centred on a his eighteenth birthday. Then he had had no beard. Since then, however, his beard had been a daily torment.

No, that wouldn't do. It was more like

writing a piece of copy. We discarded that volume and picked up another. As Chapters VIII seemed to be our method of procedure we turned to Chapter VIII again. This was about "Emphasis in Narrative." We decided to experiment with a bit of "Emphasis by Surprise," as outlined in section 9. We read that the reader would be impressed by that for which he had been least prepared. So we started in again.

Jessica Trent's husband sat down at his pallid face and began mechanically to rub his eighteenth birthday with Mennen's Shaving Cream.

That was a bit startling. It seemed to us we had got a certain effect. But still, we weren't satisfied. We riffled back the pages and decided we must have a definite objective point as explained in the chapter on "Plot." We must bear in mind constantly the culmination of a series of events. We must know what was to happen and what was not to happen. Of course we knew a lot of things that wouldn't be allowed to happen, after reading a chapter on things to avoid in the Moving Picture. Well, anyway, we lit our pipe and sat down to think. . . . Those three dots, by the way, are *points de suspension*, as we have just learned. They are frequent with French authors—a kind of rash—and used to "Emphasize by Pause."

But maybe you don't know just what we mean to emphasize. Well, merely that —we fell asleep. When we woke up it was two hours later and still we had no idea of what was to happen or what was not to happen. So we decided to take up a list of the "Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations" in another volume. That might help us. The first situation given was "Supplication," but that didn't seem to help us. We didn't want Jessica's husband supplicating all over the place. In spite of our better nature, by this time we had taken quite a fancy to Jessica's husband, with his troubles with his beard and all, and we hadn't yet observed that he was mean to his wife or to the children. At least, as long as he sat there, he seemed to be all right. Of course, perhaps if he rose and began to move around some he would get all riled up. Still, you couldn't tell, yet. He seemed to be a pretty decent sort of fellow,—patient too—sitting there with all that shaving cream on his face, waiting for us to think out what to do with him.

Well, finally, long about the thirteenth situation, we came upon "Technical Elements: A Malevolent Kinsman, a Hated or Reciprocally Hating Kinsman." In this general category we decided to select "C—Hated of Grandparent for Grandchild." We don't know what possessed us, but:

Jessica Trent's grandchild sat down at her grandmother's dressing table and began mechanically to rub lip-rouge on the mirror. Her thoughts

were centred on a grim plan. It was to rub blacking all over the bed-spread. Her grandmother entered the room. "You bad girl," she exclaimed, and spanked her.

But there was the story ended, almost before it had begun! and it turned out merely to be one of those "Kewt Kwips of the Kiddies" that they pay five dollars apiece for. We would have to write and sell two or three of them every day to keep even with our financial obligations, if we were to earn our living by our pen,—and we knew we could never keep it up.

We regarded the other volumes of the Palmer Institute Course with intellectual hunger but with dubiety as to their usefulness to us in particular. Anyway, we felt tired of Jessica Trent, and we had never liked her name in the first place. Sounded sort of made up. We didn't so much mind her husband, George L. Trent,—but we were now afraid to look in on him where he was still sitting before that infernal mirror waiting for us for heaven's sake to do something with him. As for the grandchild—and they'd only been married six months—we were quite at a loss to account for him. So we tiptoed stealthily down the stairs and out of that house of confusion.

W. R. B.

The Salad Bowl

THE primary obligation of the novelist ought to be to give the customer two dollars' worth. . . . If he can give the customer two dollars' worth, and, at the same time, lift the hood and give his soul a chance to cool off, that is fine; but some of us are not highly pleased by the oily exhalations that arise from the souls of most novelists when the lid is raised. Therefore, unless the novelist is sure that his soul has a peculiar and ingratiating aroma like camels or Djer-Kiss, let him sniff it in private, and sell the customers something that comes nearer the price of admission.—Elmer Davis, *Letter to W. C. McGeehan*, Esq.

Our country is being overrun with and by a putrid stream of the most despicable, the most iniquitous, and on the whole the most dangerous form of a degraded variety of literature; this stuff is being publicly sold and publicly sent through the mails; and so far no authority, public or otherwise, seems to be willing or able to stop the dissemination of this literary garbage.—Hendrick Willem van Loon, in *The Commonwealth*.

The only visits I ever make nowadays are to the homes of bachelors; for the discomforts in the houses over which fair ladies pretend to preside are beyond belief. Men really seem to care whether their guests are comfortable or not. . . . In how many houses are the dressing-table lights properly arranged? What of the reading-lamp that should be on the table beside your bed?—Elisabeth Marbury in *The Commonwealth*.

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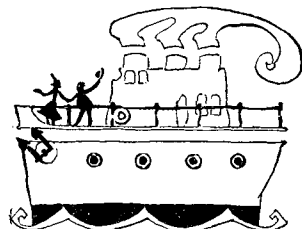
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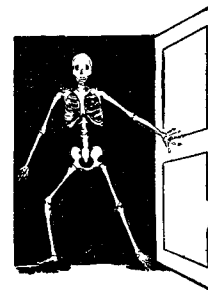
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